Policy Practice Requires

Step 1: Assessment

Assessment is the first step in the policy advocacy process. It requires that the policy advocate clearly identifies the nature of the problem, its history, how problem has been addressed in the past, how others have addressed the problem or a similar issue, and their successes. Based on this assessment, the policy advocate should state their recommendations to address the problem. This assessment step also requires a solid analysis or synthesis of what key authorities have to say about the issue. Lastly, it is important when engaging in advocacy efforts, that the policy advocate is aware of the positions of opponents.

- How many people are affected by the problem or issue under consideration?
- What are they like? (age, demographics, race)
- How long as this problem or issue been present?
- What is the history? Have there been previous efforts to address the problem? How well did they work?
- How do other jurisdictions deal with this issue? What kind of success have they had?
- What are your recommendations or proposals to address the problem? Is there is evidence that they will work?
- What do key authorities say about the issue? Who are the potential allies and opponents?

(Barusch, 2012. p. 57, as cited in Sullivan, n.d.)

Step 2: Coalition Building

Coalitions broaden the base of support for an issue (Schneider & Lester, 2001, p. 244). Coalition Building is a second step in the policy advocacy process and it involves the four elements noted on the slide. Coalition building involves the solicitation and inclusion of allies to moving forward the policy advocate’s work. Two examples of coalitions are provided below, the Coalition on Human Needs and the Indiana Coalition for Human Services. On their respective websites, the reader is able to learn more about the focus and activities of each coalition.

1. Promote united action to change policy – coalitions are action oriented.
2. Provide sharing and transfer of Information to relevant parties.
3. Provide mutual support and reciprocity for long term sustainable change.
4. Coalitions can be in place for short term or long term efforts.

Here are two examples of a coalition.
Example 1: Coalition on Human Needs

Started in 1981 and today it “promotes adequate funding for human needs programs, progressive tax policies and other federal measures to address the needs of low-income and other vulnerable populations.” (www.chn.org, History of CHN).

Example 2: Indiana Coalition for Human Services

“ICHS is a nonpartisan coalition, of over 25 organizations, that educates decision makers and the community on fact-based human service policy which emphasizes quality outcomes for Hoosiers, and ultimately the State of Indiana.” (Indiana Coalition for Human Services. http://ichsonline.org/)

Step 3: Advocacy

Advocacy is the third step in the policy practice process. While there are some other forms of advocacy, the three forms represented on this slide represent three types of advocacy in which social workers are most to be engaged. Definitions of all three types are noted here.

Cause Advocacy

“Promoting changes in policies and practices affecting all persons in a certain group or class” (Schneider & Lester, 2001, p. 196).

Client Advocacy

“Seeks to protect, enforce and ensure clients’ rights, entitlements, resources, services and benefits” (Schneider & Lester, 2001, p. 152).

Legislative Advocacy

Legislative advocacy is representation of a client group, often in partnership with the client group, to present issues and concerns to elected representatives, in order to promote legislative change or advocate to bring attention to a specific issue or social problem which can be addressed by legislative action (Schneider & Lester, 2001).

An interesting point made by Schneider and Lester in their book titled “Social Work Advocacy” is that “legislative advocacy is never over.” Legislative advocacy is not a one shot action. A bill
may be passed on an important issue, but there may be flaws in the legislation – or unintended outcomes - that require additional advocacy and additional legislative action.

Step 4: Empowerment

Empowering others is of central importance to advocacy work. Ultimately, advocacy efforts should result in empowerment for clients, client groups or simply groups of people impacted by an issue.

Means that …

“The advocacy process involves direct action by clients (and/or their representatives) to resolve their problems or to fulfill their desires” (Moxley & Freddolino, 1994).

“Empowerment occurs when clients (and/or their representatives) successfully confront and overcome the issues or barriers preventing them from achieving what they want for themselves (Moxley & Freddolino, 1990).

“Without genuine empowerment, participation can quickly become a token exercise or even a means of maintaining power relations; and without meaningful participation, empowerment can remain an empty, unfulfilled promise” (Cornwall and Brock 2005, as cited in Pettit, 2012). (Retrieved from: http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/egms/docs/2012/JethroPettit.pdf).