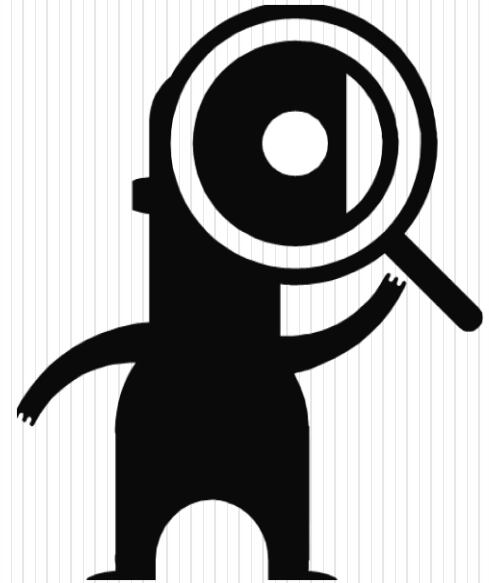


THE NINE QUESTIONS FOR ADVOCACY CAMPAIGN PLANNING

Michael Pertschuk

Looking Outward

The Nine Questions



Question 1. Objectives: **What do we want now?**

If an advocacy campaign is to achieve anything significant, the question “what do we want now?” often turns out to be the single most important, time-consuming – and difficult to answer – of the Nine Questions. This is not a question about what we want ultimately – however important a grand, long-term vision is – but what we want *right now* (although still bearing in mind what we want next, and what we want ultimately). Is this near-term objective significant enough, yet realistically achievable in the short term, to fully engage the energies of supporters?

Question 2. The target audience: **Who has the power to give us what we want?**

Who has the power to make what we want happen, and who has the power to stop it from happening? This means those who have constitutional power (for example, governors, legislators, and, at election time, voters). It also includes those who have real power — formal, if not constitutional — such as the elected majority leadership of each legislative body, committee chairs, and indeed, all legislators.

Question 3. The messages:

What do they – the holders of power – need to hear?

Moving these different audiences to act requires crafting and framing a set of messages that will persuade each of them to do what we want each to do. Although we must always root these messages in the same basic campaign themes, we need to tailor them differently to different power holders, depending on what each will respond to. In most cases, advocacy messages have two basic components: an appeal to do what is right, and an appeal to the power holders' self-interest.

Question 4. The messengers: **From whom do the power holders need to hear the messages?**

To know each of the power holders well is also to know who has particular influence with them. To whom are they politically indebted and responsive? Who are they most eager to please? Who intimidates them? (To whom are they financially indebted?) Whom do they trust? Respect? Honor? Fear? Like? Perhaps even love? Who are the staff members who have their ear and trust? Who are the lobbyists they have grown comfortable with? The same message has an entirely different effect depending on who communicates it. Who are the most credible messengers for each audience? In some cases, these messengers are experts whose credibility is largely technical. In other cases, we need to engage the authentic voices who can speak movingly from personal experience.

Question 5. Delivery:

How can we get the power holders to hear the messages?

There is a continuum of channels through which to deliver advocacy messages to the power holders. These range from the personal (for example, lobbying) to the confrontational (for example, protest action). The most effective means available to citizen advocates without either special access to the power holders or vast financial resources is often media advocacy, that is, approaching the mass media strategically as indirect channels to the power holders.

Looking inward

The Nine Questions



Question 6. Taking stock: What have we got?

Campaigns generally don't start from scratch but build on existing strengths, so an effective advocacy effort begins with taking careful stock of the advocacy resources already there to build on. This includes inside and outside leaders, past advocacy experience, networks and alliances already in place, and staff and other organizational or allied capacity, information, and political intelligence.

Question 7. Filling gaps: **What do we need to develop?**

Identifying the advocacy resources that we don't have means looking at alliances that we need to build or strengthen, networks we need to expand, and capacities such as outreach, media, and research, which are crucial to any effort. What kind of technical support do we need and where can we get it? And, inevitably, money.

Question 8. First steps: **How do we begin?**

What are our most effective first steps? How do we begin to build now toward ultimate legislative action?

Question 9. Strategic flexibility:

What do we do when the plan isn't working, runs into unforeseen roadblocks, or confronts unanticipated opportunities?

As do any travelers on a long journey, campaign organizers need to check their course at every stage. They need to reevaluate strategy, revisiting each of these questions (Are we aiming at the right audiences? Are we reaching them? Are we building the support we hoped to build?). They remain open to the need to adapt their plan and their campaign to new events, shifts in inside and outside personnel, and change in general.

