First 5
Advocacy Toolkit

This publication was prepared for:
The First 5 Association of California

by

The Center for Health Improvement

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About the First 5 Association of California
The First 5 Association of California works to improve the lives of California's youngest children and their families through an effective, coordinated, and inclusive implementation of the California Children and Families Act at the local and state levels. The Association is a nonprofit membership organization comprised of county children and families commissions throughout the state, along with other groups that are also dedicated to making a difference in the lives of children and families.

About the Center for Health Improvement
The Center for Health Improvement (CHI) is an independent, nonprofit health policy center dedicated to improving population health and encouraging healthy behaviors. CHI uses evidence-based research as the basis for policy innovation and implementation. Since its inception in 1995, CHI has partnered with all levels of government, advocacy organizations and community associations, philanthropic foundations, and educators.

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About the Toolkit
The First 5 Advocacy Toolkit (toolkit) has been developed to assist county children and families commissions as leaders in advocating for children’s issues. The toolkit is divided into two main sections—Advocacy 101 for those just entering the field of policy and Advocacy 401 for those who have done some advocacy but want to expand their skill set. The toolkit provides helpful tips and tools related to several advocacy topics, such as:

- The Policy Process
- Building Coalitions
- Communicating with Policymakers
- Conflict Resolution and Consensus Building
- Media Advocacy

Each section of the toolkit serves as a “mini primer” on the topic with references to helpful samples and tools listed in the appendices. Users may find it helpful to skip directly to sections in which they are particularly interested. The toolkit and the attachments listed in the appendices are available online at the following websites: http://www.ccafa.org and http://www.chipolicy.org

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Introduction

Policy decisions touch the lives of children and their families every day. From regulating clean air to increasing or limiting access to health care services, public policies can help or hinder our children’s health and well-being. Policy advocacy is critical to ensuring that the public policies set in our cities, counties, and state positively impact our youngest children and that policies that would harm our children are not enacted.

What is Public Policy?
Public policy can be defined as a system of laws, regulatory measures, courses of action (and inaction), and funding priorities concerning a given topic chosen and promoted by public authorities. Public policies are established by organizations and political units, such as boards of supervisors, city councils, municipal utility districts, and the state legislature. They can be documented and enacted through a local ordinance, statute (law), regulation, executive order, or court ruling.

Lobbying and Advocacy: What’s the Difference?
While there are complex legal definitions of lobbying and advocacy, the key difference is that lobbying entails support or opposition to specific legislation at the federal, state, or local level, while advocacy does not specify a legislative proposal. The following chart provides some examples of lobbying and advocacy to illustrate the difference.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lobbying</th>
<th>Advocacy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Writing to your elected official to ask him/her to vote in favor of a specific bill.</td>
<td>Inviting elected officials to participate in a community forum to discuss barriers to prenatal care in the county.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asking members of your organization or the general public to contact elected officials to vote in favor of a specific bill.</td>
<td>Developing a publication that explains the problem of poor oral health in young children and developing general recommendations for policymakers, communities, and schools.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicating your position supporting or opposing a proposed ballot initiative to a member of the general public.</td>
<td>Encouraging the community to call your organization for more information about the benefits of quality early care and education programs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaging a lobbyist, public relations firm, or other individual or organization to undertake the activities listed above in support of a specific bill on your behalf.</td>
<td>Inviting your elected official to visit your school readiness program.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
All organizations can advocate, and depending on the type of organization (e.g., non-profit, public), some monies may be used for lobbying purposes. For more information on lobbying rules and regulations, see Attachment 1 in the Tools Appendix.

**A First 5 Opportunity**

The Institute of Medicine identifies policy development as a core function of improving population health. Therefore, leaders are needed to ensure that important issues related to children’s health and well-being are brought to policymakers’ attention. As experts on what our youngest children need to be healthy and ready for school, Commissioners and Commission staff are perhaps the most important advocates for children 0-5. On some issues that affect children, there are established coalitions that Commissions can join to conduct advocacy efforts (e.g., tobacco control), and in other cases Commissions will be the trailblazers (e.g., universal preschool). Regardless of the issue, Commissions have the opportunity to make a significant lasting impact in their communities, in the state, and even in the nation by making children’s issues a priority to policymakers.

For information on First 5 Association advocacy efforts, see Attachment 2 in the Tools Appendix.

**Commissioners Begin Advocacy Discussions**

Commissioners from around the state have begun productive discussions on the “why” and “how” of developing a statewide advocacy network. While still in the early discussion stages, Commissioners have shared many ideas about how to leverage Commissioner resources to speak on behalf of young children throughout the state. The potential power of a statewide advocacy network of Commissioners is clear. By imparting a similar message and speaking in a consistent voice to policymakers around the state, Commissions can raise the visibility of issues and have a significant impact on policy change. For more information about these ongoing efforts, contact Sherry Novick, Association Executive Director, at (510) 526-9999 or sherry@ccaфа.org.

**Engaging Communities in Advocacy**

Involving community groups in advocacy is critical to ensuring that you have defined the advocacy issue appropriately. Community-based organizations, parents, grandparents, and other community members know best what they need. Commissions are well-positioned to engage community groups in advocacy for a variety of reasons, including their extensive grantee networks. Moreover, Commissions can use their clout to help ensure that socially and geographically isolated communities have an advocacy voice. See pp. 28-29 of this toolkit for more on this topic. For resources on civic engagement, including a video toolkit and a promising practices guidebook, go to the First 5 Association website at www.ccaфа.org.

“Never doubt that a small committed group of people can change the world. Indeed that is all that ever has.”

-Margaret Mead
Advocacy 101: Basics of Advocacy

Choosing an Advocacy Issue
Most people who volunteer and advocate for different causes are deeply driven by their convictions. In some cases, we work to engage, organize, and empower individuals to advocate for themselves or their children. In other cases, we advocate for a population that cannot advocate for itself. This is certainly the case when it comes to advocating for children. As First 5 Commissioners and staff, you have already identified the population for which you want to advocate. Though your population is targeted, there are many concerns that fall under the umbrella of children’s health and well-being that can be adopted as advocacy issues. From advocating for universal preschool and access to health insurance to ensuring that child care workers are paid a living wage, the list of children’s advocacy issues can be quite long. How do you choose an issue or set of issues for focus?

Criteria for Choosing an Issue
While the specific criteria that you use to select an advocacy issue may vary slightly by Commission, the criteria below can be used as a guide. You should always ensure, of course, that your advocacy issue aligns with the vision, mission, and goals of your Commission.

- **Addresses a perceived threat.** Does the issue present a threat to the health and well-being of children 0-5 and their families?
- **Proposes a true benefit.** Do you have a solution in mind based on promising or best practices? Will working on this issue result in improvements in the lives of families with children 0-5?
- **Presents a unique opportunity to contribute.** Does the Commission have unique information to contribute to the debate on this issue?
- **Allows for civic/community engagement.** Does the issue present an opportunity for your Commission to involve people who are directly affected by the problem, thereby building their capacity and ability to make changes in their own communities?
- **Provides an opportunity for leadership.** Does the issue present an opportunity for your Commission to establish a leadership position that enhances its role in the community? Can the Commission fill a needed role as a facilitator, public educator, and/or advocate?
• **Is realistic.** Can the advocacy goal be realistically achieved?

• **Is simple.** Are the problem and solution clear and easy to understand and explain?

• **Is backed by public opinion.** Does the issue resonate with the public?

In addition to considering these criteria, you might also want to select an issue in which you already have a relationship with a key decision maker who will have influence over the policy process you are seeking to influence (e.g., a county supervisor, mayor, or state legislator). See p. 11 for related ideas on crafting your message.

**Developing an Advocacy Action Plan**

It is important to complete a plan before starting advocacy activities. Your action plan should include specific short- and long-term goals, objectives, strategies, and tactics, with clear timeframes and areas of responsibility. Goals and objectives, strategies and tactics all are concepts we frequently use and confuse in planning. Often we end up with a row of "dust-catchers" on our bookshelves instead of useful action plans on our daily agendas. Solid planning should provide a road map for wherever your Commission and its partners want to go. An agreed upon plan of action is a source of motivation, providing a basis for shared decision-making. Let’s take a step back to clarify the terms:

• **Goals** are what you are trying to achieve with your efforts. Goals delineate endpoints for your activities. They can be short-, medium- or long-range. For example, if your issue is advocating for increasing wages for child care workers, your goal might be that a majority of your city’s child care centers will support a wage increase for their staff.

• **Objectives** are sub-goals or signposts along the way to your goal(s). They are measurable, achievable, relevant to your mission, goal and time-frame. An objective for the above goal might be that by June 30 of next year, 50% of your city’s 60 child care centers will pay their caregivers a living wage of $X/hour.

• **Strategies** define how you will reach your goal and objectives. To reach the prior objective, for example, your organization’s strategy might be to increase outreach and education on the policy to area child care centers.

• **Tactics** are the short-term implementation actions to make a strategy work. Tactical details, such as training staff on the issue; updating your contacts database to ensure you have accurate contact information for the child care centers; and developing written advocacy materials are the realistic checkpoints that will make or break your outreach and education strategy.

Once you’ve selected an issue, develop your action plan using the guidelines in Attachment 3 of the Tools Appendix. A sample action plan chart is included.
Case Study #1: First 5 Contra Costa Uses Policy Platform for Advocacy Efforts

Commissions may choose to develop their policy platforms under a broad issue umbrella. That is certainly illustrated by First 5 Contra Costa’s policy platform, which serves as a public statement of the Commission’s positions on selected policy issues. The platform’s issue statements are fairly general and span a number of broad categories, including child health, family functioning, child development, and systems for families. See Attachment 1 of the Samples Appendix for a copy of the policy platform. The Commission’s platform has successfully provided the Executive Director with the ability to conduct advocacy on specific issues and respond quickly to advocacy opportunities without continually seeking Commission approval. Developing the policy platform was not easy, however. The first step involved defining the overall role of the Commission in the community.

Commission as Advocate and Catalyst for Systems Change
During the Commission’s early strategic planning sessions, Commissioners realized that there were problems that they could solve with funding, but there were also many problems that they could not solve with funding. Broad issues such as universal health access and affordable, accessible, quality child care for all children were important to families but were not issues that could be addressed by the Commission alone. At the same time, the Commission recognized that they had just enough money to serve as a change agent to making a lasting impact on the community by advocating for important policy changes related to children. This dual role—funder and advocate—was embraced by the Commission and reflected in the Commission’s strategic plan, which included a policy development and advocacy strategy. Later, the Commission solidified its vision by adopting a role statement, which positions the Commission as a leader and partner in creating systems change for very young children and their families based on best and promising practices. The Commission fulfills this role by being a funder, facilitator, advocate, and public educator. See Attachment 2 of the Samples Appendix for a copy of the role statement. At one point budgetary concerns caused the Commission to question whether or not to include advocacy and policy issues in its role statement. However, the public weighed in during a Commission retreat and voiced concern that no other organization would fill this advocacy role. This public input was critical in the Commission’s decision to remain active in advocacy and policy-level “systems change” projects.

Putting the Platform Together
After the role statement was adopted, the Commission established a policy advocacy committee consisting of a small group of Commissioners that drafted a purpose statement and began development of advocacy issue areas and a priority table. The Commission then voted on and approved the purpose statement, issue areas, and priority areas—documents that later served to focus the policy platform. (Due to the budget crisis, baseline statements were also created as a framework for reviewing federal, state, and local budget actions.) See Attachments 3-5 of the Samples Appendix for copies of the advocacy committee purpose statement, priority table, and baseline statements. Once the committee had developed a draft of the policy platform, stakeholders were invited to attend a meeting to review the document. Though there were many stakeholders who felt that the platform was not specific enough, the Commission urged them to think more broadly to allow the Executive Director more latitude in her advocacy work. After two additional drafts, the policy committee sought and gained Commission approval of the document. Brenda Blasingame, Executive Director of the Commission, emphasizes the importance of engaging Commissioners in a conscious, intentional discussion about whether it sees its role as a policy advocacy force in the community. She also recognizes the lasting promise of First 5 as a change agent. Noting a remark made to her by a colleague early in her tenure with the Commission, she says, “The beauty of Prop. 10 is the opportunity to make some change at a systems level that could possibly stick long after Prop. 10 is gone.”

For more information on First 5 Contra Costa’s policy platform, contact Brenda Blasingame, Executive Director, at (925) 335-9991.
About Coalitions

Single agencies or advocates working in isolation are often less effective than groups of advocates in changing public policies. If you haven’t yet, you may want to consider building a coalition. As a cross-cutting organization, Commissions are in a unique position to convene diverse groups interested in an issue. Coalitions can start small, comprised of the Commission and one or two agencies that may benefit from acting together. Choose partners carefully to ensure that they are committed to your cause and work well with other participating agencies. Coalitions have many benefits, including:

- Participating organizations and agencies can pool their resources.
- Member organizations can become involved in broader issues.
- Results often go beyond that which could be achieved by any one organization.
- Community-wide efforts can be launched.
- More effective and efficient use of resources and services can be planned (e.g., duplication of service delivery can be eliminated).
- Communication, cooperation, and idea generation can be promoted.
- A broader, more stable constituency base can be built for an issue.

- A more diverse, community-based approach to the problem can be generated.
- The group, working in concert, can generate more political sway than as single agencies.

Coalitions can also have their drawbacks. Allocating staff resources to manage the coalition can be expensive if coalition members are not willing to share assignments and responsibilities. In addition, decision-making may take longer, and advocacy positions adopted by the coalition may be weakened in order to satisfy all members. Despite these disadvantages coalitions can often be the best way to address problems faced by communities.

Case Study #2: Coalition Efforts “Pay Off”

The First 5 San Luis Obispo Children and Families Commission, along with 50 local organizations, successfully advocated to direct part of their county’s Master Settlement Agreement dollars to fund health care services in their community rather than non-health related services. A coalition of local organizations cosigned a letter to the San Luis Obispo County Board of Supervisors with recommendations based on county-specific data. The coalition was successful largely due to the broad-based coalition of support and key community stakeholders who joined together to advocate for their issue. For a copy of the coalition letter, see Attachment 6 in the Samples Appendix.
Before Forming a Coalition
Before forming a coalition, ensure that you have clarified the advocacy “issue” to yourself by asking the following questions:

- Can you easily articulate the problem you hope to solve through your advocacy efforts?
- Why is this a problem in your community?
- Are there organizations or individuals who might argue an opposing view? If so, have you thought about how you would counter their arguments?
- If your efforts were successful, how would the community benefit? Community-based organizations will be more likely to consider working with you if solving a problem provides a direct benefit or if inaction causes harm.

Finally, before contacting potential partners, find out if there are other members of your community who are already working on the issue. If a coalition already exists and you share similar goals, you may simply decide to join their efforts. Connecting with other organizations that are working on similar issues is important so that policymakers—and the public—hear a unified message. Failing to coordinate can confuse people and hinder your efforts. For example, when two groups that have not communicated place similar issues on the same ballot, voters tend to vote “no” on both issues due to their confusion about the difference between the two initiatives.

If you decide to move ahead with a new coalition, see p. 22 for information on how to build a coalition.

Stating Your Case
Data can play a critical role in explaining why an issue is important and in making the case for policy change. They can be used to describe the problem faced by your community, and help make your solution to the problem convincing to others. Typically, the most persuasive uses of data combine both quantitative and qualitative elements. (For a description of the differences between quantitative and qualitative data, see Attachment 4 in the Tools Appendix.) Data represent the raw numbers and statistics gleaned from research, reports, and surveys. When data are analyzed and presented in a meaningful way they become information.

Wherever possible, data should be incorporated into all of your communications—when meeting with legislators, city council members and other elected officials, talking with the media, preparing written material, testifying at a public meeting, or writing letters to policymakers. There are two basic rules to remember when using data for policy advocacy:

- Rule #1: You will depend upon data for nearly all aspects of policy advocacy work.
- Rule #2: Data by itself, and especially in its raw form, are seldom sufficient to sway anyone to your side.

Data don’t speak for themselves—ultimately their usefulness is determined by the credibility of the source, and how you interpret and report the data. Presentation is a key element of using data to communicate a clear and meaningful message. While you should strive to incorporate data creatively into graphic form, numbers alone aren’t sufficient to convince an audience of an issue’s importance. A compelling written analysis must be coupled with your data to effectively make your case; this can be accomplished by using a technique called “social math.” Social math is a practice aimed at making data more interesting, compelling and understandable. Consider the following statements:
A. It is estimated that 947 million packs of cigarettes worth $1.26 billion are sold illegally to children under 18 every year. These products generate $221 million in profits for the tobacco industry. This is only a small part of the profits. In 1997 the four major American tobacco companies, Philip Morris, RJ Reynolds, Brown & Williamson, and Lorillard reported profits of $7.8 billion. Overall, the tobacco industry spends about $5 billion of their profits per year promoting smoking in the U.S.

B. The tobacco industry spends more money promoting smoking in a week than the entire federal government spends on preventing smoking in a year.

While statement A contains more specific data and information, statement B is more compelling because it is less cumbersome. When using data to deliver your message, be sure to carefully select the most relevant information. Keep it simple; an overwhelming amount of data may hurt rather than help your case by burying your main points. Also, try to put your numbers in some sort of context for policymakers. Statement B is clearer because it puts the numbers in perspective by comparing tobacco industry and government spending. For more information on social math, see Attachment 5 in the Tools Appendix. The next section provides further suggestions on how to present data in a way that gets policymakers’ attention.

**The Famous “One-Pager”: Developing Effective Fact Sheets**

How you present your data to policymakers is crucial in determining whether or not your message is received the way you intended. Everyone is busy and policymakers are no exception. Oftentimes, they do not have time to read through lengthy reports, no matter how well-written. A single sheet (can be double-sided) that highlights your position and top arguments is often more effective in getting your point across than longer documents. Commonly referred to as a “fact sheet” or “one-pager”, this document is a summary of a specific problem presented in a clear format. Preparing accurate fact sheets to inform policymakers will establish your credibility and enhance your organization’s advocacy role. Ideally, you should bring a fact sheet with you when you meet with policymakers. If you need to provide a more lengthy document, send it as a follow-up to the meeting when you thank the legislator for the visit. A fact sheet should define the problem succinctly, indicate the breadth of support for your policy idea, highlight any successful models, and include suggestions for policy changes, as well as references. While you may be tempted to include every last bit of data you’ve collected, avoid the “blizzard” strategy, as your main points might get lost. Rather, remember that clarity is critical. If your fact sheet is easy to read and understand, it helps make your case and reminds the recipient of your position after you have gone. See Attachment 7 in the Samples Appendix for sample fact sheets.

**Is My Fact Sheet Effective?**

An effective fact sheet:

- Summarizes the problem in one or two sentences
- Uses current data and supporting statistics
- Avoids “lying with statistics” or using misleading graphs
- Is written in simple language and is geared towards the audience it is meant to reach
- Includes district-specific data (if possible) and compares local data with state and national figures
- Includes the name, address, and telephone number of a contact person
- Uses headings to highlight the main messages you want to convey
- Is no more than one page in length (front and back)
- Includes a professional-looking chart or graph (i.e., bar chart, trend line graph, pie chart)
The Policy Process
There are three major arenas in which to influence policy at the state level—the budget process, the legislative process, and the regulatory process. The budget and legislative processes are described briefly below.

California Budget Process
Important policy changes often happen within the budget arena. Whether you fund or de-fund a program makes a huge difference in the types of services that are available for children and families. Below is a summary of the California state budget process timeline.

- **July-September**: State departments submit budget requests to the California Department of Finance.
- **October-January**: Governor sends proposed budget to the Legislature.
- **January-February**: Budget proposal introduced in Assembly and Senate as budget bills.
- **March-May**: In both Senate and Assembly budget committees, the budget bills are broken down and assigned by subject area to subcommittees; hearings are held; subcommittees vote on every line item.
- **May Revision**: The Governor releases changes to his/her budget proposal, which are based on the actual and projected changes to the state’s income and expenditures. The Legislature then holds separate budget hearings, after which the subcommittees vote on proposed changes and submit a report to the full committee.
- **Late May-June**: The budget committee in each house votes on budget bill; a conference committee resolves to reconcile any differences between Senate and Assembly versions of the budget; a single budget bill is forwarded and voted upon by each house.
- **June-July**: Governor receives the budget and has until July 1st to sign or veto the budget bill; after signing the budget, the bill becomes law. If the budget is not signed by July 1st, spending on many programs may be withheld, which may in turn impact services to children and families.

There are several ways to influence the budget process, including providing public testimony in subcommittee hearings where most of the changes to the budget bill are made. You can also communicate your concerns to your legislators by writing, calling, or visiting them. For more information on the budget process, including a graphic depiction of the steps above, see Attachments 6 and 7 in the Tools Appendix.

Legislative Process
Below is a simplified synopsis of the steps in the legislative process. For more detailed information, on the hearings that are held in each house, including graphics on how a bill becomes a law, see Attachments 8, 9, and 10 in the Tools Appendix.

1. An idea is generated, and a Senator or Assembly Member feels the idea is important enough to author a bill.
2. The bill is introduced in a first hearing (in the Senate if authored by a Senator/in the Assembly if authored by an Assembly Member).
3. If the bill requires an expenditure of funds, it may be heard in the Senate and Assembly Appropriations Committees as well as policy committees.
4. The author presents the bill in the appropriate policy committee. Testimony may be heard in support or opposition to the bill. The committee then votes on whether to pass the bill. At this point, the bill may be passed, passed with amendments, made into two-year bill, or killed.
5. If passed, the bill moves through the house of origin, is read again, discussed, and voted upon. To be passed, bills generally require 21 out of 40 votes in the Senate and 41 out of 80 votes in the Assembly. If the bill requires an appropriation, 27 votes are required to pass the bill in the Senate and 54 votes are required to pass the bill in the Assembly (in both cases a two-thirds majority).
6. Once passed on the floor of originating house, the bill moves to the other house and steps 2-5 are repeated.
7. If passed through the second house without amendments, the bill goes directly to the Governor. If amended by the second house, the bill moves to the house of origin for consensus.
If the house of origin does not agree with the proposed amendments, the bill is referred to the Conference Committee (comprised of both Senate and Assembly representatives). If a compromise is reached, the bill is voted upon again in both houses.

8. If both houses approve, the bill goes to the Governor who can sign or veto the bill.

Advocates can have influence in virtually all stages of this process. From idea generation to providing testimony in committee hearings, to sending letters to the Governor in support or opposition of a bill. Note, though, that advocating a position on a bill is considered lobbying, which may not be permitted by some organizations. For more on lobbying rules and restrictions, see Attachment 1 in the Tools Appendix.

### Legislative Resources

Your State Representatives:
http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/yourleg.html (enter zip code in box)

Legislative Calendar:
http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/legislative_calendar.html

Bill Information:
http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/bilinfo.html

Senate Committee Membership:
ftp://leginfo.public.ca.gov/pub/dailyfile/sen/senate_commitees

Assembly Committee Membership:
ftp://leginfo.public.ca.gov/pub/dailyfile/asm/assembly_committees

Schedule of Committee Hearings:
http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/todevnt.html

### Communicating with Policymakers

All you have to do to influence policymakers is to tell them what is needed, right? If only it were that easy! It is true that the most effective way to influence policy at any level or in any sector is through direct contact with policymakers—and continuity is key. Be aware that your credibility is established based upon your track record as well as the quality of your services.

You can optimize your credibility in several ways:

- **Maintain direct regular contact.** Communicating with policymakers on an ongoing basis to develop a credible relationship is preferable to limiting contact to those occasions when you desire their assistance before an important vote. If you make promises, be sure to follow through. Commissions who want to develop relationships with legislative staff begin with the District Office. Activities can include educational field trips for staff and legislators, inclusion in newsletter mailing lists and regular correspondence. For example, in one county, Commission staff have conducted successful stakeholders’ breakfasts with local legislators, funded agencies, and partners. In another county, Commission staff take newly elected legislators out to breakfast and educate them about the importance of quality early care and education.

- **Increase your visibility**. Your visibility as an issue expert is enhanced when you collaborate with other individuals and groups that are interested in similar or related issues. This often means investing the time to identify key allies and begin working with them on mutual issues.

- **Provide a clear and consistent image**. Your mission statement is an enduring statement of your Commission’s goals and purpose. It is developed, in part, to signal interested parties and policymakers about where your agency “fits” into the broader spectrum of community advocates and how they can work with you. Consistent information about your Commission and mission should be included in all communications with policymakers.

Establishing a communications plan is a good way to accomplish the strategies listed above. See pp. 31-32 for information on developing such a plan.
Who are the Policymakers?

Public policymakers are people who work at local, state, and federal levels of government. They establish the rights and standards for entire groups of people. There are several policymakers that Commissions can target for advocacy. Below are just a few:

- U.S. President
- Members of Congress
- Governor
- State Assembly Members
- State Senators
- Legislative Committee Chairs
- Mayors
- City Managers
- County Supervisors
- City Councilmembers
- School Board Members

Crafting the Message

Policymakers are extremely busy people and always have many advocacy groups vying for their attention. As a general rule, policymakers are most likely to listen and respond to you if your issue is:

- **Supported by their constituents.** This is mainly true for elected officials, whose jobs depend on getting and keeping votes. Be aware that elected officials are most influenced by their own constituents when they believe these groups represent important groups of voters. You can show them how voters in their jurisdiction care about the issue by using opinion poll data or organizing constituents to write letters or provide public testimony.

- **Supported by their campaign contributors.** Policymakers will often respond more quickly if you can work with one of their funders to relay the advocacy message for you.

All communications should follow some simple rules: use current data and simple language, summarize the problem in one or two sentences, describe how the problem affects local communities, limit correspondence to one page (front and back), and include a signature with up-to-date contact information.

- **Presented to them succinctly, using current data and simple language.** In written correspondence, be sure to summarize the problem in one or two sentences, describe how the problem affects local communities, limit correspondence to one page (front and back), and include a signature with up-to-date contact information.

- **Linked to them in a personal way.** If you can find a hook that gets a policymaker to understand the issue in a personal way, they will be much more likely to take ownership of the issue and support your efforts.

- **Related to pending legislation, ordinances, budgetary items.** Communications with policymakers tend to have maximum impact when they concern pending legislation or an issue of particular interest to a given policymaker. When policymakers have to make an imminent decision on an issue, they may be more likely to listen to your viewpoints.
Methods of Communication
Communication can take many forms, including telephone calls, faxes, letters, e-mails, fact sheets, public testimony, and face-to-face meetings with policymakers. But which method is best? Below is a table that lists the pros and cons of different types of communication methods.

In addition to these communications methods, you might consider presenting oral and/or written testimony in public hearings.

Above all, personal contact is most effective. For example, letters can have an impact as long as they are personalized. Generic letters are placed in a pile for staff to create generic responses. A personal letter or phone call followed by a visit is a good strategy. To meet with a legislator, simply call the legislator’s office and ask for the scheduler to set up an appointment. For a sample script for calling to set up an appointment, see Attachment 8 of the Samples Appendix.

### Communication Methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Pros</th>
<th>Cons</th>
<th>Bottom Line</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E-mails</td>
<td>• Inexpensive, fast, and easy to send</td>
<td>• Less personal</td>
<td>• Use sparingly; more formal communications are often better</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Will be ignored if unclear that constituent is sending</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letters</td>
<td>• Personal</td>
<td>• Postage expense</td>
<td>• Good vehicle as long as not generic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Congress not currently accepting due to poison scare</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone Calls</td>
<td>• Quick and easy</td>
<td>• May not reach legislator first time (but reaching staff can be just as good)</td>
<td>• Can be an excellent way to communicate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Personal</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• All have voicemail</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Personal Visits</td>
<td>• Personal, “face” time</td>
<td>• Difficult to schedule depending on legislative calendar</td>
<td>• An excellent way to make sure you are remembered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• May get bumped to 2nd tier staff</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Other Tips**

- **Develop a relationship with legislative staff.** Due to term limits, state legislators have a shortened tenure in office. Staff will often stay in the Capitol longer than legislators. When you identify staff who are invested in your issue, it is critical to build a relationship with them and track their location in the Capitol so that you can keep communicating with them if they change positions.

- **Make friends with community leaders and local policymakers.** Take every opportunity to work with community leaders and local officials so that you continue to be their source of information when they run for local and state office. Obtain a roster of elected officials and research the particular officials’ interests before your meeting.

- **Be a credible, stable source of information.** Because legislators do not stay in office as long as they used to, they are relying more than ever on advocates to inform them on the issues. Advocates who are armed with ideas on solutions to a problem, rather than just the problem itself, will be more likely to succeed.

- **Do your research on the policymaker.** Make sure to avoid lobbying a legislator on an issue on which they are already working or already support. If you ask them to take an action they have already taken, you may lose ground.

- **Use perspective (big picture, county level, and ground level).** When talking with policymakers and elected officials give them several views of the problem or issue you are working on. By incorporating a “mile-high” view, a countywide perspective, and a ground level look at the issue and how it affects constituents in their districts, you will help elected officials see the importance of your issue.

- **Create collateral.** Draft materials including pamphlets and one-pagers that you can leave behind. These “leave behinds” can supplement your personal visit and educate additional staff members that you might have missed. These materials could be a quarterly newsletter or program pamphlet that highlights efforts in the legislator’s district and encourages readers to view your website for more information.

- **Prop. 10 101.** Often the public (including elected officials) has trouble distinguishing between Prop. 10, First 5 Association of California, and First 5 California. Offer a pamphlet or document that quickly clarifies and brings them up to speed.
Case Study #3: First 5 Los Angeles Pursues the Politicians: Starting a Government Affairs Committee

With about 58 elected officials who have jurisdiction over LA County and are involved in decisions around funding and resources, First 5 LA identified a clear need for a governmental affairs committee to reach out and connect with local and state elected officials. "Informing regional elected officials of the Commission's work plays a critical role in raising awareness and securing funding for our cause," says Casey Beyer, Director of Government Affairs for First 5 LA.

How and why did First 5 LA develop a government affairs committee, and what were the ingredients to success? In August 2002, the government affairs department was established to take a more active role in public affairs and to increase the Commission’s visibility with LA County’s large state and congressional legislative delegations. First 5 LA also expanded its existing communications committee to include a government affairs focus. The symbiotic nature of communications and legislative advocacy eased the transition for committee members as they took on this new focus. Beyer noted that the combined committee was a natural outgrowth of two departments that had similar objectives (e.g., informing/educating different constituencies, developing and ensuring consistent First 5 messaging, building relationships, and conducting advocacy efforts).

But the Commission found that there were challenges inherent in creating a government affairs committee. The main challenge was connecting with all of the critical legislators. The primary goal was to establish and maintain relationships with policymakers and their staff, including school districts and local municipalities, which was formidable given the size of LA County. Another challenge was to maximize the skills of each committee member. The support and commitment of the Executive Director was crucial to keeping everyone’s roles and duties clearly defined.

The committee meets monthly to hear updates from First 5 LA staff on pertinent issues and related activities. The meetings also serve as an opportunity to set new goals on community and media outreach and further legislative actions linked to First 5 LA.

The committee created an action plan that included meetings and goal setting. According to Beyer, outreach to governmental offices should be the first priority. One-on-one meetings with elected officials and their staff allow First 5 LA to showcase the different programs that help children in LA County. First 5 LA also uses a monthly e-newsletter and a quarterly legislative meeting. (See Attachment 14 in the Samples Appendix for a sample of the newsletter.)

So far, their efforts are paying off. First 5 LA collaborated with First 5 California and the First 5 Association of California to help shape a successful First 5 advocacy presentation that prevented the Board of Equalization from making an inconsistent and unfair annual transfer from the First 5 trust funds to Proposition 99 programs. They have also increased participation in county events sponsored by local elected officials and kept legislators connected by publishing their monthly Legislative Update e-mail newsletter which reaches more than 400 legislators, their staffs, and other children advocates throughout California. The committee also benefits from highly committed Commissioners who attend meetings and actively engage elected officials.

Currently, the committee is working to increase levels of outreach to include all branches of government within LA County. The committee has also been ramping up efforts to promote their new First 5 LA Healthy Kids Initiative, the Master Plan for Preschool, and Partners for Families funding initiatives as part of the First 5 LA Strategic Plan for 2004-2009. For more information on First 5 LA’s government affairs committee, please contact Casey Beyer, Director of Government Affairs, at (213) 225-6433 or CBeyer@first5.org.
Evaluating Your Efforts
By evaluating your advocacy efforts you will have the opportunity to clearly see your progress, assess challenges, and improve your program’s overall impact. After all the effort invested in the advocacy campaign, why wouldn’t you want to see how successful you’ve been?

Why Should You Evaluate Your Advocacy Work?
Through evaluation you will have the opportunity to judge your own effectiveness and learn from your successes and mistakes. Evaluating your advocacy efforts will allow you to provide effectiveness information for funding reports and will provide effectiveness data that can be used to support a search for funding. By evaluating every step of the way, you can modify your approach if you discover any problems.

You will also be able to track the impact of your message—whether you’ve reached your intended audience and whether they’ve taken any action in response to your efforts. If you discover that your message lacks impact with its intended audience or does not reach them at all, you will know that you have to re-examine your message and delivery before you commit additional resources or replicate the project.

Evaluation also helps demonstrate to stakeholders that your advocacy work is cost-effective. If you are able to measure the impact of your message—dollars saved or made through policy changes—you can better justify the campaign’s value. Sometimes charting this type of change on a large-scale presents challenges. By focusing on the individuals or smaller groups positively impacted, stakeholders can still get a sense of the campaign’s worth.

Finally, by comprehensively evaluating the entire system you are attempting to modify with your campaign, you can note confounding influences beyond your control that may have inadvertently improved or diluted your advocacy impact.

Evaluation Methods Vary
The most basic and inexpensive evaluation method is a process evaluation. A process evaluation measures what is happening, to whom, how often, and for how much money. Qualitative data from a process evaluation can reveal the sentiment of a coalition or a legislator’s attitude towards your cause. Quantitative data is simply how many people are showing up at meetings, how many meetings are held, and how many legislators or key stakeholders attend such meetings.

An outcome evaluation assesses the impact of an effort or program, such as an advocacy program. Data gathered from an outcome evaluation will show whether the campaign is meeting stated intermediate goals. Outcome evaluation findings will address whether an organization’s policies have changed through the influence of your advocacy work.

Lastly, an impact evaluation takes a look at the far-reaching goals of an advocacy campaign. In an impact evaluation, the campaign’s effect on broad determinants of health, policy, and programming goals are usually examined. Due to the wide scope and reach of an impact evaluation, impact evaluations tend to be the most costly evaluation method. Impact evaluations may occur during the advocacy campaign, at the conclusion of the campaign, or even years later.

Evaluating to Increase Advocacy Impact
The process of policy advocacy builds benefits at each step.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Build awareness</th>
<th>Change policy</th>
<th>Impact people’s lives</th>
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Here’s a more detailed example. Ask yourself where in the chain you might meet challenges, and how you could evaluate your success in that area.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Awareness of issue increased</th>
<th>Public debate increased</th>
<th>Opinions changed</th>
<th>Policies changed</th>
<th>Policy changes implemented</th>
<th>Positive impact/change in people’s lives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Finally, your Commission must define success for itself. Whether you’ve selected a process evaluation, outcome evaluation, or impact evaluation, benchmarks selected before you even begin will prove invaluable. Setting goals and achieving them or regrouping and pursuing them from another angle will benefit your advocacy cause and your organizational reputation and will help to maintain positive morale within your organization.
Conflicts Resolution and Consensus Building

Dispute resolution and consensus building may be used when you run into others who aren’t yet on board with your mission and plan, or worse yet, when your agenda runs into competition with another organization’s agenda. How do you bring on reluctant collaborators or meet potentially negative resistance head on? Settling disagreements and knowing how to work with detractors can be an invaluable asset.

**Conflict Resolution**

What is it? Conflict resolution is the process of resolving a dispute or a conflict (between two parties) permanently, by considering each side’s needs and adequately addressing their interests so that they are satisfied with the outcome.

Conflict resolution aims to permanently solve the existing problem so that you can have an effective working relationship or at least get on with your work once the process is finished. Through following the conflict resolution formula, both sides (and multiple parties) can be assured that their perspective is heard and considered. Conflict resolution is similar to mediation in that often a neutral third party becomes involved to assure objectivity. Conflict resolution usually involves three parties—the two in dispute and the facilitator or mediator.

Below are the steps in the process.

1. **Create an effective atmosphere.** A comfortable atmosphere sets the stage for real work to get done by both parties.

2. **Clarify perceptions.** Get to the bottom of what the conflict is all about, be direct, and establish that both parties most likely are in an interdependent relationship.

3. **Focus on individual and shared needs.** Focus on the idea that both parties need each other to resolve the conflict and to do their good work.

4. **Build shared positive power.** Draw the positive energy of participants into the process and frame power as an asset that all participants hold rather than insisting that one party has the upper hand.

5. **Look into the future and learn from the past.** Don’t stay rooted in previous disagreements, and be sure to de-personalize arguments and focus on the present.
6. **Generate options.** Avoid preconceived answers, ask for options from both sides, brainstorm options, and narrow down to “key options.”

7. **Develop attainable goals or “doables.”** These are specific actions that have the best chance of being successful.

8. **Craft mutually beneficial agreements.** By both parties agreeing, these solutions will be clear, will last, and will not create further conflicts.

While you may be able to resolve conflicts without “outside” assistance, resources such as non-profit mediation services are available. Trainings are also available if you would like to turn one of your staff members into a skilled mediator. The Conflict Research Consortium at the University of Colorado has a website with available resources, [http://www.colorado.edu/conflict/](http://www.colorado.edu/conflict/)

### Consensus Building

**What is it?** Consensus decision-making requires that everyone agree with a decision—not just a majority as occurs in majority-rule processes. In consensus-based processes, people must work together to develop an agreement that is good enough (though not necessarily perfect) to satisfy everyone at the table. Consensus building processes often involve a trained mediator or facilitator.

Consensus building (also referred to as collaborative problem solving or collaboration) is a process in which individuals productively resolve issues, develop strategies, or make decisions guided by a facilitator or mediator. Consensus building works particularly well when there are multiple interests and when multiple parties are involved and the disputants do not fit within the confines of the conflict resolution model. Consensus building also makes use of a mediator or a facilitator and involves participants from multiple parties in developing the process.

The basic steps of consensus building are as follows:

1. **Participant identification and recruitment.** The mediator or facilitator will identify all key participants. Ignoring or overlooking involved parties will likely cause complications in the process.

2. **Design of the process to be used.** The facilitator will often get the parties involved in the disagreement to work together on an agenda. By co-creating the process together, participants will feel more ownership in their solutions and compromises.

3. **Problem definition and analysis.** The mediators will encourage the participants to reframe their arguments from “positions” to “interests,” which tend to be more negotiable.

4. **Identification and evaluation of alternative solutions.** Participants are asked to brainstorm and suggest alternative solutions. New, mutually beneficial alternatives are preferred. Participants can brainstorm together or as smaller sub-groups.

5. **Decision-making.** Each potential solution will have its benefits and barriers to implementation. All alternatives should be considered in terms of how they will benefit each party. Final solutions are fine tuned with all parties giving input, and all parties must agree to the decision.

6. **Finalization and approval of the settlement.** The participants in the negotiations process must eventually take the decision back to their organizations and try to secure their buy-in. The negotiation process may be complicated if participants in the consensus building process do not hold any decision-making power. To facilitate the negotiations, try to include participants with authority to make decisions or else encourage constant communications with the parent organization at breaks.

7. **Implementation.** Once all parties sign on to the negotiated-by-consensus solution, the difficult step of implementation remains. Challenges will often develop during this phase, but the relationships fostered during the consensus building process provide an effective basis for working to resolve any unforeseen issues.
The way that issues in dispute are framed can be a critical factor in the outcome of the dispute, and often consensus building facilitators will try to re-direct issues in terms of interests as opposed to values or needs, which are not as negotiable.

**Which Is Best To Use—Consensus Building Or Conflict Resolution?**
Consensus building may be preferred for conflicts that involve multiple parties because it keeps everyone at the table to work through their challenge. Conflict resolution is the most positive and effective means to gain agreement in two-party disputes.

Understanding the full scope and nature of your conflict and the value system of the key players will help you select the right process and facilitator to solve your dilemma.

**Conflict Resolution and Consensus Building Exercise**
Consider the hypothetical scenarios below. Which would be more suitable to conflict resolution? Which to consensus building?

**Scenario #1:** Your Commission has leveraged $20,000 dollars that can be used to advance the injury prevention goals and mission of your Commission. Three distinct ideas have been proposed to use the funds. One group of Commissioners would like to put out an RFP for seasonal safety programs that would address timely injury prevention issues, while another group of Commissioners would like to put a planning grant out to bid to explore the need for a county injury prevention coordinator. Finally a third group of Commissioners feels that the money should be saved and added to future monies to make a larger grant possible. While all three ideas may address injury prevention, the plans are quite different. In this case, consensus building might be the best way to solve the dilemma. Why? What are your next steps?

**Scenario #2:** Your Commission is helping to coordinate a school readiness collaborative in your county. Recently two partners in the collaborative have become disgruntled. One agency believes the other agency has been receiving more than its fair share of technical assistance, a belief that was exacerbated by the other organization’s recent success in gaining local press coverage. The other agency feels it is not receiving extra assistance and that the other organization is merely bitter and has become combative. Both agencies have refused to participate in collaborative meetings until the situation is resolved. Your task is to bring both agencies back into the collaborative and reduce any further disruption of the collaborative’s work. You decide that this particular disagreement might be a great time to do some conflict resolution. Why? What are your next steps?
Negotiating Effectively

Negotiation can be a powerful tool for supporting your Commission’s agenda. While many people might prefer to simply arrive at agreement without having to negotiate with another party, good negotiation skills are invaluable when and if the need arises. Even your allies may have a few differences of opinion in key program or policy areas. In the end, a solidly negotiated agreement will most likely satisfy the mission and goals of your Commission as well as the mission and goals of the other party.

By looking at the components of the negotiation process and then by examining a few examples, you should be more comfortable with seeing negotiation as just one more tool at your disposal.

Below are some negotiating essentials to keep in mind before you sit down at the table to work through to agreement.

1. **Clearly define your desired outcome.** Talk with other staff or Commission members to determine which agenda items are negotiable and which are not. By having a clear and concise statement of what your group wants, you will be better able to respond during the process. Know how your supporters will react if key points are lost or compromised, and know what your opponents really want.

2. **Go in informed.** Find out as much as possible about the other party you are negotiating with, including their organizational history and any relevant background information related to the issue. You should be aware of any weaknesses in their case as well as strengths. Know about any pressures the other party has that might be reinforcing its position. What do they have to lose if they concede points in your negotiations?

3. **Set the stage.** Negotiation is best done in person, and when scheduling, give yourself and your team sufficient time to prepare. Review your arguments prior to negotiating, and try to frame them as positively as possible. Find outcomes that will benefit the other side and use those details in making your own points.

4. **Fasten your seatbelt.** Expect some bumps along the way and do not let adverse reactions, opinions, or feedback bother you. In fact, try to brainstorm in advance about what some of their objections might be and formulate a response. Also, be aware of different tactics that they might use such as high-pressure or silence. Be prepared for how you might respond to these different maneuvers.

5. **Negotiate some “givens” first.** Do not bring out the most contentious issues early in your negotiation; instead, bring up lesser issues first that will be relatively easy to gain consensus on. Consider these early items as a “warm-up” of sorts; after you have eased into the conversation, there will be more background experience and positive momentum to carry you through the more complicated issues.

6. **Look for all possible options.** Do not try to back the other side into a corner if at all possible. Decisions made when there are non-threatening options available tend to be more satisfactory for both parties.

7. **Finish with a review of the agreement.** By both parties reviewing the terms of the agreement, everyone will feel informed and satisfied. More often than not, in revisiting the final points, participants will be reminded of the good, hard work that went into the negotiations and feel proud of their efforts.
**Negotiating Exercise**

The following scenario describes a hypothetical situation requiring negotiation skills. Though the details of this scenario might differ in your county, read the scenario and then reflect on what your next steps would be if this were your Commission. Can you imagine any potential roadblocks or surprises that could arise? How would you prepare for potential roadblocks before negotiating? Potential next steps are offered at the end of the scenario.

**Negotiating Within a Coalition**

Your Commission has become increasingly interested in efforts to reduce soft drink availability in area schools. The Commission has joined several like-minded health organizations to form a coalition focused on reducing student access to soda beverages. Your coalition, Coalition A, has decided to advocate for the school board to require district schools that enter contracts with soda companies to sell only juice and water in their vending machines. It has come to your attention that another coalition in the community, Coalition B, has stated they are supportive of completely banning schools from entering into contracts with soda companies and that they are also planning to approach the local school board. Your Commission feels that allowing schools to enter into water and juice contracts with soda companies is preferable to banning contracting with soda companies altogether in order to allow schools to continue to generate some revenue. You know that your coalition will be more effective with the school board if it presents a message that is unified with Coalition B. Your Commissioners suggest negotiating with others in the coalition before meeting with the school board. You invite Coalition B to send representatives to a working meeting where the issue of supporting partial versus complete bans will be discussed and decided upon.

**Potential Next Steps**

- Gather your arguments in favor of your position.
- Draft a statement of your final desired outcome.
- Find out who will be representing the other coalition.
- Anticipate and define potential roadblocks or sticking points.
- Generate options and solutions to perceived roadblocks.
How to Build a Coalition

The benefits and drawbacks to coalitions were described on pp. 10-11 of this toolkit. Once you have decided that forming a coalition is the best way to advocate for your issue, begin by taking the following steps:

1. **Identify and contact potential members.** Identify partners whose missions overlap with yours, but also think broadly and invite “non-traditional partners,” such as the business community. Since public policies affect wide groups of people, it is important to bring together diverse community members to define shared problems, identify solutions that are acceptable to the larger community, and accomplish mutually defined goals. If you are working to solve a problem for an underserved population in your community, be sure to engage them in your efforts from the beginning. Talk with them to identify strengths within the community that might assist with a solution. Brainstorm about the obstacles that have prevented the problem from being solved in the past and find out about the potential solutions they see.

2. **Hold an initial meeting to solidify the coalition’s vision, mission, and goals.** Based on the information you gather in your conversations with potential members, solidify your vision, mission, and goals as a group. Clarify the exact purpose of the coalition. Organizers and participants must not only understand the problem, but more importantly, they must also have a proposed solution or solutions. Make sure that all participants agree on the short- and long-term goals of the group’s effort in addition to the vision and mission.

3. **Develop a message.** A unified message presenting your coalition’s issue with a sympathetic and compelling hook should be developed. If possible, this message should provide information about how the problem is important to other sectors of society (e.g., why health access is a problem that employers and educators alike are concerned about, in addition to those concerns expressed by health and children’s advocates). See Attachment 13 in the Tools Appendix for a message development tool.

4. **Gain consensus on an action plan.** Determine what action is needed by the community to solve the problem. Is it feasible? In their earliest stages, coalitions should take on achievable steps so the group’s effort can build momentum and strength. Do you have agreed upon priorities? Do you have a concrete idea of how to best involve each of the members? What resources does each member bring? Is your membership sufficiently diverse to address all aspects of the problem and is it representative of those you seek to serve? Can you hire staff? If not, how will members share in the staff support of the coalition, such as organizing and facilitating meetings and communicating coalition progress to all members? Make certain that you have a communication plan in place, as well as a plan to develop materials about the coalition, such as position papers. Brainstorm strategies, activities, and tactics for action and assign tasks to members as appropriate.

5. **Keep the coalition going.** Once a coalition is up and running, maintaining its momentum can be one of the biggest challenges. Members are volunteers who have other responsibilities; their willingness to remain involved rests on perceived rewards of their participation. Is there solidarity? Do members support one another’s contributions? Do they feel they are making a difference? When attendance drops off or member turnover becomes excessive, is there a remedy? Do you have a strategy for recognizing and dealing with problems before or as they arise? Can you provide learning opportunities to members? Do you celebrate successes? Sharing power and leadership is a good way to avoid pitfalls. Additionally, keeping members informed about progress periodically and asking for their feedback will keep them interested and engaged without overwhelming them with too much information.
Case Study #4: Growing a Coalition in Humboldt County Creates Systems Change

The Humboldt County Children and Families Commission has greatly increased its impact in the community through the work of its many coalitions. In Humboldt County, the culture of interdependence and community focus is ripe for coalition building, which the Commission has leveraged from the beginning. The Commission’s strategic plan includes language that clearly speaks to the necessity of coalition and community building. “Agencies and programs will be supported in their efforts to collaborate, coordinate, and link their services in a way that provides the most benefit for families.” The Commission’s development of one coalition in particular, which focused on asset-based community development, has resulted in countywide systems change.

When Wendy Rowan, Commission Executive Director, decided to put together a workshop on Asset-Based Community Development, she thought beyond the day’s agenda. She felt that the upcoming presentation on community development would be an ideal way to coax interested organizations into working together to make change in the county. Ms. Rowan invited Dr. John McKnight, expert on Asset-Based Community Development and co-author of Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Towards Finding and Mobilizing a Community’s Assets, to present to the fledgling group. Dr. McKnight was a good fit in part because the philosophy of Asset-Based Community Development matched the community-friendly climate of Humboldt County.

Several local community-based organizations (CBOs) attended the training, including Humboldt State University, the Humboldt County Department of Health and Human Services, and the Humboldt Area Foundation. The Commission facilitated the initial meeting by offering them space at the Commission office. The hope was that the groups would want to continue meeting after their training in Asset-Based Community Development had ended, and they did. During the initial meeting and several subsequent meetings, the assembled organizations felt progress was possible and decided to form a coalition. The fledgling group continued meeting and named their coalition the “Growing Caring Communities Alliance” (Alliance). The new coalition then drafted the following mission statement: “the alliance will improve the quality of life in Humboldt County by supporting activities that build on local strengths, actively connecting communities with one another, and identifying resources so that communities can continue to build their own capacity to create social change.”

The Alliance has begun its work and uses a consensus-based decision-making process. Coalition members also rotate responsibility for facilitating meetings, taking minutes, and other necessary tasks. The Alliance’s goals are a bit broader than many direct service-based community coalitions. The coalition seeks to build capacity in the community and among CBOs. By providing information, resources, and assistance to strengthen CBOs, the Alliance ensures that CBOs have greater future success in helping the community at large. Although the Alliance would like additional organizations to join the coalition, they are still able to effectively pursue their mission with the original member organizations.

For more information on Humboldt County Children and Families Commission efforts at coalition building, contact Wendy Rowan, Executive Director, at (707) 445-7389 or wrowan@co.humboldt.ca.us.
Achieving Parity on Policy Issues
Many public health movements have not traditionally embraced nor adequately addressed health and health care issues for communities of color and other priority populations. Yet, we know that health disparities exist for children in all categories of the broad determinants of health, including living environments and conditions, socioeconomic status, and access to health services. One important way to work towards eliminating health disparities involves shaping policy. Consider the following methods.

Capacity building. Health advocates and agencies must strive to build the capacity of organizations and coalitions dedicated to reducing and eliminating health disparities. Although we usually think of the affected individuals first, we must also consider the health and capacity of the organizations working to improve the health and delivery of health care services to children and their families. By promoting policies that support child health promotion agencies and organizations by offering technical assistance or funding opportunities, we are developing greater potential for lasting impact.

Resource allocation. By supporting proposals or allocating funds for organizations that work to reduce health disparities, you are ensuring forward progress on this issue. Include language in RFPs or RFQs that speaks to the existing health disparities in your community, and require applicants to address these needs in their proposals. Support adoption of funding policies at the local and state level that consider reducing health disparities as a key ingredient in successful proposals and initiatives.

Involving representatives from key communities in decision-making process. Seeking representatives from the community you are attempting to impact will bring you one step closer to eliminating health disparities. Appointing knowledgeable and committed community representatives to coalitions and other decision-making positions will facilitate discussions about health disparities. Involving professional and community experts also fosters important health disparity education among your staff.

Drafting a “parity platform.” Written position papers and other forms of strong, clear communication function as important educational materials for policymakers, legislators, and their staff. A succinct statement that includes information about the broad determinants of health, factors contributing to health disparities among children and families, the latest data and research, strategies to eliminate health disparities in your county, and how your Commission or coalition can help can be an invaluable tool. Circulating the platform can encourage other organizations to consider their own role in achieving health care parity. Additionally, the shared “parity platform” can bond advocates together during challenging times and remind everyone of the central themes and focus of their work.

Community Engagement for Advocacy
Why Involve Community Groups?
When conducting advocacy efforts at the community-level, it is critical to involve community members and community-based organizations from a very early stage. Partnering with community members, including parents, will ensure that you are not imposing advocacy priorities on a population by assuming that you know what they need. Further, when communities speak for themselves, they make a good point all the more compelling. While not every community member may be comfortable talking to policymakers right away, natural leaders will often emerge with guidance as they become more engaged in the issue.
Case Study #5: Supporting Parent Engagement through Parent Action Grants

Parents are often just waiting to be engaged. In San Francisco, the First 5 Commission has succeeded in getting parents involved in both Commission and city-wide initiatives to support young children through their Parent Action Grants. This program offers mini-grants (up to $5000) for activities initiated by parents or parent groups. These activities include both programs for parents (workshops, trainings, support sessions) and activities for children (camping, art enrichment, holiday celebrations). The Commission offers technical assistance to grantees as well as an on-going series of trainings on advocacy and civic engagement. Through these capacity-building trainings, parents are better able to implement their Parent Action Grant projects and to advocate for the projects’ sustainability. For more information on this project, contact Moira Kenney, Executive Director at mkenney@dcyf.org or (415) 554-9250.


Commissions Are Well-Positioned for This Work

Commissions are well-positioned to get community groups/clients involved in advocating for social change for a variety of reasons.

- Commissions deal with an issue that is important to a large number of community members—the health and successful development of children.
- Commissions have Commission members from various disciplines and locations throughout the county and can provide a wide array of support.
- Commissions have direct relationships with community-based organizations and community members through their grantee networks.
- The public role of the Commission provides a unique opportunity for direct feedback from parents and community members and also allows Commissioners to support and engage parent groups in advocacy efforts.

Targeting Socially and Geographically Isolated Populations

Involving community members in advocacy is especially important when it comes to engaging socially and geographically isolated communities. Many of these communities have little or no voice to be able to communicate their concerns to policymakers. The following steps can be used to identify and engage these populations in advocacy:

1. Identify isolated populations that the Commission has never communicated with before, and invite them to share their community concerns with you. Be prepared to visit the community to hold these discussions. Talk with grantees, Commissioners, and other community partners to identify populations with which the Commission may not have regular contact.

2. Ensure that the time and location of the meetings are convenient for the community members you are targeting. The location should be easily accessible, and the meeting should be held at a time when most of the community members will be available. Depending on the group, you may need to hold the meeting during the evening or on a weekend.

3. Make extra efforts to ensure that community members feel comfortable meeting with you. For example, some cultural groups may not feel comfortable eating snacks prepared by the Commission. Other groups may only feel comfortable meeting in a neighbor's home. Understanding these issues in advance will help make your meeting successful.

4. Arrange for transportation, child care, and translation services as necessary to ensure maximum participation.

5. Choose staff members who are sensitive to the needs of a variety of cultures and who can effectively communicate with special populations. Cultural competency training can help to prepare staff who have little experience working with diverse communities.
6. Facilitate a conversation about the needs and priorities of the community members regarding their young children.

7. Provide staff support to help community members voice their concerns and priorities to local policymakers. Arrange for policymakers to visit these communities to hear from them directly.

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**Case Study #6: Engaging Geographically Isolated Groups in Advocacy**

When Carmen Garcia began her position as the Community Engagement Coordinator for the Yolo County Children and Families Commission, one of her first priorities was to map out the county and find out whether there were families that the Commission was not reaching. “There are parts of the county that are very isolated,” notes Garcia, “and you wouldn’t even know if there are families who live there.” One of these communities was the town of Dunnigan. Garcia knew that Dunnigan was home to a mobile home park—the Campers Inn RV Park. Guessing that families with young children might live there, Garcia asked the Commission’s Americorp staff member to conduct some outreach at the RV Park. They went door to door leaving flyers inviting residents to a meeting to discuss mini-grants available from the Commission. The meeting was held at the RV Park and 14 people showed up—13 of whom had children or grandchildren aged 0-5. The mini-grant meeting helped Commission staff “get in the door” to find out more about this isolated community. Ninety-eight percent of the residents were migrant workers and many were monolingual Spanish speakers. During the meeting, they brainstormed priorities related to children 0-5. The residents voiced several concerns—from the lack of affordable housing to a need for more social services. Above all, though, they wanted access to a park where their children could play.

On a tip from the Commissioner who represents District 5, which includes the Dunnigan area, Garcia contacted the District 5 County Supervisor who happened to have $50,000 available for the Dunnigan area. The Supervisor was looking for a group of residents who would be interested in developing a plan and committed to getting it going. After hearing about the needs of the RV park community, the Board of Supervisors agreed to allocate the funding for playground equipment. A vacant county lot will be donated for the space. The new playground will likely open this summer.

The members of the RV park community in Dunnigan have now formed the Dunnigan Community Action Team and hold monthly meetings organized by the Commission. Garcia notes that the process has empowered the residents to become more engaged in the civic process. “They feel that they have more power, that they can do more things, and that their voice counts.” At their request, the Commission is helping them organize meetings between the Community Action Team and local policymakers and leaders, such as their district supervisor, the local sheriff deputy, and a local school board member. For more information, contact Carmen Garcia, Commission Community Engagement Coordinator, at (530) 669-2475 or cgarcia@yolochildren.org.
Engaging the Media: Marketing Your Message

The primary way to communicate a message to the general public is through the media, including print, radio, internet, and television outlets. A variety of options exist to engage the media and get your message out; however, all strategies begin with some basic rules about framing your message and “learning the ropes,” which often means developing relationships with media organizations and reporters. As with any endeavor, putting more planning and forethought into a project will increase the chances of successful results.

The following sections provide information on four steps in getting your message out to the public.

- Framing Your Issue
- Developing a Communications Plan
- Creating Local Media Attention
- Follow-Through: Closing the Loop

Framing Your Issue

Framing an issue before you contact the media will help ensure that you communicate the essential elements of your message. Often a message intended to shed light on a systemic problem requiring a policy change will get modified to fit the format of the news outlet you are working with, and usually not for the better. News items intended to point out the effects of dangerous products produced by large corporations that could benefit from stricter regulations (e.g., cigarettes or SUVs) may end up focusing on individual actions. By shifting the focus to an individual level, news reporters might think they are making the story more palatable to their audience when in fact they are diluting the story and removing the desired impact. Your goal is to continuously “expand the frame” of your issue to include the impact to the community and the importance of related policy.

It doesn’t hurt to practice by thinking about one of your issues in terms of a media frame so that you will be ready to think in “frames” when the time comes. For even more practice, watch the local six o’clock news with an eye for news frames and try looking for wide children’s health frames that have been winnowed down to the individual level. The following six suggestions will help you to develop an effective frame when you take your message to the press.

- **Translate individual problems into social issues (also known as “expanding the frame”).** News often focuses on an individual’s story, which dilutes the impact at the aggregate level. Take these issues and describe how they affect the larger community, region, county, or state.

- **Assign primary responsibility.** Trace the problem to its root cause and avoid blaming the individual impacted by the problem (e.g., blame an auto manufacturer for a faulty or unsafe design versus blaming the driver).

- **Present solutions.** Don’t just raise issues and drop them. Investigate several options and include those in your letter, story, or interview.

- **Make practical policy appeal.** Often the most effective solutions are the simplest and most straightforward. If there is a simple, effective policy solution, make sure to include it in your message, otherwise your issue may not be raised in a policy forum or someone else may misinterpret your message and suggest a policy that you do not support.

- **Develop pictures and images.** Paint the picture for your audience whether the message is in print, radio, or television. Be descriptive and use images and language that is widely accessible. Don’t trust television news to get the right images either; suggest locations and times for them to get their visuals.

- **Tailor to audience.** Be savvy about who is watching, listening, and reading. If your message does not speak to your audience, it’s practically worthless. Do your homework and use examples that will resonate with that particular media market’s audience.
Developing a Communications Plan
A communications plan is a blueprint for getting your message out and should support collaborative planning with other interested agencies. A major part of any communication plan involves telling policymakers about a proposed solution and convincing them that your solution is in their best interest. Developing a communications plan can be illustrated in four steps:

Step 1: Craft Your Public Image. Policymakers need to understand who you are—what services you provide, for example, and who your customers and partners are. Because you will be working collaboratively toward mutual goals, they need to know what your overall policy goals are. They should not have to intuit this information or learn about you from others.

Before launching a communication campaign, consideration should be given to how you want your agency to be thought of by policymakers and other interested groups. An agency fact sheet (as opposed to a subject matter fact sheet) with your mission statement that accompanies all external communications is one way to inform others about what you seek to do.

Step 2: Articulate Key Messages. Key messages are short statements of what you are trying to achieve. They are directly linked to your mission statement and are incorporated into many types of communication. In many cases, if you are working in a coalition or partnership, taking the time to develop these key messages is one way to ensure that the group is on the same page. Standard short messages that are vivid and memorable promote your cause each time they are used. For example, the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is the nation’s lead prevention agency. It uses the phrase, “Safer. Healthier. People.” to reinforce what it seeks to accomplish, that is, working to promote and protect health and preventing disease.

Step 3: Identify Target Audiences. Target audiences are the individuals and groups you are attempting to educate and, ultimately, persuade to your cause. Community leaders, employers, and appointed and elected officials are usually always identified as targets. Other decision makers that have the ability to influence policy and budget decisions should be included as potential audiences for your messages. Some groups have found it helpful to include “interim” target audiences in their mailing lists. These are individuals and groups without direct decision-making authority but who have access to policymakers and thus can be powerful allies in your cause.

Simply identifying your target audiences is insufficient; you must also determine the best ways to reach them. For example, do your intended audiences use e-mail and the Internet? Do they read newspapers or professional journals? Do they have a bulletin board or company newsletter? Do they belong to an employee union or have children who can bring information home? Knowing the information habits of your audience will assist you in tailoring information and increasing the likelihood that they will see it.

Step 4: Develop Strategies and Tactics. Communication strategies are the general approaches you will use in getting your messages out to the right audiences. Tactics involve the implementation details. For example, an educational strategy that seeks to educate policymakers and interested parties on your issue might depend on using the tactic of e-mail alerts to disseminate written information to multiple community groups. A social marketing strategy that seeks to get people to adopt a particular behavior (e.g., get children immunized), on the other hand, might use paid and unpaid media tactics that point people to service providers within the community.

Creating Local Media Attention
The local news media represent a valuable resource in your attempts to get your issue into the public eye. Opportunities for advocacy exist in the local paper, regional magazine, local radio programs, and television news programs. Designating one person as a media spokesperson and providing that person with training is suggested. Depending on the time frame related to your issue (e.g., this week, next week, next month, next legislative session), using one or more of the following media outlets will help raise awareness of your issue:

- Interviews. Contact reporters, editors, call-in radio show hosts, or local television news agencies and pitch your story angle. Offer an interview on the topic; you are creating value by giving them both a story and one source.
• **News releases.** Make sure several staff members know how to craft a standard press release and that you have a listing of all contact and fax numbers of local wire services and media outlets.

• **Press conferences.** A well-orchestrated press conference can effectively raise awareness of your issue or initiative. Decide who key players are, plan the event, secure attendance, and alert the media.

• **Letters to the editor.** A strong concise letter to the editor in response to a news story will effectively convey your message whether it agrees with or contradicts the original news item.

• **Op/Ed pieces.** Keep track of recent Op/Ed pieces and if you sense an opportunity, contact the paper’s opinion page editor. Identify yourself and pitch your idea; if there is interest, attach your letter. Be patient, you may have to wait for an opening in the section or for a themed page already in development. Offer to work with the editor on changes or trimming your piece if needed; quick, clear communication is another key to success.

• **Editorials.** If you have special expertise, you may write the editorial staff directly outlining why your issue is pressing and ask for an opportunity to meet and discuss the issue. For this meeting with the editorial board you need to prepare a persuasive and convincing fact sheet citing solid sources, research, and effective policy. You may succeed in getting the paper’s editorial board to write an editorial piece based on your position.

• **Talk radio programs.** Be prepared with your arguments ahead of time, and have them limited to a very few succinct points. Also be prepared to wait if you are selected to speak on air; you may be asked to wait for some time. Turn your radio down when you begin speaking to avoid annoying interference; have someone else tape the radio program for future use including self-evaluation and distribution.

• **Local TV news programs.** Call the local news station and ask to speak with the producer or a specific reporter who appears to cover your issue. Be prepared to pitch your story quickly and be able to provide sources, contact names, numbers, and e-mails. If they like your story, they may want to report on it next week or that afternoon, depending on the news day. Have cellular numbers available for sources and, if possible, give them a heads up before you call the station.

**Follow-through: Closing the Loop**

Get the most mileage out of your advocacy efforts. After a success in the local news media, be it in print, in an on-line source, on a television broadcast, or on a radio program, think ahead to get extra copies of your work. Remember, placing your issues in the news makes an impact on others and lends your cause an added degree of credibility.

Strengthen your reputation as an authority on a particular issue by mailing your story to contacts and policymakers. Mailing videotapes of television segments and audiocassettes of on-air broadcasts can also help your cause. Hard copy items like news articles, videocassettes, CDs, and DVDs also make great “leave behind” materials for visits to elected officials and policymakers. Realize that for a short period of time after airing or publication, your story still has impact. Save copies of everything that gets published or broadcast, as these items will invariably be of use in future projects or funding proposals as evidence of your organization’s influence.
Conclusion

In the relatively short time since the passage of the California Children and Families Act in 1999, county First 5 Commissions throughout the state—led by dedicated and committed Commissioners and their staff—have undertaken tremendous efforts to promote the health and well-being of children under five years of age. To date, the list of accomplishments and diversity of expertise are impressive.

As you continue your efforts to promote a vision of a California that supports the healthy development of young children and their families, this Advocacy Toolkit provides the basic tools to achieve public affairs success. Developed specifically for county First 5 Commissions, the toolkit builds upon First 5 program momentum.

It is, however, only a first step. The real work of advocacy happens in community conversations, in long legislative meetings, in boardroom dialogs, and in the media. As you move forward with these efforts, refer back to this Toolkit for ideas or guidance. And don’t be afraid to think big. Advocacy training can benefit others in your community as well, such as affinity organizations and coalitions working toward a similar vision. By empowering them to accomplish their goals, you can expand your impact on children’s policy issues and create lasting change.
References

Introduction


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Advocacy 401


Appendix 1:
Tools

Attachments listed in the tools appendix can be accessed by going to the following websites: http://www.ccafa.org and http://www.chipolicy.org

Attachment 1: Lobbying Rules and Restrictions
Attachment 2: First 5 Association of California Policy Platform
Attachment 3: Developing a Plan for Advocacy
Attachment 4: A Primer on Data
Attachment 5: Using Data Strategically: Social Math
Attachment 7: Budget Process Graphic
Attachment 8: Overview of the Legislative Process
Attachment 9: How A Bill Becomes a Law Graphic (simple)
Attachment 10: How A Bill Becomes a Law Graphic (complex)
Attachment 11: Tips for E-mailing Policymakers in the Internet Age
Attachment 12: American Public Health Association’s Ten Tips for Advocacy
Attachment 13: Message Development Tool
Appendix 2: Samples

Documents listed in the samples appendix can be accessed by going to the following websites: http://www.ccafa.org and http://www.chipolicy.org

Attachment 1: First 5 Contra Costa Policy Platform
Attachment 2: First 5 Contra Costa Role Statement
Attachment 3: First 5 Contra Costa Policy and Advocacy Committee Purpose Statement
Attachment 4: First 5 Contra Costa Policy and Advocacy Issues and Priority Table
Attachment 5: First 5 Contra Costa Baseline Statements
Attachment 6: Sample Coalition Letter
Attachment 7: Sample Fact Sheets
Attachment 8: Sample Script for Making an Appointment with a Legislator
Attachment 9: Sample Script for Calling a Policymaker
Attachment 10: Sample Letters in Support of a Proposal
Attachment 11: Sample Letter Opposing a Proposal
Attachment 12: Sample Written Testimony
Attachment 13: Sample Oral Testimony
Attachment 14: First 5 Los Angeles Government Affairs Newsletter