

Sharing Personal Stories to Achieve Your Advocacy Goals

STEP 1: DEFINE YOUR MISSION

Before you start finding people to tell their personal stories, you need to clearly define your advocacy mission. What do you hope to accomplish? What is the mission that is at the center of your advocacy goal? Is it your mission to advocate for subsidized guardianship, more comprehensive post-adoption services, etc?

Advocacy efforts are rarely accomplished single-handedly. You need to take the time to define your mission so that others will have a clear understanding of what you want to do and whether they share your mission and want to help you achieve your goal. The most successful advocacy campaigns are achieved by carefully building a coalition of like-minded people who are willing to work together to bring about change. To effectively solicit the help of others, you need to be clear about your mission and your goals. In fact, it will be most helpful if you can define your mission in a single sentence and state your goals in single sentences.

When trying to engage state or federal legislators, you need to be able to capture their attention quickly. Your message needs to be clear and concise, like a sound byte. Once you have captured their attention, you can provide more comprehensive information to support your cause.

Make sure your mission is stated from the child's point of view. Most people can agree that we, as a society, need to take care of vulnerable children. Therefore a mission described in terms of the needs of children will likely attract more groups to join your cause. The two missions below want the same outcome, but the first example is more likely to draw more supporters.

Child Centered Mission	Adult Centered Mission
Our mission is to ensure that children adopted from foster care are provided with adequate mental health services and coverage to help them heal from past abuse and neglect.	Our mission is to ensure that adoptive parents are given more money and better mental health services for the children they have adopted from foster care.

Our Mission is:

STEP 2: STATE YOUR GOALS

Once you know your mission, you will need to be able to state your advocacy goals clearly and simply.

Our Goals are:

STEP 3: OUTLINE A STRATEGY FOR ACHIEVING YOUR GOALS

Once you know what your goals are, outline the steps to take to achieve them.

Our strategy for achieving our goals:

STEP 4: MAKE A LIST OF PROSPECTIVE COALITION PARTNERS

Make a list of the people you need to contact to develop relationships with to build your coalition. You may add or delete names to this list as you learn more about how to reach your goals.

Prospective coalition partners:

STEP 5: MEET WITH PROSPECTIVE PARTNERS TO FORM A COALITION TO SUPPORT YOUR MISSION AND GOALS

Set up a meeting with prospective coalition partners. Develop a plan for building a coalition. You will not be able to avoid turf issues and should proactively plan for how to openly talk about them as well as how to break down barriers that might keep people from joining or working effectively with the coalition.

To keep people focused on the mission, some groups have found it helpful to have the people attending the first meeting to bring a picture of a child from the system and set the picture in the middle of the meeting table to remind everyone the focus of the mission. Individual and organizational egos need to be secondary to the advocacy mission.

Try to determine what each partners' area of expertise is and determine how you might share the work. Areas of expertise may overlap and you may need to decide who will take the lead on a given tasks and how to work together.

Coalition Partners	Contact Information	Areas of Expertise

STEP 6: DEVELOP A COMPREHENSIVE STRATEGIC PLAN WITH YOUR COALITION

STEP 7: DECIDE HOW YOU WILL USE PERSONAL STORIES TO ACHIEVE YOUR MISSION AND GOALS

Answer the who, what, when, where, how, and why questions for how you will use personal stories to help you achieve your mission. (See handout: "Tips for How to Use Personal Stories for Advocacy Work")

STEP 8: DEFINE THE ROLES OF EACH COALITION MEMBER AND ASSIGN TASKS:

Keeping your central mission in mind and respecting the integrity of each organization, you will want to efficiently divide the advocacy work based on each coalition partner's expertise, skills, connections to other key players and advocates.

Advocacy Role	Assigned tasks

STEP 9: FIND PEOPLE WHO CAN TELL PERSONAL STORIES THAT WILL HELP CONVEY YOUR MISSION'S MESSAGE

Decide the parameters for the type and range of stories that can help you achieve your mission. Use your connections with coalition members to find people with personal stories that illustrate the need for others to take on your mission and help you achieve your goals. Carefully interview panelists, write a single page version of the panelist's story, help prepare each panelist to speak at a public event, and support the panelist before, during, and after your public meeting. (See separate handout for "Tips for How to Use Personal Stories for Advocacy Work")

Type of speaker	Advocacy message

LIST OF PROSPECTIVE SPEAKERS

Speaker	Contact Information	Type of Story

STEP 10: FIND DOCUMENTED CHILD WELFARE FACTS TO SUPPORT THE SPEAKERS' STORIES, YOUR AND YOUR ADVOCACY GOALS

(See separate handouts for how to find child welfare facts to support your mission and goals.)

Facts needed	Types of messages the fact supports

STEP 11: FOLLOW UP WITH YOUR COALITION MEMBERS, SPEAKERS, LEGISLATORS, AND OTHER ADVOCATES

You will need to constantly reinforce, thank, and support the efforts of everyone on your team. Remember the people who tell their stories are sharing very personal information and often talking about topics that are difficult to discuss. They are risking a lot to help you achieve your goals. Your advocacy efforts would not be what they are without the stories and the storytellers. You need to honor and support them. When legislators listen to you and respond to your advocacy message, you need to be ready to follow up with them—provide facts, more in-depth information, or schedule another visit with them.

Follow up activities	Timeline

STEP 12: CONTINUE TO REEVALUATE YOUR STRATEGIES AND CHANGE YOUR COURSE IF YOU FIND A BETTER WAY TO REACH YOUR GOALS

Your mission should be your constant guide, but your strategies and goals can change as others respond to your efforts and you learn the most efficient and effective way to accomplish the goals to achieve your mission.

New strategy	Goal	Adjusted deadline