

# Guidance for Developing a State Advocacy and Communications Plan



## Introduction

Creating an advocacy and communications plan is a way to strategically organize your advocacy activities as you work to advance prenatal to three policy priorities in your state. These activities should be strategically aligned to your policy goals, responsive to your state context, and implementable. The process of developing your advocacy and communications plan is an opportunity for you and your partners to clarify your goals and strategies, as well as the process and tactics you will use to achieve them over a sustained period. Advocacy planning is a continual process and we encourage you to design your plan to be a living document that your team returns to at periodic intervals to assess progress and adjust course as necessary.

## Components

We suggest that your state advocacy and communications plan encompass the areas of communications, mobilization, and direct lobbying as appropriate to your goals. Below are elements that we recommend including in your plan.

### For each of your policy priorities:

- **Context:** As a first step in developing your advocacy and communications plan, briefly summarize:
  - ✓ The problem or need;
  - ✓ How your policy solution addresses that problem or need;
  - ✓ The current status of your policy solution; and
  - ✓ Key elements of the current policy and political environment of your state that may impact your priority.

As you develop the rest of your plan, the context should serve as a backdrop and inform your strategic decisions.

- **Advocacy Goals:** Advocacy goals are the leverage points that ultimately help you to reach your objectives for change.
  - ✓ Your **short-term advocacy goals** should articulate what you plan to accomplish in the next 3 months.
    - Example: Build policymaker awareness of your policy agenda, including outreach to newly elected legislators
  - ✓ Your **mid-term advocacy goals** should articulate what you plan to accomplish over the next year.
    - Example: Get a bill introduced with bipartisan sponsorship and get a high-profile hearing
  - ✓ Your **long-term advocacy goals** should articulate what you plan to accomplish over the next one to three years.
    - Example: Get a bill advancing your policy goal passed and funded

*Note:* Advocacy campaigns are not linear! Your progress may move faster or slower than you anticipate, or you may move forward, then backward, or see change leap forward suddenly. The process of identifying short-, mid-, and long-term goals is a tool to support intentional advocacy planning with activities that are strategically aligned to your goals, but should not get in the way of being flexible and nimble in response to emerging opportunities, threats, or changes in context.

- **Targets and Audiences:** Targets and audiences are who you need to reach to advance your advocacy goals. These should be as specific as possible, particularly for your short-term goals. For each, think concretely about what action you need them to take. (For example: champion a policy, cast a vote, not oppose your priority, mobilize, etc.)
  - ✓ **Targets** are specific policymakers who must act in order for you to achieve your goals (Example: House budget chair).
  - ✓ **Audiences** are specific groups of people who influence your targets and can help you achieve your goals (Example: Parents of children under three accessing child care).

As you are developing your list of targets and audiences, we recommend considering how you will engage bipartisan, bicameral, and gubernatorial support. Who do you need to move this priority?

- **Key Messages:** Your key messages are the topline take-aways that frame and explain your priority. Having clearly identified key messages that are shared across your partners helps to build consistency and cohesion in your communications and actions. These should be easy to understand, compelling, and take into account the different interests of your targets and audiences.
- **Partners and Allies:** Your partners and allies are who you will work with to achieve the goals of your advocacy and communications plan.
  - ✓ **Core partners** are the owners and implementors of this advocacy and communications plan.
  - ✓ **Allies** are organizations or coalitions with aligned interests to yours who support your policy priority.
  - ✓ **Potential partners and allies** are organizations or coalitions with aligned interests to yours to which you plan to conduct outreach.
- **Strategies and Tactics:** Your strategies and tactics are how you will reach your identified targets and audiences to move them to action to advance your advocacy goals. These will be most specific for your short-term goals. To the extent possible, identify who from your coalition will be involved in each.
  - ✓ **Strategies** are the categories of action that can be employed to advance your advocacy goals.
    - Example: earned media and op-eds, organic and paid social media, email mobilization, events
  - ✓ **Tactics** are the specific actions you will take to execute your strategies.
    - Example: pitching to an editorial board, organizing a day of action, hosting a Twitter town hall

The context of the COVID-19 pandemic means that many advocacy activities are currently taking place in a digital format, we encourage you to think creatively about how traditional strategies and tactics can be adapted to the digital context. We also recommend thinking through the strengths and capacities your coalition members bring to the table. Do your strategies and tactics leverage these?

- **Timeline of Activities:** Your timeline outlines when you will implement your plan activities. This should extend at least through your state's current/upcoming legislative session. Factors to consider in developing your timeline include: elections, legislative calendars, timelines for state budget development, and availability/capacity of advocacy partners.
- **Measuring Progress:** Identify metrics relevant to your advocacy and communications plan and how you will track them to assess progress toward your identified goals. This will support you in evaluating the effectiveness of your activities and thinking through what you might want to change as your move forward.

## Updates

Objectives change fast in advocacy. Your plan should be most specific regarding your short-term goals. Consider revisiting with your coalition every few months to update short-term goals and assess whether your mid-term and long-term goals need to be adjusted. Updating your plan regularly gives you the opportunity to reflect on the effectiveness of your activities and think strategically about what you want to keep doing and what you may want to do differently.