



MINNESOTA
COUNCIL OF
NONPROFITS



**BUILDING A GRASSROOTS
STRATEGY**

Wednesday, August 28



PUBLIC POLICY AT THE MINNESOTA COUNCIL OF NONPROFITS

- We support individual nonprofits and Minnesota's nonprofit sector to be their own voice in the public policy process
- We provide training on advocacy and lobbying, serve as a resource to policymakers on the nonprofit sector, and advocate on issues that impact all nonprofits, such as incentives to charitable giving, nonprofit tax exemptions, lobbying rights and election activity rights

WHY BUILD A GRASSROOTS STRATEGY?

- People are our greatest asset
- The community knows what will make their lives better
- Policy-makers respond to people who are organized
- A well-planned strategy helps you achieve your goals

A BIT ABOUT ME...

- Dana Montgomery, Senior Project Manager, Grassroots Solutions (GRS)
- Have been at GRS almost eight years, prior to, worked in nonprofit sector
- GRS is founded on idea that “People Matter”; Focus on getting people involved in issues clients care about
- Advise nonprofits, associations, government entities, and foundations on:
 - Engagement, advocacy, and organizing efforts
 - Strategic and effective planning
 - GRS also does electoral/campaign work, evaluation

TODAY'S OBJECTIVES

- Learn importance of, and differences between, goals, strategies and tactics
- Understand the value of, and how to, think and plan more strategically in advocacy or engagement work
- Hear tips for avoiding common pitfalls, staying on track over time
- Aimed at appealing to a broad audience; High level overview of ideas, concepts

A COUPLE OF DEFINITIONS...

- *Grassroots*: “Ground up” approach to organizing. Engaging everyday people, not political professionals, in issues that impact them and their community
- *Organizing*: Building power over time by recruiting, educating, engaging, and preparing supporters
- *Advocacy*: Encouraging people to take action together, in support of an issue or cause



ASSETS AND CHALLENGES

NONPROFIT GRASSROOTS ASSETS

- Compelling issues that often resonate with public
- Deep knowledge of issues and impact
- (Often) Capacity to leverage in the form of members, volunteers, and/or partners
- Personal stories from those directly affected
- History of work to learn from

NONPROFIT ADVOCACY CHALLENGES

- Limited Resources
- Taking on too, too, too much
 - Better to do a few things well than many things poorly
- Focusing exclusively on a set of activities that are not tied to a common goal
- Focusing on activities that don't help to achieve goals

HOW TO MITIGATE CHALLENGES AND LEVERAGE RESOURCES FOR SUCCESS...

- Understanding, and then determining, clear goals, strategies and tactics is first step in creating a clear course of action
- Building a plan that lays out how to accomplish goals and tasks helps organization:
 - Leverage unique assets (skills, history, stories for success) based on budget and resources.
 - Remain realistic and focused over time.



**CREATING A GRASSROOTS
STRATEGY**

UNDERSTANDING THE DISTINCTIONS

- *Goal*: The outcome. What you want to achieve or accomplish within a certain timeframe
 - Should be measurable, realistic, and doable
 - Beware of conflating aspirational/mission statements and goals: “We want to eliminate hunger”
 - Focus on attainable goals that build towards achieving that end (advancing X hunger policy, creating a food shelf in our local community)

DISTINCTIONS, CONT'D

- *Strategies*: Broad approaches you will take to accomplish goal
 - “Create public awareness around need for food shelf” or if policy related: “Educate elected officials about hunger issues in our community.”
- *Tactics*: The tools and activities that you will use to drive strategies and ultimately achieve goals
 - “Hold teletown hall inviting members in community to engage in conversation about hunger increase in community” or if policy related: “ID and recruit X people in network to have conversations with their elected official.”

TIPS...

- Learn about the landscape – how ripe are people, or if applicable, policy makers for the change you'd like to see happen?
 - Do you need to do a lot of education before you will be able to successfully implement an initiative, for example?
 - Knowing the grassroots and/or advocacy landscape can help you set realistic goals
- Target – geographically, by district, etc.
 - Cannot engage, organize or mobilize with equal intensity in all places
 - Maximizes resources

TIPS, CONT'D...

- Prioritize – what activities will be most impactful
 - Select a few activities that will give you the greatest return on investment
 - Don't get distracted by bright and shiny tactics that look good, but have little impact overall (i.e. spending all of your advocacy dollars on a billboard advertisement)
- Leverage partners – team up with other organizations doing likeminded work and determine how to compliment, not duplicate efforts



**USE PLANNING TO GET ON THE
RIGHT TRACK**

WHY PLAN?

- To make sure goals, strategies, tactics are *actually* realistic and attainable
- To create benchmarks for success
- To keep you on track
- To create accountability

WHAT GOES INTO A GOOD PLAN?

- Numbers – The next layer of details that will hold you accountable to reaching your goals
 - i.e. We want to engage X community members in a conversation about housing issues; we want to focus on connecting with X number of decision-makers on this issue; we need to recruit X community members willing to meet with their decision-maker in order to reach our goal of X conversations with them.
- Resources – The number and type of staff, volunteers, interns, partners that can help get the work done; the internal or external technology at your access, etc.

GOOD PLAN, CONT'D

- Defining roles – Who is doing what
- Timeline – Working backwards from your goal. What has to be in place and when in order for you to execute strategies and tactics within your timeframe.
- Benchmarks – How you will measure success along the way.
 - i.e. We want 50% of conversations with community members complete by X time.

GOOD PLAN, CONT'D

- High degree of internal, and if applicable, external coordination
 - For example, if working on a policy effort, making sure the communications, grassroots, and lobbying elements are integrated.
- Budget, budget, budget – know how much money you have to work with.

STAYING ON TRACK

- Look at plan as living and breathing document that needs to be updated and adjusted throughout effort – not a rule book
- Be Nimble - Remember that as political, grassroots, or other circumstances change, goals, strategies or tactics may need adjustment
- Don't be afraid to try new things
- Constantly ask yourself: “Will this activity help us to achieve our goal”
 - Just because it sounds cool, doesn't mean it's effective

STAYING ON TRACK

- Redefine success – a “win” can mean many things.
 - If you know year one is about planning and creating buy-in (as opposed to obtaining “victory,” whatever that may be) creating “wins” that reflect that will keep people engaged, build momentum.
- Be easy on yourself – this stuff is hard

FOR ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS

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