
Advocacy Labs_
The AdvocacyLabs Guide to the Science of Advocacy
In an era marked by rapid social and political changes, mastering the science of advocacy is key to changing the world for the better. Drawing upon a wealth of academic research and real-world case studies, this guidebook distills the essence of effective advocacy into 31 actionable lessons.
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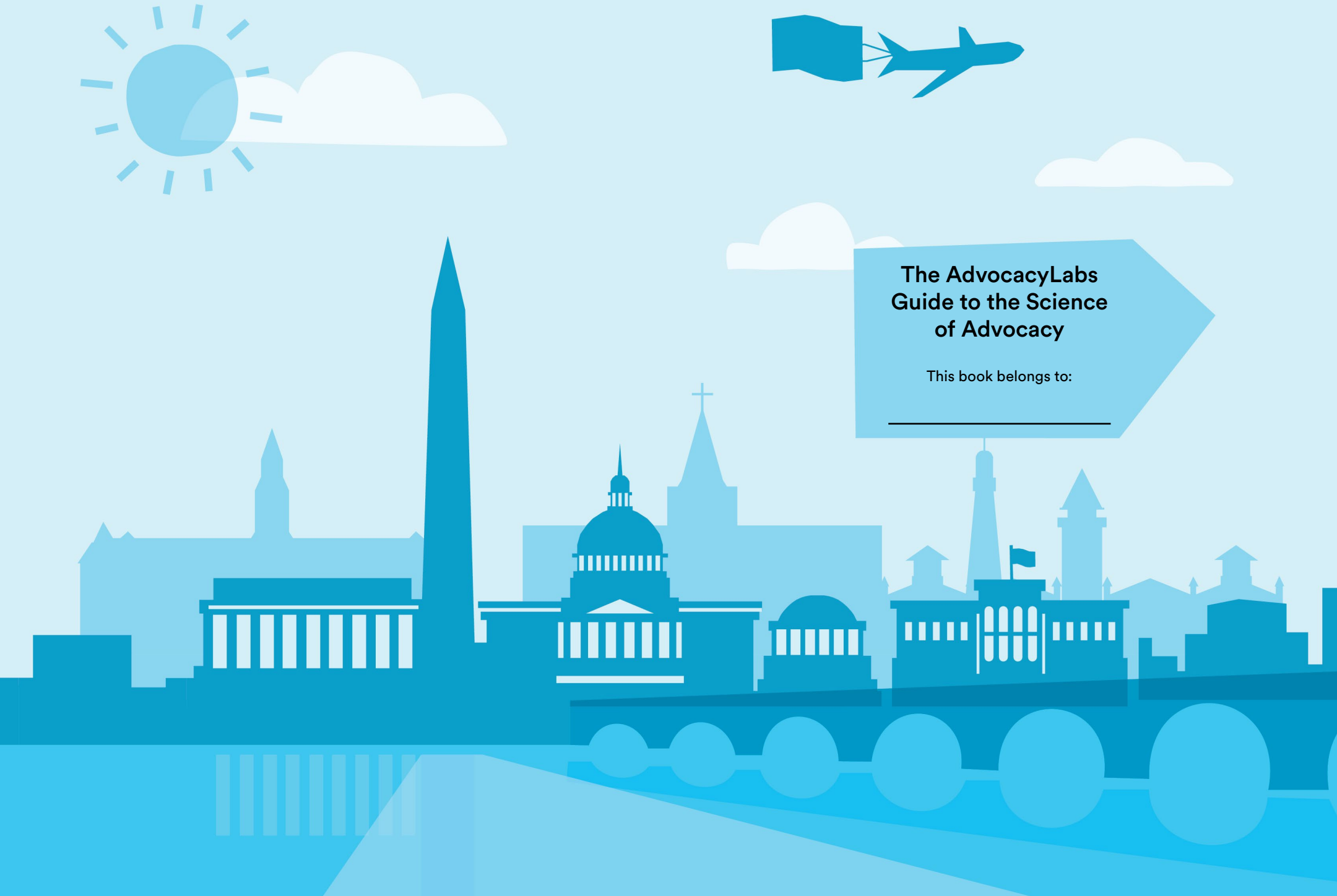
by Marc Porter Magee, Ph.D.



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This book belongs to:

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A collaboration between

50CAN FutureEd

About AdvocacyLabs
AdvocacyLabs is an initiative of 50CAN and FutureEd that provides insight into how change happens in education policy, using reports, briefs and interviews grounded in academic research and exclusive data from education advocacy organizations. Follow us on X at @AdvocacyLabs.

About 50CAN
50CAN: The 50-State Campaign for Achievement Now is a locally led, nationally supported nonprofit education advocacy organization committed to a high-quality education for all kids, regardless of their address. Follow us on X at @FiftyCAN.

About FutureEd
FutureEd is an independent, solution-oriented think tank at Georgetown University's McCourt School of Public Policy, committed to bringing fresh energy to the causes of excellence, equity and efficiency in K–12 and higher education. Follow us on X at @FutureEdGU.

The AdvocacyLabs Guide to the Science of Advocacy

50CAN: The 50-State Campaign for Achievement Now
1380 Monroe St NW, #413
Washington, DC 20010

Author
Marc Porter Magee

Editors
Thomas Toch, Ned Stanley and Molly Breen

Design & Layout
Megan Kitchen

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Mastering the science of advocacy

In an era marked by rapid social and political changes, mastering the science of advocacy is key to changing the world for the better. This guidebook, a collaborative effort between 50CAN and FutureEd, is for change-makers seeking proven tools for navigating the complex waters of policy reform and community mobilization.

Drawing upon a wealth of academic research and real-world case studies, the guidebook distills the essence of effective advocacy into 31 actionable lessons, offering a roadmap from where we are to the brighter future you are aiming to achieve.

As the third installment in our guidebook series, this book builds upon two previous works, *The 50CAN Guide to Building Advocacy Campaigns* and *The 50CAN Guide to Political Advocacy*. This third guide takes things a step further by incorporating insights from hundreds of academic studies and experiments into an accessible format focused on specific tactics. Organized around four strategies for change, it functions both as a reference book and a workbook for aspiring and seasoned advocates alike.

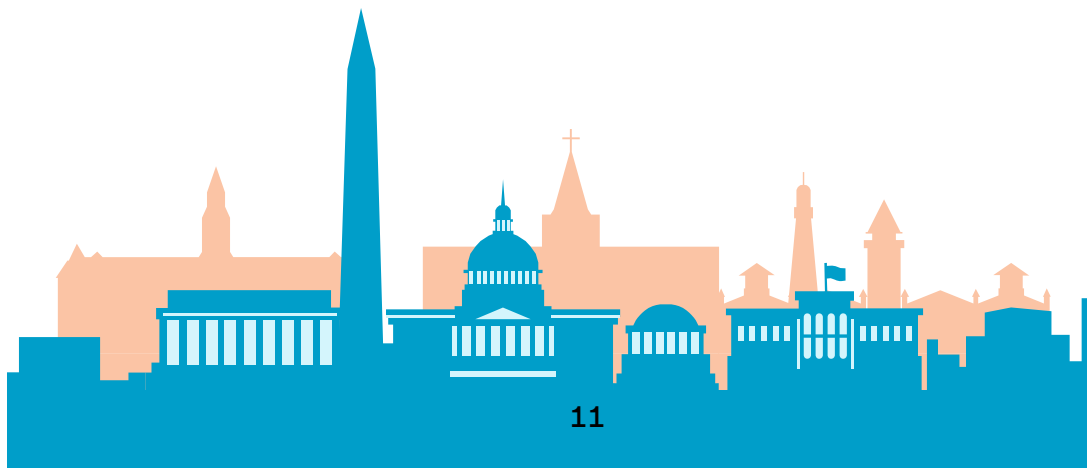
Here's what you need to know:

- → **Rooted in rigor**. Each lesson is underpinned by trusted academic research and enriched by the practical experiences of advocates in the field, ensuring a blend of methodological depth and practical wisdom.
- → **Comprehensive and flexible**. Covering 31 tactical lessons across four strategies, each chapter provides insight into a different approach to change-making. Together, they offer a comprehensive toolkit that can be adapted to a variety of settings.
- → **Focused on action**. This guidebook emphasizes the practical application of peer-reviewed studies, enabling readers to translate academic insights into more effective advocacy efforts right away.

Through the pages of this guidebook, we invite you on a journey of discovery, learning and action. Whether, like 50CAN and FutureEd, you're working to improve education for all or working on another cause close to your heart, this book is here to serve as your guide in building a better tomorrow.

Marc Porter Magee
CEO and Founder, 50CAN

Thomas Toch
Director, FutureEd



A framework for action

IN THIS SECTION

50CAN's advocacy framework

All societies fall short of their ideals. The question is: how do we address these failures?

By bringing people together around concrete solutions and pushing forward past all the obstacles in the way, advocates help ensure a healthy, democratic community that is always changing for the better in response to people's needs.

Most advocacy efforts are organized into **campaigns**: efforts designed to achieve a clear goal in a specific amount of time. Advocacy is most effective when it has a beginning, middle and end. Advocacy campaigns can be built anywhere and come in all shapes and sizes. Some take place in a neighborhood and last for a few weeks. Others take place across a whole nation and may go on for decades before achieving their goals.

What makes advocates great is the discipline they bring to this complex work. They know the one key to maximizing their odds of success: **don't skip steps!**

One way to think about the key parts of an advocacy campaign is to imagine yourself climbing a mountain. What will it take to make it to the top?

① Clarify goals

While your vision is to climb a mountain, your goal is to reach a specific destination on the mountain. You need to know where you want to plant your flag before you take your first step. That destination is the goal of your campaign.

② Match strategy to environment

Think of strategies as the different paths you might take to the mountain top. Some might be well-worn paths around the side of the mountain. Some might be shorter paths with steeper slopes. Take time to study the options because the path you choose is one of the most important decisions you will make.

③ Select winning tactics

Tactics are the steps you take to move forward on your chosen path. The number of steps will depend on the type of journey you choose. Those steps become the actions that get you where you want to go.

The four strategic paths up the mountain

After decades of research examining thousands of advocacy campaigns across hundreds of issues, social scientists have found that a few key strategies regularly get results. As with most things in life, the more thought you put into choosing a strategy, the more successful you will be.

① Social movements

A large number of people build their power to secure change by organizing around common goals. By rallying people toward a shared cause, this approach can change the status quo in profound ways.

② Elite negotiations

Advocates work to influence people who already hold power. By tapping into the interests of public officials, this approach secures change through trading and compromise.

③ Emergent networks

People use trial and error to discover solutions to a problem. By testing and refining their approach over time, they develop proof points for widespread change.

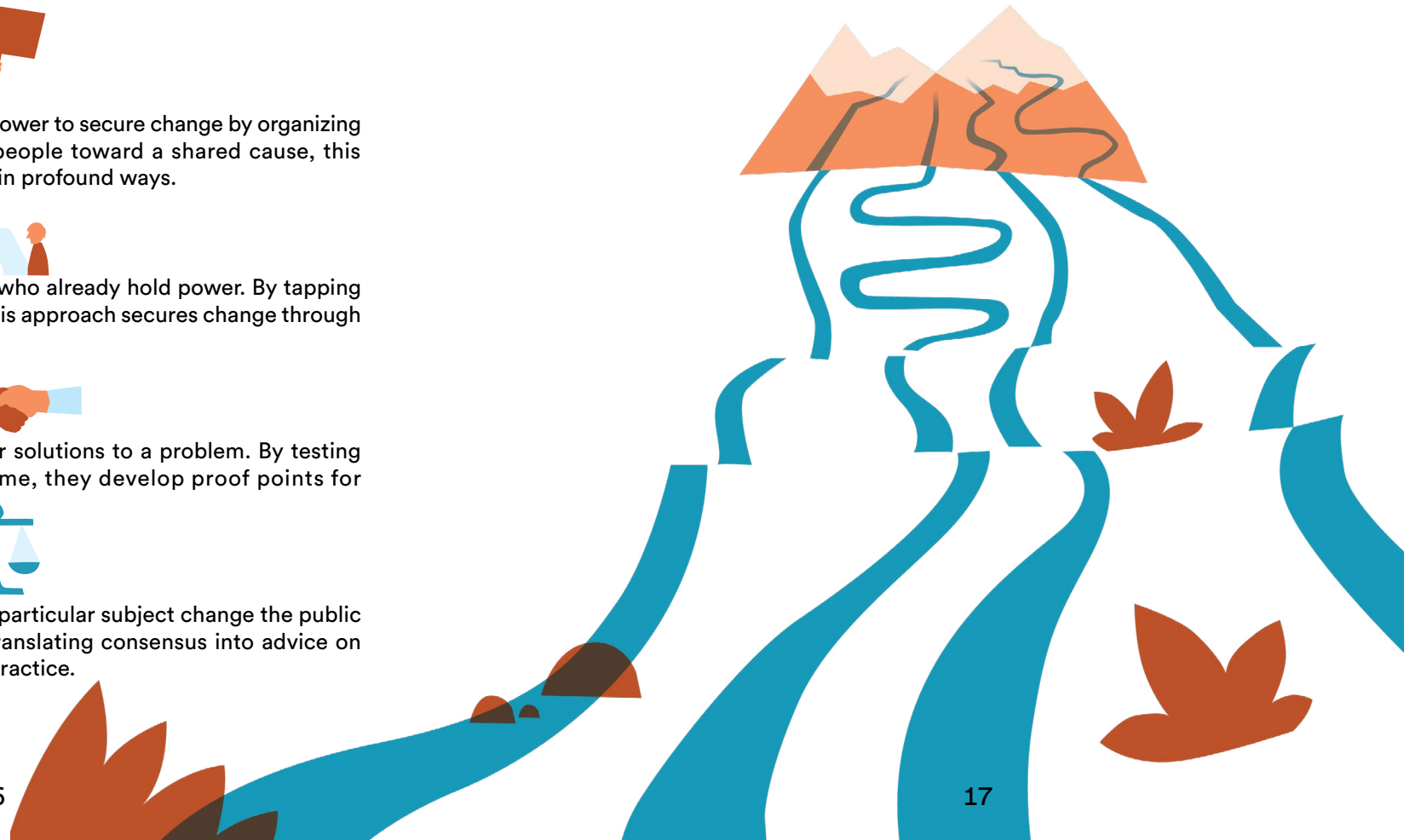
④ Expert communities

Trusted people with knowledge on a particular subject change the public debate by reaching consensus. By translating consensus into advice on solutions, they influence policy and practice.

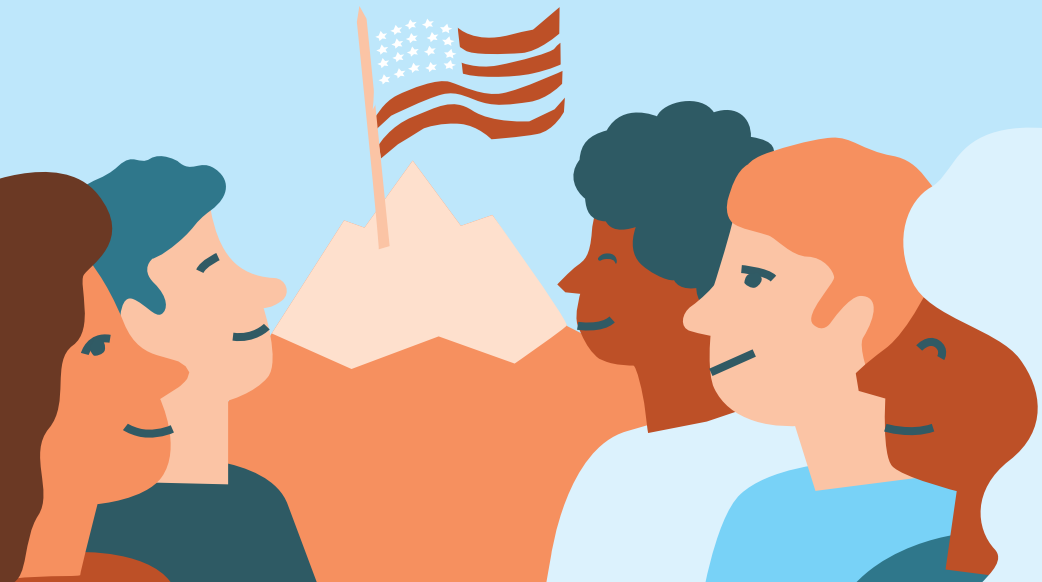
Advocacy tactics must be paired thoughtfully with your strategy to ensure you make it all the way to the mountain's summit. In the sections that follow, we present **31 evidence-based tactics** organized by their strategic paths that you can use to build your own campaign.

At the end of this guidebook, we provide campaign planning templates you can use to keep track of your favorite tactics as well as a list of the relevant studies. You can read in-depth discussions of these studies as well as interviews with the researchers involved at AdvocacyLabs.org.

Turn the page and let's dive in!



Social movements



IN THIS SECTION

Make it personal

The right approach to securing supporters can turn a small idea into a big deal. Testing out different ways to get people excited can help you find the best approach to both welcoming new folks and keeping long-time members engaged. The big conclusion from this research: keep it personal and personalized.

Expert advice

"The kind of investment you have to make goes far beyond the typical 9-to-5 workday. You really have to spend time with people, get to know them, get to know their children. It is just so much more personal than policy analysis."

Steven Quinn, National Outreach Director, 50CAN

Getting people to join an advocacy campaign starts with inviting them to act. But what's the best way to connect with them through your outreach?

To study the effect of sharing personal stories on recruitment efforts, Johns Hopkins political scientist Hahrie Han partnered with environmentalists to test out two different approaches: one where canvassers used a message with just the facts about water pollution and another where they added in a personal story about growing up near a lake that's now polluted.

The results? The personal story worked better: 68 percent of people who heard the personal story gave their support, compared to 49 percent who received only the facts. People also rated the person asking for support as more likable when they told a personal story.

So, making a personal connection is key to recruitment—but does this personal approach work beyond the first ask? In a later study with a healthcare reform group, Han tried different emails to see what would get existing members more involved.

The outcome? Personal touches worked again. More people signed a pledge when the email was personalized, compared to stock emails. Calls asking for meeting attendance also worked better when they mentioned the individual member's past involvement and asked for their ideas to make events better. More members of the group getting these personalized messages showed up than those who received the stock message.

This research highlights how important it is to take the time to make a personal connection when rallying support for your cause.

Your turn

What personal touches have you noticed that drew you closer to an advocacy campaign?

What is one step you could make to add more personal touches to your outreach?

Talk about gains, not losses

When choosing what to say, we often pick messages we think will change people's minds. But what if those messages change how people think without changing how they act? Experiments reveal how saying things in a negative way can make people nod along, but it also can make them not want to come together and take action.

Expert advice

"Lots of ideas for getting people mobilized don't work and so a good leader will try something, and if that's not working, they will try something else until they have found what works."

Pamela Oliver, Conway-Bascom Professor of Sociology, University of Wisconsin-Madison, and co-author of *The Critical Mass in Collective Action*

Advocates always aim to create the most convincing messages for their issue. But what if the words that get a lot of attention don't actually motivate people to act? It's crucial for leaders in any advocacy campaign to know which messages can change minds and which can spark action. Sometimes, they might have to choose one over the other.

To better understand these tradeoffs, Johns Hopkins political scientist Adam Seth Levine and Stony Brook University political scientist Reuben Kline conducted an experiment focusing on climate change messages. Their study aimed to see how different messages about climate change could affect both people's opinions and their willingness to act. In the first experiment, they compared the effects of a basic message on climate change against one that added a warning about how it could affect the availability of food in their area. In the second experiment, the message warned about the impact of climate change on their personal health.

What they found was surprising: Even though the extra warnings made more people say they supported action to stop climate change, those same people were less likely to sign a petition when asked to get involved. The personal health warning made 13 percent fewer people sign the petition and the food scarcity warning made 15 percent fewer people sign.

What's going on here?

The researchers concluded that by emphasizing harmful personal outcomes, the messages made people more afraid and therefore less likely to want to be generous with their time. In other words, the messages were both persuasive and paralyzing.

In another study, researchers looked at public transportation advocacy. They tested different arguments commonly used by advocates to see if they encouraged people to get involved. The same pattern emerged: some messages both increased support for spending more on public transportation and made people less willing to volunteer for the issue. This effect was particularly strong when people were reminded of all the times they were stuck in traffic because of congested roads. By drawing attention to how people's time is scarce, it made them less generous in committing that time to advocating for a solution.

These studies underline a key point: the choice of message can greatly influence not just what people think about an issue, but whether they'll actually do something about it. It's a tricky balance to find the right words that both change minds and inspire action.

Your turn

What is a common argument you make when trying to change minds?

Is there a way to make it less likely to discourage action?

LESSON 3

Make your wins visible

Most advocates want more people involved in their campaign. But how do you attract supporters when you are just getting started? Three strategies can make the difference: highlighting early supporters, getting positive media coverage and showing that public officials are taking notice and acting.

Expert advice

"The most powerful advocates are great storytellers. They invest time in developing a communications strategy that tells a coherent story about the why, what, who and how to ensure that their momentum—and their wins— inspire others to take action."

Chelsea Crawford, Executive Director, TennesseeCAN

Once an advocacy campaign starts, leaders often wonder how to get more people involved. Is there a way to really get things moving? Many think that if you get a few passionate supporters early on, others will follow, creating a snowball effect. But does this actually work?

A team of sociologists led by European University Institute's Arnout van de Rijt decided to test this idea with an experiment. Using the online petition site Change.org, the sociologists varied the number of signatures shown to new visitors, alternating between displaying petitions with just a few signatures and those with many. They found that the more signatures a petition already had, the more likely people were to sign it. This suggests that getting those first few signatures is the hardest part, but building momentum from there is easier.

A different way to try to gain momentum is by encouraging the media to write positive news stories on your advocacy campaign. The hope is that if the news says your campaign is doing well, more people might want to join. To see if this works in real life, University of Michigan's P. Sol Hart and Rutgers University's Lauren Feldman conducted a study in which they showed people different news stories about climate change. Some stories said efforts to stop climate change were working, while others said they weren't. Then, the researchers asked people if they felt like getting involved through activities like contacting officials or joining rallies. The results were mixed. Only in some cases did the positive news make people more likely to act.

Lastly, professors Mark T. Buntaine, Jacob T. Skaggs and Daniel L. Nielson wanted to see what makes people stick with an advocacy effort. They tried different things, like sharing praise from local leaders about the work. They found that people were more likely to keep going when they saw that the government was listening and responding to their actions.

In short, getting a campaign rolling starts with getting a few people to show their support. Positive news can sometimes help, but what really keeps people going is seeing that their efforts are making a difference.

Your turn

What is one way you could make your early supporters more visible?

How could you show that public officials are responding to your work?

LESSON 4

Start small

Starting a movement can be hard, but it helps to remember that a few people can make a big difference. Studies show that you can make the initial steps a little easier on yourself by spending time in places where people gather in small groups and reaching out to those who like to bring others together.

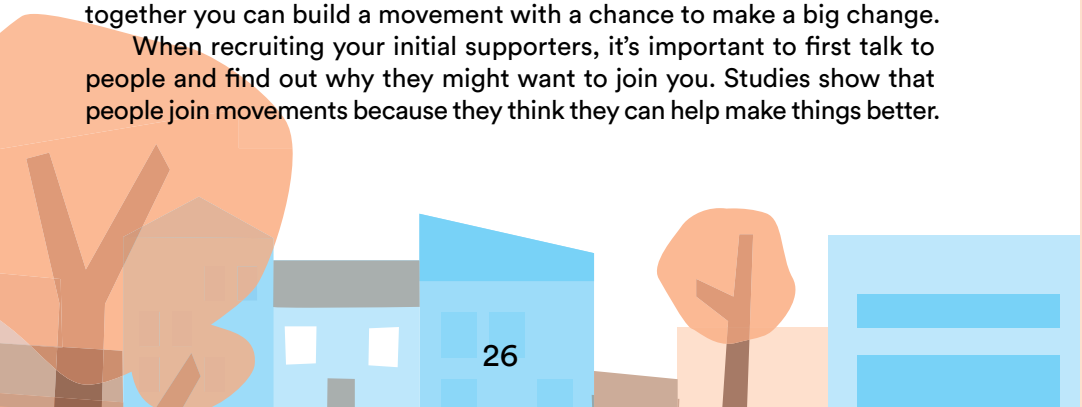
Expert advice

"If democracy rests on participation, one of the most important things we can do is to try to make it more likely that people will want to get involved."

Marcos Pérez, Assistant Professor of Sociology at Washington and Lee University, and author of *Life Histories and Political Commitment in a Poor People's Movement*

It's easier to start a movement by working with a small group of people rather than trying to galvanize a big crowd. The first step is to find a few people who really want to make a difference on the issue you care about. As you work together, more and more people will start to join in, and together you can build a movement with a chance to make a big change.

When recruiting your initial supporters, it's important to first talk to people and find out why they might want to join you. Studies show that people join movements because they think they can help make things better.



Organizing small group gatherings rather than large meetings often works better to get people involved and keep them engaged. Movements tend to begin in intimate settings like churches, college dorms and coffee shops, where people can connect on a personal level.

It's not necessary for everyone to join immediately. Studies have found that as a few people start to join a movement, participation seems less daunting and others feel encouraged to do the same. Most people don't want to be first but are happy to join a crowd.

Let's look at an example from history. In his book, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change*, sociologist Aldon Morris argues that, in the 1950s, the Civil Rights Movement faced a recruitment dilemma. Many Black people had jobs working for white people who didn't want their employees to fight against unfair treatment. This made it hard to get people to join the movement because they were worried they would lose their jobs. As a solution, the movement's leaders focused their outreach efforts on Black people who didn't have white bosses, such as church leaders, funeral home directors and hairdressers. By securing recruits from Black-led organizations first, the Civil Rights Movement was able to push through this difficult startup phase, making it easier for many more people to join in the fight.

So, if you're looking to start a movement, begin by gathering a small group of believers who are in the best position to step forward and go first. These are usually people with the least to lose by getting involved. As this group starts to take action more people will be inspired to join, enabling your movement to grow to the size it needs to be to make a difference.

Your turn

Who do you think might be most likely to join your advocacy campaign?

What small settings in your community might work best?

Begin with betrayal

Studies show that when people are feeling really upset, especially if they are feeling let down by the government, they can jumpstart a movement. Once these people find each other, a mixture of positive and negative feelings can bind them together, making them feel like they're part of a team working towards the same goal.

Expert advice

"We tend to emphasize the positive emotions in social movements: the joy and solidarity of a collective identity. And we've forgotten about the negative emotions, which often lead us to action."

James Jasper, Professor of Sociology, City University of New York, and author of *The Emotions of Protest*

Getting people to take action is one of the toughest jobs you face as an advocate. Researchers have found that our emotions—like feeling scared, happy or surprised—can push us to act on issues. When we feel deeply connected to others through strong emotional bonds, we're more likely to fight for what's right.

Studies show that people are especially motivated to act when they feel the government isn't looking out for their interests. Unfair rules can make us feel betrayed. And, when the government tries to silence people, it often makes them want to speak up even louder. Being told to stay quiet actually inspires people to get involved in politics because they feel wronged both by the issue and by how their objections are handled.

As City University of New York political scientist Jeanne Theoharis explains in her book, *The Rebellious Life of Mrs. Rosa Parks*, the 1955 Montgomery bus boycott is a crucial example of how resentment over injustice can power a movement. Back then, one of the most hurtful and overt forms of segregation was requiring Black people to sit in the back of the bus. Bus drivers often resorted to violence to enforce the rules of segregation. Perhaps Rosa Parks put it best herself: "We shouldn't be expected to not react to violence. It's a human reaction. And that's what we are: human beings." By defying the bus rule, Parks put the spotlight on something that felt uniquely unjust to thousands of others in her community. This shared sense of outrage made it more likely that others would join in and the protest would grow big enough to be successful.

Sparking a movement can be tricky, however. For instance, rallying people to combat climate change has proven difficult because the specific causes can feel complex and out of reach. Often the emotion people feel is despair, which doesn't often lead to action. Finding ways to tap into other emotions—like anger and a sense of betrayal—could increase the odds of success.

Your turn

Which emotion best describes why you got involved as an advocate?

Who else might share that feeling?

Create a bandwagon effect

Often people do what they see others doing. It's like the wave at a ballpark. If everyone is joining in, it will get stronger as it reaches more people. But if only some people are participating, the wave will quickly die out.

Expert advice

"When you trace it backwards in time you see that social movements build upon each other in waves. So, participation needs to be understood as a continuous process of making the opportunity to get involved visible to those around you and creating an expectation of action."

Pamela Oliver, Conway-Bascom Professor of Sociology, University of Wisconsin-Madison, and co-author of *The Critical Mass in Collective Action*

In advocacy groups, participation is usually all-or-nothing. This is because being part of something bigger makes everyone feel more connected. By the same logic, if some people start to leave it can cause a chain reaction, leading to a rapid decrease in the group's size.

This tendency to follow others is seen in politics as well. For example, in Washington, D.C., lawmakers often act together. A topic will either capture the attention of all the lawmakers or be ignored by everyone.

So, how do you keep people participating in your campaign? Studies show that meetings where people make friends, help make decisions and focus on fixing problems in their community are really good at keeping people involved.

Take the 1963 Children's March in support of civil rights, for example. As University of Alabama Professor Tondra Loder-Jackson shows in her book, *Schoolhouse Activists: African American Educators and the Long Birmingham Civil Rights Movement*, teachers couldn't march without risking their jobs, so they supported their students in a different way. They talked about the march in class, let students take the lead in planning with their friends and told them it was okay to skip school to go to the march. This support helped most students decide to participate. In fact, 6,600 out of 7,500 Birmingham's Black public school students chose to march, showing how powerful it is to create the right conditions for participation.

Just like the teachers in the 1960s who helped their students stand up for what they believed in, creating an environment for your campaign where everyone feels included and important can make a big difference in ensuring your success.

Your turn

What kind of involvement keeps you coming back to your issue?

How might you create more opportunities like that for others?

Put people to work

You might think making things easy for people keeps them involved in your advocacy campaign, but the opposite is true. When people feel their work is essential, they tend to stick around. The harder they work, the more they get out of the experience and the more committed they become.

Expert advice

"In order to keep people mobilized, they need to feel useful … The most successful and sustainable change efforts are co-productions between leaders and supporters."

Elisabeth Clemens, William Rainey Harper Professor of Sociology, University of Chicago, and author of *The People's Lobby*

Even when life is tough, people want to be part of making the world better, especially through a cause close to their heart. Why would someone keep sacrificing for a goal when they don't seem to be getting much in return? Research points to the psychological benefits of advocacy. Being part of a group, especially one that's fighting for a big goal, creates a strong bond among its members. The more you invest in the campaign the stronger your attachment grows, even if the battle gets tough.

In his research, Washington and Lee University sociologist Marcos Pérez found that creating a sense of belonging is key to keeping people engaged with a movement, especially when initial excitement wanes and challenges arise. The emotional bonds that form among activists can also be a powerful tool in facing opposition.

This was the case with a group of unemployed workers in Argentina known as the Piqueteros. Despite living in some of the country's poorest areas, they banded together in the 1990s to protest against the privatization of the national oil company. Their efforts paid off, turning the Piqueteros into a major political force in Argentina.

Pérez explored why people who already face so many challenges would dedicate themselves to such a movement. In his study of the Piqueteros, he talked to over a hundred activists and found that being part of the movement gave them something invaluable: a sense of purpose. These activists felt disconnected from and overlooked by society, and the movement offered them a community and a way to fight back against the forces they blamed for their struggles.

Participation in the movement, Pérez found, became an end in itself by providing members with a refuge from their daily struggles, a source of pride and a positive experience that made their lives more fulfilling.

Your turn

What are your most fulfilling advocacy experiences?

How could you help more people feel ownership over your campaign?

Take action by provoking a reaction

One key approach to community organizing is the use of controlled conflict, where people work together to provoke the powerful into overreacting. Done right, this tactic can strengthen your negotiating position and help secure wins.

Expert advice

"To make change, you have to be able to demonstrate the power that an organized community holds even if it makes people uncomfortable or angry. In fact, it is when you are pushing people in power outside of their comfort zone that you know your organizing is working."

Nicholas Hernández, Executive Director, Transform Education Now (TEN)

In his 1971 book, *Rules for Radicals*, sociologist Saul Alinsky argued that effective advocacy is, at its core, a cycle of action and reaction. He believed that confronting power was key to sparking change.

Alinsky's ideas on social change started at the University of Chicago, which was famous for its focus on practical, real-world studies of urban problems. Chicago itself served as a kind of city laboratory, with Alinsky forming the Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council as a testing ground for his community organizing ideas. Inspired by labor movement tactics such as boycotts and sit-ins from the 1920s and 1930s, Alinsky aimed to change the power dynamics within communities and create a more level playing field for low-income families.

Alinsky recognized that community organizing was more complex than traditional labor organizing because the opposition wasn't a single employer but a complex network of elite interests. This meant that community activists had to seek out conflicts with specific members of the elite to build support for their efforts, a strategy still relevant in today's advocacy work.

This conflict-driven approach is evident in the actions of the Philadelphia Student Union (PSU), a group of young activists fighting against school downsizing plans by the School Reform Commission (SRC). The SRC, facing a budget shortfall, closed several schools and cut essential services, decisions that the students felt were unfair and unjust.

In 2014, PSU members disrupted a movie screening hosted by an SRC member to protest these cuts. Their chant, "Hey, hey! Ho, ho! The SRC has to go!" and the subsequent reaction, including harsh words from the event's host and calls for the students' arrest, was captured on video and widely shared. This event was a turning point in the fight over school closures, leading to increased protests and, eventually, in 2017, the SRC voting to disband itself and return control of the school district to a local school board.

Alinsky's legacy of using strategic, confrontational tactics to challenge power structures and create change is alive in the work of groups like the PSU, demonstrating the ongoing importance of his strategies in advocacy and social change.

Your turn

Who might be an opponent you can organize against?

Where would they be most vulnerable to a confrontation?

Tell a story

Most public officials are sensitive to what their constituents think. This has led advocates to try and influence voters to increase their odds of success. Research shows that the most effective tool for getting voters to change their pre-existing beliefs is storytelling.

Expert advice

"Stories will help you cut through the debate and help people connect with your passion for a cause. That's why I lead my advocacy work in education by talking about my son or a student I've gotten to know through our programs."

David Sun-Miyashiro, Executive Director, HawaiiKidsCAN

When advocates talk to political candidates, they often say they have public opinion on their side. But how do you strengthen this argument? Can you really change what people think about an issue?

To find out, Duke University psychologist Matthew Stanley and colleagues studied the reactions of over 3,000 people to see if they could change their minds about controversial topics like standardized testing, fracking and drone strikes. They tried three methods: giving information that supported the participants' existing views, giving information that contradicted their views and giving information on both sides of the argument.

The researchers discovered that changing people's minds is tough but possible, with some methods working better than others. Mostly, people stuck to their original beliefs. For example, support for standardized testing in schools barely changed after hearing both sides of the argument, with less than 1 percent of people changing their minds. However, a less balanced approach worked a little better. When only presented with arguments against standardized testing, support dropped by about 5 percent.

But what if just presenting facts isn't changing enough opinions to help you win? Yale University political scientist Joshua L. Kalla and UC Berkeley political scientist David E. Broockman found that storytelling can be highly effective. They tested four different methods of storytelling and found that sharing a story about someone else's experiences was the best way to change opinions. For example, after hearing stories about the struggles of undocumented immigrants, people were much more supportive of providing them college scholarships, with 13 percent of people shifting to a pro-immigrant position. This method, which involves sharing real-life stories, worked well no matter who shared the story.

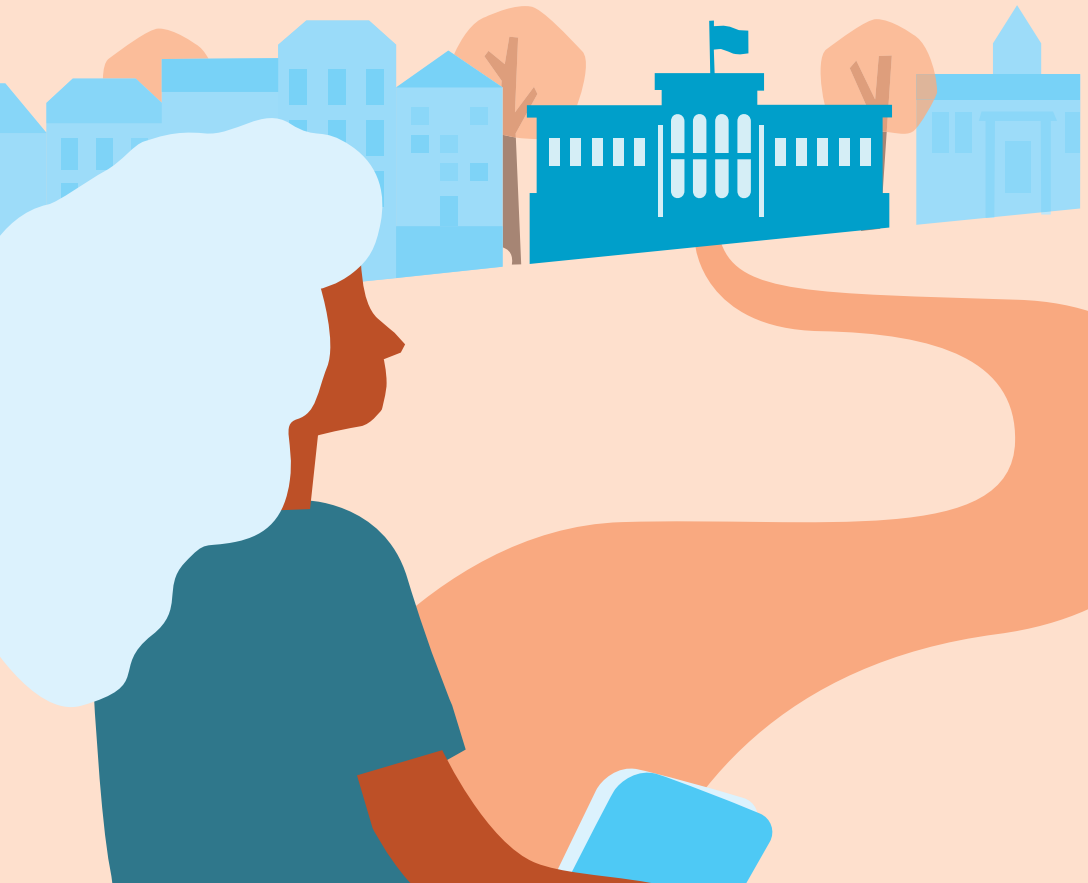
So, in debates where facts alone don't change minds, try centering personal stories in your outreach and see if that might make a difference for your campaign.

Your turn

Who might you tell a story about that captures why this work matters?

Where might you have an opportunity to share this story to reach more people?

Elite negotiations



IN THIS SECTION

Embrace your opposition

Standing up for what you believe in can be tough because you might face harsh criticism. But being ignored is a bigger problem than being criticized. Studies show that not getting attention of any kind means you are likely headed toward defeat. Successful advocacy campaigns are the ones that get people talking. So, when you find yourself up against opposition, it can help to lean into the debate.

Expert advice

"There is a lot more change being proposed in any given year than there is the capacity at the political level to enact these changes or even consider them. While there may be a fear of stirring up people on the other side of an issue, it is important to understand that that is all part of the political process. You can be loud and stir up some attention and opposition or you can be ineffective."

Jeffrey Berry, John Richard Skuse Professor of Political Science, Tufts University, and author of *The New Liberalism: The Rising Power of Citizen Groups*

Back in the 1990s, government officials realized that the United States Postal Service (USPS) had to change to keep up with innovations like email and the growing competition from delivery companies like FedEx and UPS. While most politicians agreed that big changes were needed to make USPS more efficient and more sustainable, Congress kept putting off doing anything about it.

The main problem, according to experts like University of North Carolina political scientist Frank Baumgartner, was that not enough members of the public, the media and policymakers were talking about how to reform USPS. Important issues need to go through extensive discussion and debate before they can become laws. On this key issue, that wasn't happening.

One surprising thing Baumgartner and his colleagues found was that not having anyone argue against an idea could make it more likely to fail. In fact, more than one-third of all advocacy groups named "lack of attention" as a major obstacle to their success. When there's a public debate on your issue, it draws attention from the media, other organizations and government officials. This attention can help bring even more support to your side, get the public involved and make it worth the time of public officials to try and get something done.

So, even though it might seem bad when people disagree with your idea, having that disagreement is important. To make a change, you need to get the public to care about what you're trying to do. Your opponents, more often than not, give you the energy you need to make change.

Your turn

Who are the opponents of your issue?

How might you draw them into the debate?

What do you need to focus on to win that debate?

Be bold

Changing a law is like pushing a heavy object across a smooth floor. It's tough to get it moving at all, but once you do, it's more likely to go a foot than an inch. Advocates who go for big, bold changes—a strong push—have a better shot at success than those who only try little nudges. So, if you want to really make a difference, it's better to go all in.

Expert advice

"The status quo is sticky. People get used to the existing rules and arrangements and they take them for granted as the natural way of doing business. Once you've got a particular set of policies or institutions in place, that tends to produce constituencies that benefit from them. Whenever anybody stands up and wants to challenge them, there are people who step forward to defend them. So, change is always about struggle."

John Campbell, Class of 1925 Professor and Professor of Sociology, Dartmouth University, and author of *The National Origins of Policy Ideas*

Back when Bill Clinton was president, a top goal of environmentalists was making gasoline cleaner by reducing the amount of sulfur in it. As you might expect, powerful oil and car companies didn't support this change and the additional costs it would entail.

For seven years, environmentalists fought for changes to the federal rules without any apparent success. But during that time, the relentless pressure of their campaign was beginning to change minds at the EPA.

Finally, in the last year of the Clinton Administration, the Environmental Protection Agency announced that the amount of sulfur in gasoline had to be reduced by 90 percent over the next six years. Leaders of oil and car companies were really upset, calling the decision "catastrophic." But the government stood firm behind this big, historic change.

This pattern is seen across many issues because most of the time it is easier to get a big change done all at once than lots of little changes spread out over many years. Indeed, studies show that groups targeting big, important changes have a better chance of success, and that it is rare for policies to get a little better or a little worse. Big changes or big cuts happen more often than incremental ones. That's because when there is a lot of disagreement around an issue, public officials usually conclude it is not worth their time to debate something small.

This pattern isn't new. The Boston College sociologist William Gamson found something similar when he looked at groups trying to change the system between 1880 and 1945. He noticed that advocacy groups with bigger goals usually did better. These bold efforts got more support, were more likely to be taken seriously and won more often.

So, the lesson is that it's often better to go for a big goal. You will get more attention and that can lead to more success.

Your turn

What is a modest version of your goal?

What is a bold version of your goal?

Who might be more energized to join your campaign if you turned a modest goal into a big, bold goal?

LESSON 12

Take on the powerful

Despite what you might think, the rich and powerful don't always get their way in policy debates. These powerful groups often disagree among themselves, using their resources to battle each other to a draw. Even when the powerful do agree, the opinions of everyday people and the results of elections matter more.

Expert advice

"There's a tendency to overestimate what money can do. It's important but it's not the only thing that matters. When people actually get active and organized, they can make a big difference. We have seen quite a lot of that throughout American history and that's especially true for the local and state governments."

Theda Skocpol, Victor S. Thomas Professor of Government and Sociology, Harvard University, and author of *Diminished Democracy*

When Congress got to work in 1993, the top goals of the business world weren't on the agenda. Instead, a Democratic president and Democratic Congress were busy with their own plans, like the Family and Medical Leave Act and healthcare reform. But just two years later, everything changed. Congress was now focusing on things businesses wanted, like tort reform and tax cuts. This shift wasn't because businesses suddenly got better at lobbying. It was because of the 1994 elections, when Republicans gained power.

Mark Smith, a political scientist at University of Washington, explored why business influence ebbs and flows in his book *American Business and Political Power*. In his study, Smith examined more than 2,000 issues under debate between the 1950s and the 1990s and the key drivers in the outcomes of these debates. He found that even though businesses spend a lot of money trying to influence decisions, public opinion and elections matter more. Smith's research showed that the outcome of elections and changes in how people feel about the role of government explain why pro-business laws succeed or fail. In fact, Smith concluded that shifts in public mood towards businesses explain nearly three-quarters of the success rate of business-friendly legislation during the period studied.

Other studies show that well-funded groups aren't as powerful as many people assume they are. For example, law professors Samuel Issacharoff and Jeremy Peterman found that, despite predictions to the contrary, after the *Citizens United* Supreme Court ruling that loosened restrictions on political spending, special interests haven't gotten more powerful or won more often.

These studies show that when one group starts pushing for change, others will push back. This competition, plus the natural tendency of the government to resist change, means that defending the status quo is often easier than changing it. In Washington, playing defense is a winning game.

Your turn

Which groups are your most powerful opponents?

In what ways are they out of step with public opinion?

How could you highlight that contrast with elected officials?

Persist

Fighting for a cause you believe in takes a lot of effort. Most of the time, people who try to make changes need to keep at it for many years before they see any success. For big issues, it might even take decades to see real results. One thing successful advocates all have in common is that they didn't give up.

Expert advice

"Change takes a long time. You note when the final fight comes forward but usually in one form or another that fight had been going on for decades. This little gain happens and then there's pushback. And then this little gain happens and there's pushback. And round and round and round. Sometimes it just means hunkering down and sticking with it, especially when the win you're looking for is a big win."

Beth L. Leech, Professor of Political Science and Vice Chair of Graduate Studies, Rutgers University, and author of *Lobbyists at Work*

Back in the 1990s, trying to make the criminal justice system fairer was a tough battle. Neither President Clinton nor President Bush prioritized the issue and even small changes were met with fierce pushback.

As political scientists David Dagan and Steven Teles explain in their book, *Prison Break: Why Conservatives Turned Against Mass Incarceration*, when advocates couldn't get things moving at the federal level, they turned their focus to states like Texas and Georgia where they saw emerging opportunities for change.

In Georgia, for example, the tough-on-crime laws passed in the 1990s led to a huge increase in the number of people in jails, straining state resources and creating deplorable conditions. The situation shocked many Georgians, including Republican Governor Nathan Deal. In response, a bipartisan effort emerged to take advantage of this growing awareness of the problem. By 2013, this advocacy effort had succeeded in passing a series of reforms that helped reduce the number of people going to jail, especially African Americans.

The success of state advocacy efforts like those in Georgia helped pave the way for the First Step Act at the federal level. This 2018 law made penalties for drug offenses fairer and gave judges more freedom to decide sentences. By being willing to shift their focus from the federal to the state level, advocates created new momentum that kept their advocacy campaign alive and ultimately led to success at the federal level as well.

Most groups fighting for a cause stick with it for years, facing many challenges. One of the biggest challenges to sustaining an advocacy effort is disagreement among advocates. If a group can't stay united, it's a lot harder to be successful. Studies show that groups with clear goals and good organization are better at dealing with these challenges.

So, fighting for change is about more than just having a good idea. It's about staying focused on your goal while staying flexible about the path to success, and keeping at it, even when the going gets tough.

Your turn

How long have you been advocating for your issue?

How much longer do you think it will take to reach your goal?

What can you do to ensure you sustain your effort over the long run?

Partner with public servants

Effective lobbying doesn't involve arm-twisting, raised voices or threats. Lobbying works best when you and your legislative champion work together as a team, each doing your part to achieve common goals. Your focus should be on finding elected officials who will serve as champions and then acting like an extension of their own legislative staff.

Expert advice

"Effective lobbying looks nothing like the lobbying depicted in the movies. The reality is very different than the shorthand. The reason why the image of lobbying is so different is that the reality doesn't make good entertainment. Effective lobbying takes a long time. It's a brick by brick, day by day process of moving your issue forward."

Jeffrey Berry, John Richard Skuse Professor of Political Science, Tufts University, and author of *The New Liberalism: The Rising Power of Citizen Groups*

In the 1960s and early 1970s, people who cared about the environment were often seen protesting and marching in the streets. One of their most visible achievements was the creation of Earth Day in 1970, a celebration which eventually grew to involve one billion people each year. Yet an even bigger win for those fighting for the planet turned out to be the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in that same year.

As political scientist Jeffrey Berry reports in his book, *The New Liberalism*, when President Carter came into office in 1977, he hired two environmental activists to lead the EPA. By shifting their focus from working outside the halls of power to inside, advocacy groups dramatically increased their influence. Today, groups that started out with passionate street protests are focused on crafting regulations that touch every aspect of the American economy.

Effective lobbying is not just about throwing money at a problem and hoping for the best. Successful groups work closely with lawmakers who agree with them, acting like an extra part of their team. They help by doing research and focusing on technical issues that the lawmakers might not have time to address.

Think tanks emerged as key groups that specialize in this kind of policy work. They create detailed plans to support lawmakers in making new laws. Unlike universities, which tend to focus on theoretical advances or technical contributions to a debate, think tanks focus on practical solutions that can be turned into policy right away.

In the end, even though protests can draw attention to issues, policy change often comes from working closely with those in power. Effective inside advocacy is about teamwork, collaboration and persistence. When it's done right, the advocates may remain anonymous and invisible, but their lasting impact is clear.

Your turn

Who are the biggest legislative champions on your issue?

What do they say they most need to advance these ideas?

How can you partner with them to provide this support?

Mobilize your grassroots

Grassroots lobbying is how advocacy campaigns turn their membership numbers into results. Carefully designed experiments show that small numbers of people can make a big difference when they reach out to public officials to make their voices heard.

Expert advice

"The most powerful voices in any room are the people most affected by the policies under debate. That means the most important thing you can do when developing an advocacy campaign is to build it from the ground up with the people you are aiming to serve."

Michael O'Sullivan, Executive Director, GeorgiaCAN

Have you ever wondered if all the effort to help people speak out on behalf of your cause really leads to change? It's a big question for anyone trying to make the world a better place. Luckily, there are four high-quality studies that help us understand how much of a difference grassroots mobilization makes.

One study conducted by a team of seven social scientists led by the University of Florida's Alexander Wagenaar looked at a movement in rural areas of Minnesota and Wisconsin called Communities Mobilizing for Change on Alcohol, which focused on ways to stop young people from buying alcohol. The movement's leaders spread their message across their community through more than 300 presentations, eventually signing up more than 2,000 new supporters. All this hard work led to some real changes, including regional businesses being much less likely to sell alcohol to underage kids.

Another study led by Wagenaar focused on a similar movement in the Cherokee Nation, located in northeastern Oklahoma. As a result of their grassroots efforts, advocates saw an 18 percentage point reduction in underage alcohol purchases.

Researchers have also explored whether sending emails or making phone calls to lawmakers could make a difference in how they voted on important legislation. To understand how a wave of email outreach influences the legislative process, Michigan State University's Daniel Bergan organized an experiment in partnership with the Clean Air Works for New Hampshire coalition, which was advocating for policies to promote a smoke-free workplace in the state. Bergan randomly assigned New Hampshire's 120 state legislators to either a control group or treatment group to isolate the effects of this grassroots tactic. Bergan found that the grassroots email campaign had a significant and positive effect on the results of two pivotal votes on the policy.

Another experiment in Michigan led by Bergan showed that even just a few phone calls from constituents about anti-bullying legislation could make lawmakers more likely to support it. Communication from constituents about the bill increased the odds an elected official would vote for it by 12 percentage points. Interestingly, more calls didn't make a bigger impact. It was getting calls at all that really mattered to legislators on these issues people don't often speak out about.

These studies show us that when people come together to discuss what they care about—whether through meetings, visits or phone calls—they can really help make things better. More important than how many people call or how often is simply showing lawmakers that there are people who care enough to reach out.

Your turn

How might you integrate more grassroots outreach into your work?

Who needs to hear more from these grassroots voices?

LESSON 16

Increase your access

Getting a foot in the door is often thought to be key to a successful advocacy campaign. So how can advocates increase their access to the halls of power? Mobilizing constituents and donors makes a difference.

Expert advice

"The process isn't set up to be democratic. The reality is that policy happens behind closed doors. Successful advocacy is about opening those doors for the people you represent."

Subira Gordon, CEO, Nashville Charter Collaborative

Trying to change the system by talking to the people who make our laws? It's a big challenge, especially when it's hard to even get a meeting with them. Who gets to talk to these elected officials?

To answer this question, political scientist Michelle Chin and her team at Texas A&M University recruited 69 Congressional schedulers to participate in a laboratory experiment to test how scheduling decisions are made. Chin gave the participants a set of appointment requests and asked them to create a mock schedule for their representative. Among the information they were given about the people requesting appointments was whether they were constituents. They found that people who were constituents of the lawmaker had a better chance of getting a meeting than those who weren't.

Political scientists Joshua Kalla and David Broockman took the experiment a step further. They reached out to elected officials and asked for meetings posing as either "local constituents" or "local campaign donors." Turns out identifying yourself as a donor makes it three to four times more likely you'll get that important meeting.

But there's a catch: not everyone is treated equally. In another experiment, David Broockman and Daniel Butler found that lawmakers were more likely to respond to emails from a typically white-sounding name (Jake Mueller) compared to a typically Black-sounding name (DeShawn Jackson), as determined by census information on names and race. Lawmakers responded to 61 percent of emails sent from "Jake Mueller" but only 55 percent of emails from "DeShawn Jackson," even though the text of the emails was identical. The researchers also found that this bias in favor of the white-sounding name was not present in the response rates of elected officials of color, suggesting that representation matters when it comes to responsiveness.

These studies show us that while trying to make a change, who you are and how you're seen can really affect whether lawmakers listen to you. While pushing for more active engagement in the political process, we should also insist on equal access for all and greater representation among our elected officials.

Your turn

How can you reach more constituents of the public official you are trying to influence?

Can you also reach donors of this public official and bring them into your movement?

Are there opportunities to improve the representativeness of the public officials in your community?

Insist that elected officials take a stand

Advocacy campaigns often try to get support from elected officials, who can play a big role in influencing public opinion on an issue. Studies have shown that when these officials take a stand on an issue it can change minds.

Expert advice

"As advocates, we have to juggle hundreds of different priorities. So where should securing public statements from elected officials fall on your To-Do list? Right at the top. They are key in shifting the debate in your favor."

Kelli Bottger, Executive Director, Louisiana Kids Matter

Politicians often talk about what they support or don't support. But is it worth the effort to get them to publicly support your issue?

UC Berkeley political scientist David Broockman and Washington University political scientist Daniel Butler decided to find out with an experiment. They worked with eight state senators who agreed to send different types of messages to their constituents on the hot button issues of decriminalizing marijuana and the treatment of undocumented immigrants. Some constituents got no message from their representative, some got messages with strong opinions and lots of reasons, and some got messages with strong opinions but no reasons.

Before and after these messages were sent, the researchers asked more than 1,000 constituents what they thought about the issues. They discovered that people who got messages about what their representative believed were more likely to agree with those beliefs later on. Surprisingly, it didn't matter if the message included a lot of reasons or none at all; people changed their minds either way.

This suggests that politicians can really influence what people think just by saying where they stand on an issue. This is important for anyone trying to make a change because it means getting politicians to publicly support you can make a big difference.

Your turn

How might you make stronger asks of your public officials?

How could you get the word out when they stand up for your issue?

How will you thank and encourage public officials when they stand alongside you?

Practice strategic lobbying

Getting policies passed means winning public officials over to your side. Studies reveal that convincing these leaders in social settings works best. It also helps to cite proof points and surveys of constituents to make your case.

Expert advice

"Effective lobbyists build relationships on the foundation of accurate information, discretion and trust. That starts by investing in the substantive arguments on an issue, but then goes further by investing in the relationships that make change possible."

Steven Hernández, Executive Director, ConnCAN

Getting public officials to support your issue is crucial to your success. So, how do you win them over? Luckily, there are some tactics that have been tested and proven effective.

Direct lobbying is one way to do this. This kind of lobbying is just what it sounds like: advocates talk directly to leaders, asking for their support. A study led by University of Southern California's Christian R. Grose looked into whether it mattered where these conversations happened. To understand whether lobbying in a social setting might be more effective, they partnered with an active advocacy campaign seeking to influence the vote in a state legislature on education funding. In their experiment, 20 percent of the legislators who were lobbied in social settings ended up supporting the policy, compared to only about 8 percent of those who were lobbied in their offices.

What should you talk about in these social settings? One approach is to focus on survey results of an elected official's own constituents. To find out if this helps, Washington University's Daniel Butler and University of Notre Dame's David Nickerson partnered with a state newspaper to survey 10,690 New Mexicans about the governor's spending proposals and then bring these district-specific results to the attention of half of the state legislators, with the other half serving as a control group. They discovered that those legislators who saw the survey results were more likely to vote in line with what the people wanted than those who didn't.

Finally, it also helps to find examples of other elected officials leading on your issue, particularly from the same party as the person you are lobbying. A study published in the *American Journal of Political Science* found that leaders were more interested in policies that had been adopted by their own party in other communities. Conservatives were 40 percentage points more interested in a policy if they thought it came from Republicans while liberals were 20 percentage points more interested in a policy if they thought it came from Democrats.

By talking to leaders in a relaxed setting, showing them what their voters think and drawing on proof points, you can increase the odds of getting their support.

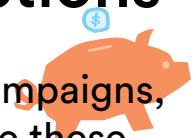
Your turn

Have you tried to invite the public officials you are seeking to influence to a more social setting?

Do you know of any surveys you could integrate into your pitch?

How could you integrate more success stories into your communications?

Spend smartly on elections



Before getting involved in political campaigns, it's smart to look into when and where these efforts really make a difference. Studies show that efforts to influence elections can work, but often do not. The closer and more personal the approach, the more effective it is.

Expert advice

"It is easy to spread yourself thin across a large number of elections and have a limited impact on the outcome of those races. If you really want your electoral advocacy to matter, you need to be thoughtful about where to focus your efforts. For the 50CAN Action Fund, that means local races, with a particular focus on primaries that polling suggests are close enough for our grassroots advocates and tactics to make the difference."

Jonathan Nikkila, Executive Vice President, 50CAN Action Fund

Back in the 1940s and 1950s, Columbia University sociologist Paul Lazarsfeld and his team were among the first to question whether political campaigns mattered. They discovered that presidential campaigns seemed to have little effect on how people actually voted. Instead, what mattered more were people's real-life experiences and their long-term loyalty to parties or groups.

In subsequent studies the researchers found they could often predict the outcomes of elections by looking at basic facts about the economy, how many supporters each party had and where candidates stood on important issues. These findings led some advocates to conclude that all the efforts of campaigning—strategy meetings, stump speeches, debate prep, message testing and advertisements—didn't really change the results.

But is this always true?

More recent research has shown that the effect of campaigns on elections is not so simple. For example, Yale University's Minali Aggarwal and colleagues ran a careful experiment in 2020 that demonstrated that an $8.9 million social media campaign by a liberal advocacy group had a small but noticeable effect on the presidential election, nudging more people to vote for Biden and fewer for Trump. Other experiments prove that the personal touch works best. Going door-to-door boosted voter turnout by 2.5 percent while automated messages had virtually no impact.

Despite what many think, spending more money doesn't always mean a candidate is more likely to win. Experiments conducted by Yale political scientist Alan Gerber with local campaigns in Connecticut found that spending on direct mail often didn't help incumbents get more votes. It was effective for challengers, however, securing an additional vote for every 30 dollars spent, suggesting that how and on whom money is spent can make a big difference.

So, while some early studies suggested that campaigns might not have much effect on election outcomes, newer research has shown that campaigns definitely have a role to play. This doesn't mean that throwing more money at a campaign will always lead to victory. Instead, consider how well that money is used and how effectively the campaign connects with voters.

Your turn

Are there some challengers in upcoming races who are aligned on your issue?

Could you organize volunteers to connect with voters through door-to-door canvassing and personal phone calls to support them?

Encourage your champions to serve

If you want to influence the outcome of an election, the first step is recruiting candidates. Studies suggest advocates should start early and focus on encouraging messages.

Expert advice

"It can feel like a lot of work, but there is nothing more powerful than finding people who share a common vision and helping them master the electoral process. That is truly democracy in action."

Amanda Aragon, Executive Director, NewMexicoKidsCAN Action Fund

If advocates only look at the candidates already running for office, they might not find anyone who really supports their cause. So, what's a good way to find better candidates? It turns out that just encouraging someone to think about running can be a powerful motivator.

When you ask people who've decided to run for office why they did it, many say that being encouraged by others was a big reason. To put this idea to the test, political scientist David E. Broockman partnered with an advocacy group to send emails to almost 100,000 of their most active members with different kinds of messages. Some messages offered political support and others offered more personal encouragement, such as "You would be great in office" or "We want you to run." Brookman discovered that personal encouragement worked much better, prompting twice as many people to actually run compared to the messages simply offering support.

Encouraging members of your community to start early in politics is also key. A study by political scientist Martin Lundin and colleagues looked at how joining a student council affects running for office later in life. They found that people who had these early leadership experiences were 34 percent more likely to run for public office as adults.

Whether it's through heartfelt emails or fostering leadership skills in youth, these findings show how advocates do not have to accept the reality of two bad choices in an election. By focusing on expanding the pool of future leaders, they can help ensure that people truly representative of their values have a chance to be heard in the political arena.

Your turn

Do you know anyone who might consider running for office with a little more encouragement?

How might you engage with students to help set them on the path to public service?

Emergent networks and expert communities

IN THIS SECTION

LESSON 21

Build a strong brand

Creating a strong public narrative that conveys the authenticity of an organizing campaign can provide a critical boost. It can also protect you from the inevitable backlash from those resistant to change.

Expert advice

"The person who decides what language we use to describe an issue or what story is told to encapsulate a problem will be ahead of the game from day one. Make sure that person is you."

Paula White, Executive Director, JerseyCAN

For advocates, it is critical to have a story that helps the members of your campaign understand each other and stand together against the challenges they will face. Through the creation of a compelling brand, leaders can inspire others to join them in taking action and help their movement grow to the size needed to make a real difference.

One example of the power of symbols is the role of branding in the success of the United Farm Workers. César Chávez asked his brother Richard for help creating a symbol that could inspire others to take action. Together, they chose an eagle and the colors of black and red for their flag. Chávez said, "A symbol is an important thing. That is why we chose an Aztec eagle. It gives pride. When people see it, they know it means dignity."

The importance of a strong message and strong symbolism is also clear in the story of Equal Education (EE), a South African education advocacy group, which was documented in a case study by researchers Ben Kirshner, Tafadzwa Tivaringe and Jesica Siham Fernández. EE was founded by students, teachers and activists who wanted to improve schools in poor areas in the post-apartheid era. They faced a tough situation because they were not fighting against the old apartheid government but trying to make a newly democratic government led by former activists more responsive to community needs. Some in power criticized EE, saying it wasn't truly led by the people it claimed to represent. But EE fought back by telling its own story, showing they were a genuine, student-led group.

In order to more strongly connect the revolutionary struggles of the apartheid years to their present moment, they redesigned their brand around the slogan: "Every Generation Has Its Struggle." This slogan was included on posters with raised fists grasping a ruler, a pen and a calculator. They chose the colors red, black and yellow to echo the symbolism present in South Africa's new flag: red for the sacrifices made in South Africa's struggle for independence, yellow for the natural wealth of South Africa and black for the native people of South Africa.

They focused on simple problems like the number of broken windows in school buildings to draw attention to the current educational crisis. This approach turned their local efforts into a wider movement for quality education across the country. More than 15 years later, EE is known worldwide as a model for youth activism. Their success shows the power of having a clear identity and message, proving that a well-told story can unite people and drive change.

The stories of the United Farm Workers and Equal Education highlight the transformative power of a strong brand in advocacy. Creating a clear, compelling story and visual symbols can unite people, inspire action and drive significant social change.

Your turn

How could you change the elements of your brand—colors, icons, slogans and songs—to better capture the spirit you aim to represent?

How can you better connect to struggles of the past that are aligned with your values and mission?

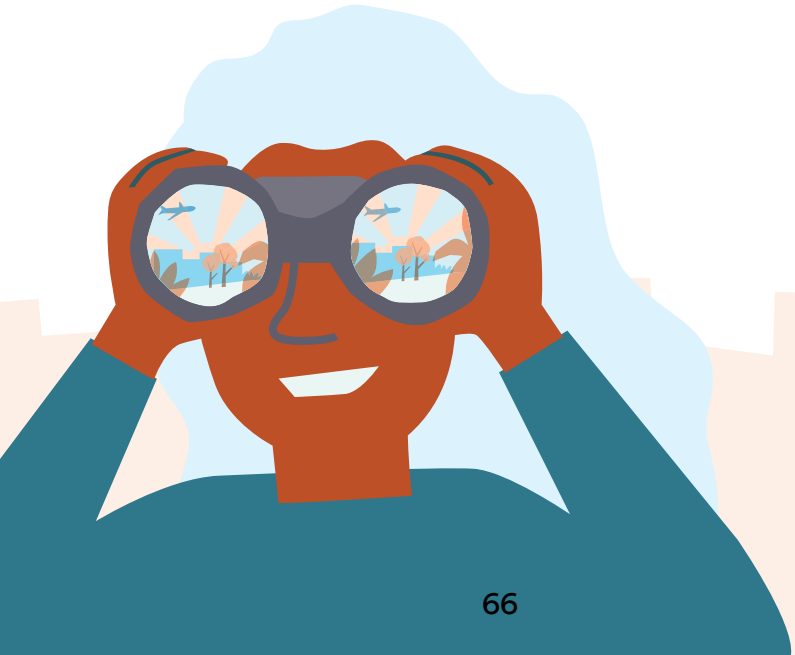
Focus on the future

When trying to get people to support your campaign, deciding what to say and who should say it can be tricky. Studies show that focusing on your plans for the future, and including stories and numbers in your pitch, gets better results.

Expert advice

"People are aspirational. They like to dream. Your campaign needs to take them on a journey toward something hopeful and better. It will take many people walking together to reach the destination."

Derrell Bradford, President, 50CAN



When advocacy leaders sit down to write about their work, they often wonder if it's better to talk about the good things they've already done or the great things they plan to do in the future.

To figure out which approach works best, Cornell University political scientists Adam Seth Levine and Cindy Kam partnered with a nonprofit group advocating for increased access to healthcare. They split the nonprofit's members into three different groups. One group got a basic letter asking for donations, another got the same letter plus information about past successes and the third group got the same letter plus details about future plans.

It turned out that talking about future plans got many more people to donate than talking about past successes. The average donation in response to the basic letter and the letter with information about the past was the same ($45) while the average donation in response to the letter featuring future plans jumped to $64. In a follow up survey to respondents the researchers explored what caused this jump, finding that talking about future goals motivated prospective donors by helping them see how their contribution would make a difference.

In another study, Levine teamed up with Stony Brook University political scientist Yanna Krupnikov to explore whether it was better to use hard evidence or personal stories to get support. They sent out letters to potential donors of a nonprofit, with some letters including data and others sharing a personal story. It turns out both increased donations compared to a more basic pitch, showing that when it comes to asking for money, more information is better.

Your turn

How can you focus your communications on future plans rather than past accomplishments?

Where can you add more evidence and stories to your messages rather than just stating your goals?

LESSON 23

Never stop innovating

Social movements win by tipping the scales towards change. How do they do it? Successful groups are quick to use new tactics that catch their opponents by surprise. The future of advocacy will depend on groups finding fresh ways to make change happen in their communities.

Expert advice

"Great advocacy leaders embrace the vitality of conflicting viewpoints to bring innovative new approaches into the world. By being willing to make room for conflict, these leaders interrogate all the possible ways forward and open up the possibility for innovation."

Kelsy Kretschmer, Assistant Professor of Sociology, School of Public Policy, Oregon State University, and author of *Fighting for NOW: Diversity and Discord in the National Organization for Women*

In 1892, John Muir started the Sierra Club, a group that created a whole new kind of advocacy movement centered on the energetic defense of the environment. Yet by the 1960s it found itself lacking the advocacy tools needed for many of the new problems it was working to solve. In 1965, it created a legal defense fund and launched a new kind of campaign that used the power of the courts to fight for the natural world. The spark for this new initiative was the desire to protect the Mineral King Valley in the Sierra Nevada Mountains from Walt Disney's plans to create an "American Alpine Wonderland" ski resort.

This new legal tactic suffered a setback seven years later when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled four to three in favor of the Walt Disney Company. But the Sierra Club didn't give up. They found a small detail in the court's decision that let them keep fighting, and eventually, in 1978, President Carter protected the valley by making it part of a national park.

The Sierra Club's fight showed other groups a new way to protect the environment through legal battles. How do you make it more likely your campaign will stay on the cutting edge of advocacy?

Vanderbilt University sociologist Holly McCammon's research looking at innovation in advocacy shows that when lots of groups work on the same problem, they come up with even better ideas. For example, she found that states with a greater diversity of women's suffrage groups were more likely to see the emergence of tactical innovations.

Sometimes, sharp disagreements within a group can actually lead to innovative groups emerging around fresh ideas, such as when leaders split off from the Sierra Club to found Friends of the Earth (which pioneered a focus on "climate justice") and Greenpeace (which introduced a more confrontational approach to environmental advocacy). These new groups often find even more creative ways to make a difference, showing that sometimes, change within a group can lead to bigger changes in the world.

Your turn

Who do you know who might be taking a different approach to tackling your issue?

How can you learn more about what they are doing?

How can you embrace disagreement in a way that sparks new ideas?

Be an information organizer

While information is free, public officials' time is expensive. Therefore, organizing the facts related to your issue is one of the most important contributions advocates can make. By generating the briefings that public officials need to act, advocates make themselves invaluable.

Expert advice

"Influence is really about information. The most effective lobbyists are great at providing elected officials with the information they need to act on their behalf. That means making sure that they know what the counter-arguments are, making sure they know how to counter the counter-arguments, getting information about what people in their district might think, knowing the technical details of all the procedures and processes to help a bill become a law."

Beth L. Leech, Professor of Political Science and Vice Chair of Graduate Studies, Rutgers University, and author of *Lobbyists at Work*

In the 1980s, the problem of acid rain was getting worse, and despite over 70 different bills introduced to try and fix it, none of them went anywhere because they were all deemed too expensive. According to Brown University political scientist Eric Patashnik in his book *Reforms at Risk*, what was needed was a new way of thinking about how to help the environment. That's when the Environmental Defense Fund stepped in. EDF suggested using a market-based approach designed by economists that required overall sulfur emissions be cut in half but allowed power plants that lowered their pollution by more than half to sell the extra allowances to other plants. This made it much more flexible and market-driven than the old top-down rules.

By 1990, this idea was turned into a law, introducing a "cap-and-trade" system to tackle acid rain. It worked better than anyone could have hoped, reducing acid rain faster than predicted while costing industry just one-fourth of what had been projected. This success showed that sometimes new ideas and leadership can really make a difference.

Researchers looking into how experts help make policies have found that public officials listen to advisers whose expertise they find essential. These "information organizers" don't swamp lawmakers with detail, but rather zero in on the key information needed to make decisions faster. This is important because the world of politics moves fast and public officials need help understanding complex issues quickly.

The trickier a problem is, the more likely it is that officials will need outside experts to help them figure it out. This makes experts who can organize, condense and communicate information truly valuable. They save a lot of time for the people trying to make laws and make it more likely that change will happen.

Your turn

What are the most important sources of information about your issue?

Who can help you organize and present this information?

How can you track counter-arguments and how will you determine the best ways to counter those counter-arguments?

Protect your credibility

Earning a politician's trust is crucial for advocates, and keeping it means providing useful information, not just talk. Being successful requires a lot of quiet work behind the scenes. The best advocates can clearly explain issues and consistently provide advice that holds up.

Expert advice

"The real test of influence is not whether you are generating ideas, but whether the people in power are listening to you."

John Campbell, Class of 1925 Professor and Professor of Sociology, Dartmouth University, and author of *The National Origins of Policy Ideas*

In 1980, a sweeping law called the Motor Carrier Act upended the rules governing the trucking business. President Carter said he supported it because it cut through the red tape in ways that would make things better for both customers and workers.

City College of New York political scientist Andrew Rich, who studies where policy ideas come from, says the real work to change these trucking laws started long before 1980, in the college classrooms of the 1950s and 1960s. Rich traces the Motor Carrier Act back to the work of economists whose research showed how trucking regulations were outdated and counterproductive. These academic studies helped shape the ideas of policymakers in the 1970s and eventually led to the big, bipartisan changes in the law in 1980.

Think tanks, and other groups that come up with policy ideas, don't usually represent specific people like other advocacy groups do. Their power comes from how much people trust their research. Experts tend to gain credibility in three scenarios: when most researchers agree on the problem and solution, when there's a big public debate around the issue and when there is adequate time for policymakers to hear from people in the know.

Researchers have found that in policy debates, simple arguments are more effective than complex or dramatic ones. Staying focused on one issue over time also builds trust. Having a strong, well-researched viewpoint and sticking with it might not be the most thrilling plan, but it can really help your campaign in the long run.

Your turn

How are you working to gain the trust of your champions?

What do you need to do to maintain that trust once it is gained?

What is the greatest threat to your credibility in the eyes of your champions?

LESSON 26

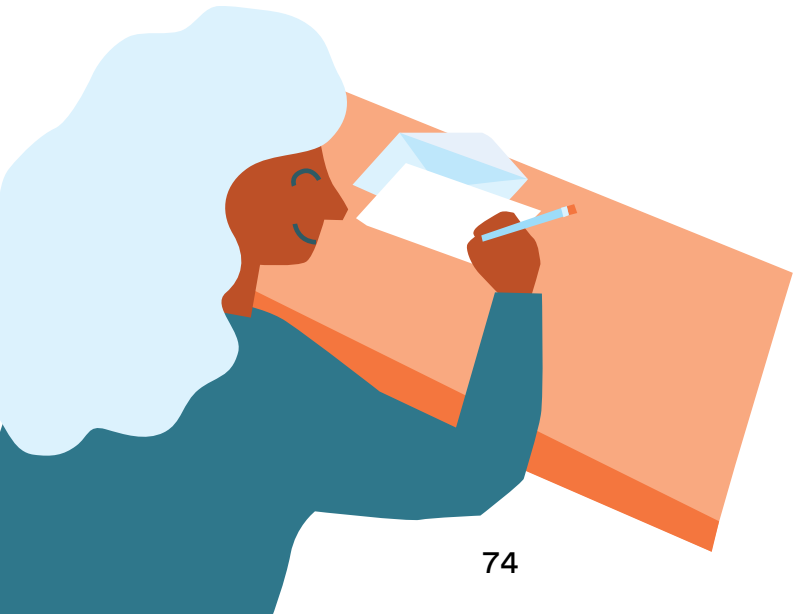
Stand up for the truth

When you have the truth on your side, one of the best things you can do is get people focused on the facts, especially during elections. But how do you make sure that happens? Studies show that politicians are more likely to stick to the truth when they know someone is watching and checking what they say.

Expert advice

"In an age where misinformation spreads quickly, fact-checking is essential. By emphasizing accuracy, we can correct misperceptions and strengthen the integrity of our democratic processes."

Britney Mumford, Executive Director, DelawareKidsCAN



It's really frustrating as an advocate when you see politicians on the campaign trail not telling the truth about your issue. Some groups try to keep an eye on what these candidates say, hoping that if the politicians know they're being watched, they'll stick to the facts. But does this tactic actually work?

Dartmouth College's Brendan Nyhan and University of Exeter's Jason Reifler decided to test this out. They looked at 1,169 state lawmakers from nine states and split them into three groups during an election. One group didn't get any messages, the second got a simple note saying their campaign statements were being watched, and the third group received a detailed warning about how their statements were being monitored and asserting that making false statements could hurt their chances of getting elected again.

The researchers then checked if these politicians were telling the truth by using ratings from PolitiFact and news articles. Their study showed that politicians who got the detailed warnings were 54 percent less likely to lie on the campaign trail.

Nyhan and Reifler noticed that these politicians weren't just talking less or getting less news coverage to avoid getting caught. Instead, they genuinely seemed to be more careful about not making false statements. The researchers concluded that advocates who decide to take up fact-checking can make a big difference.

Your turn

Have you tried fact-checking candidates? If not, why not?

How might you increase fact-checking as part of your campaign?

LESSON 27

Build a frame that lasts

The way you talk about a problem can really make a difference in how successful you are in dealing with it. The challenge isn't just coming up with a new way to talk about a problem, but deciding if it's worth all the effort and time to make others see it that way, too.

Expert advice

"Shifting the world view that folks have is a longer-term project that is often measured in decades, not weeks, months or years. It's not a simple project to get people to change their fundamental outlook. Often when we talk about framing we miss the larger questions of ideology and the way that our views are grounded in larger philosophical traditions, not narrow word choices."

Andrew Rich, Dean, Colin Powell School for Civic and Global Leadership, The City College of New York, and author of *Think Tanks, Public Policy, and the Politics of Expertise*

Understanding how we talk about, or "frame," problems is key to changing minds. For example, an influential 1982 study published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* showed that people's choices on the life and death issue of deciding between two different cancer treatments changed based on whether the treatments were described in relation to "survival rates" or "mortality rates." Even doctors and medical students shifted their preferences based on how the information was presented. For example, the choice of radiation therapy over surgery jumped from 18 percent to 44 percent when the information on success rates was presented in terms of the probability of living rather than the probability of dying.

This concept of framing goes back to University of Pennsylvania sociologist Erving Goffman. He believed we "frame" reality to make sense of it, focusing on some things while ignoring others. This idea shows up in how people advocate for change.

University of Washington political scientist Christopher Parker found that military service was a powerful frame that influenced African American civil rights leaders. Their experiences in the military in WWII gave them a new perspective on race and the confidence to fight for equality. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. also used framing effectively, linking the experiences of Black veterans with Christian teachings to encourage courageous and disciplined resistance of racial oppression.

Yet changing the way people think about a problem is hard. Researchers who studied 98 different issues found that only a few underwent significant framing changes despite the best efforts of advocates. This is because it's tough to change the conversation when so many different voices are involved and people are used to seeing things a certain way.

So, while framing can be powerful, it often requires a lot of time and effort to shift how people view an issue. This makes it a challenging but crucial part of advocacy.

Your turn

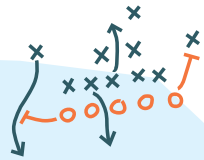
What are the existing frames that shape the way people think about your issue?

Is there a larger ideology that these frames are connected to?

How might you shift these frames in a favorable direction while avoiding the distraction of counter-framing?

Earthquake-proof your campaign

Even well-planned efforts to make a difference can be thrown off by sudden changes in politics. Research shows that big political shifts happen often and can greatly affect plans for change. You can't always see these shifts coming, but you can make your plans stronger by being ready to adapt and change your approach based on the new political situation.



Expert advice

"Because you never know which way the political winds will blow, you need to find ways to frame your issue that are bipartisan. And you need to be willing to switch venues. If you can't get traction in Congress, you move to the states. If legislatures won't help you, take it to the courts. You have to keep moving until you find a way forward."

Beth L. Leech, Professor of Political Science and Vice Chair of Graduate Studies, Rutgers University, and author of *Lobbyists at Work*

In 1898, Congress created a tax on long-distance phone calls to help pay for the Spanish-American War. This tax was meant to be temporary but ended up lasting for 90 years. At first, it was seen as a luxury tax because only rich people had phones. Decades later, people started to argue that the tax should be removed because the reason behind it (the war) was long gone.

For a while, it looked like the tax might be taken away. Anti-tax advocates had the facts on their side and seemed close to winning. But then a recession hit and the government didn't want to lose the 5 billion dollars a year the tax brought in. This setback meant the advocates had to change their plan. They stopped trying to persuade Congress to drop the tax and started fighting in the courts. Eventually they won their case and the tax was removed.

This story shows how an unexpected change such as a recession can close one window of opportunity and open another—or at least force advocates to get creative and adapt their approach. Political scientists talk about these "policy windows" as key factors in the success of a particular advocacy effort.

Columbia University sociologist Debra Minkoff studied the evolution of women's organizations between 1955 and 1985 and found that adapting to big changes can be risky, especially when it means moving away from what you're good at. She concluded that the best time to try new strategies is when things are going well, not in the middle of a crisis. When the political environment changes dramatically, the groups that are already flexible have the better chance of success.

Your turn

If your advocacy in your current venue stalls, where else might you turn?

How can you invest in a culture of flexibility?

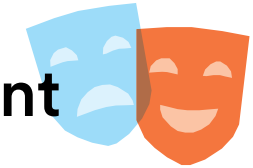
How can you build up more experience with a wider tactical toolkit?

Closing: Minding the greater good

IN THIS SECTION

LESSON 29

Get angry, not violent



Effective advocacy leaders can spark action by highlighting injustices and tapping into people's emotions to draw them into a campaign. Anger, when channeled properly, can be a powerful motivator. But if this anger leads to reckless actions or violence it can backfire, damaging the very cause people are passionate about.

Expert advice

"Often in education advocacy we strive to have a dispassionate policy debate and ask people to set their emotions aside. But how can you not be emotional about your child being bullied at school? Why shouldn't you be angry when your child hasn't been taught to read? Anger is personal and it is energizing. It's the first step towards getting results."

Marcus Brandon, Executive Director, CarolinaCAN

Imagine a workplace where staff members are treated unfairly but where they think nothing can change. Then in comes an organizer who shakes things up by pointing out all the injustices. When people get angry enough to take action, things start to change.

Making people angry isn't just effective for workplace organizing; it works for tackling big community issues, too. But translating this tactic to societal problems can be a challenge.

Take the example of climate change. It's a pressing problem, but it's hard for activists to point to one bad guy causing it all. It often feels like it's everyone's problem and at the same time beyond anyone's control. Yet a study by psychologist Thea Gregersen and colleagues showed that people who are really angry about climate change are seven times more likely to join a protest.

This is similar to what University of Illinois psychologist Josefina Bañales and colleagues found about students who learn about racism and social injustice. Those who got really angry about these issues were more likely to take action.

Getting people angry can sometimes backfire, however, especially if the anger leads to violence. For example, a study by UC Berkeley political scientist Omar Wasow discovered that during the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s, peaceful protests in a community actually helped advocates gain more political support for the cause. By contrast, violence in a community turned people away and led public officials who supported civil rights to lose support in their elections.

When Harvard University political scientist Erica Chenoweth and human rights advocate Maria J. Stephan looked at over 300 advocacy campaigns around the world, they found that nonviolent campaigns were more successful. These campaigns attracted more types of people, which led to greater levels of participation and more popular support.

So, while anger can get people moving, how that anger is channeled—either through peaceful means or not—can really make a difference in whether a movement succeeds or fails.

Your turn

What makes you angry about your issue?

Who is standing in the way of the change you seek?

How can you ensure your efforts are always peaceful?

Protect yourself from zealotry

Getting people excited about your issue is important, but there can be such a thing as too much passion for a cause. Research shows that while strong enthusiasm can drive a movement's success, it can also create problems. Leaders need to make sure that enthusiasm does not turn into extremism.

Expert advice

"You can be aggressive. You can be disruptive and you get some things that way but it can harm you in the long run. Being aware of the tradeoffs helps activists think about how to minimize the damage. They should always ask themselves: 'Is it worth it?'"

James Jasper, Professor of Sociology, City University of New York, and author of *The Emotions of Protest*

César Chávez was a remarkable leader who fought hard for the rights of farm workers through the United Farm Workers. Yet Randy Shaw argues in his book, *Beyond the Fields: César Chávez, the UFW, and the Struggle for Justice in the 21st Century*, that Chávez' extreme dedication to the cause was both a strength and a weakness.

For example, Chávez proved the strength of his conviction by fasting for 25 days—longer even than Gandhi—to show the importance of non-violence and boost morale during a tough strike. This act really motivated the workers and helped ensure the strike's success.

On the other hand, Chávez's intense commitment sometimes made things difficult. He insisted that UFW staff earn very little money, which made it hard for them to afford even the basic necessities of life. Over time, his way of running things became less about teamwork and more about maintaining control, which eventually drove out supporters. Chávez also started to see disagreement as disloyalty, even accusing some of his team of plotting against him. This behavior hurt the movement he had worked so hard to build.

Experts like University of Chicago sociologist James Coleman have studied what happens when leaders push themselves and their teams too hard in the service of a goal. Sometimes, pushing everyone to focus only on the cause can lead to extreme consequences, like a decline in the health of staff or an increasing focus on violence as a tactic. This is especially true in groups that become too closed off from the outside world, losing touch with different viewpoints. Coleman suggests that groups should connect with wider communities to avoid becoming too extreme.

So, while being passionate about your issue is good, leaders and their teams need to stay open to other ideas and remember the importance of working together, not just fighting against those who disagree.

Your turn

What are you doing to make sure your social network doesn't only include people who think like you?

Who in your life do you trust to let you know when you are slipping into zealotry?

How will you know if you have gone too far and lost touch with your values?

LESSON 31

Be democratic

When aiming to change the world, it's crucial to be aware of the risks. Change can lead to unexpected issues and sometimes efforts to improve things might actually make them worse. The best way to avoid these downsides is to pursue change democratically and listen to a wide range of ideas along the way.

Expert advice

"If institutions have failed, and you've decided you must do something to transform your community or your country, what's the safest way and most effective way forward? Historically it has been nonviolent resistance."

Erica Chenoweth, Professor of Public Policy at Harvard Kennedy School, Susan S. and Kenneth L. Wallach Professor at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, and co-author of *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict*

Karl Marx once said that the French Revolution was like a giant spring cleaning, sweeping away outdated parts of society. Harvard University sociologist Theda Skocpol used this idea to look into what happens when revolutions sweep away the bonds that hold society together. She found that in France, China and Russia, revolutionary leaders who promised power to the people ended up creating stronger, more centralized governments that used violence to maintain control.

George Mason University sociologist Jack Goldstone reviewed over 300 studies on revolutions and noticed a similar gap between what revolutionaries promised and what they actually delivered. Instead of reducing inequality, establishing democracy and improving the economy, revolutions more often lead to more authoritarian regimes, less equality, worse conditions for ethnic and religious minorities, and slower economic growth.

One positive example is South Africa, where a peaceful transfer of power to Nelson Mandela and the African National Congress led to a more democratic regime that avoided the violence often associated with big societal changes. This shows that when leaders are truly committed to democracy and practical in their goals, positive change is possible.

Advocating for change is about more than just winning a specific fight. It's also about leaving the fabric of society stronger than we found it. Whether your movement achieves its immediate objectives or not, often its most lasting legacy will be the impact it has on our democracy as a whole.

Your turn

How are you working to make sure the leadership of your campaign listens to the people you aim to serve?

What are the main ways your efforts might make things worse and how are you aiming to mitigate those risks?

How can you ensure a commitment to democracy informs the choices you make in advancing your goals?

Resources

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My campaign plan

Goal

Strategy #1

Strategy #2

Tactics linked to strategy

1.
2.
3.

Tactics linked to strategy

1.
2.
3.

A win looks like:

Potential obstacles:

My campaign plan

Goal

Strategy #1

Strategy #2

Tactics linked to strategy

1.
2.
3.

Tactics linked to strategy

1.
2.
3.

A win looks like:

Potential obstacles:

My notes

My notes

My notes

My notes

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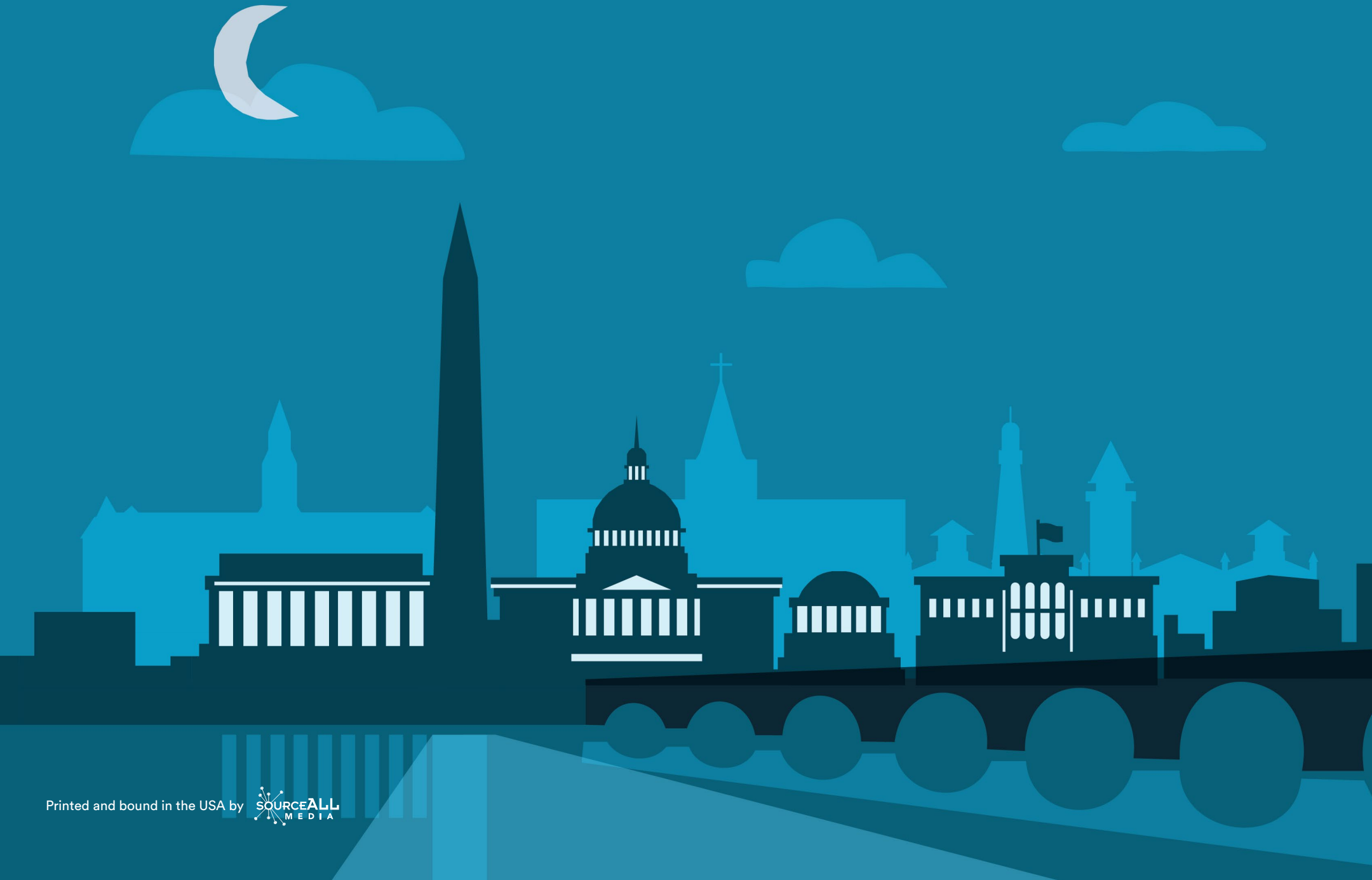

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