

## Influencing Decision Makers

### GETTING THE VOICE OF THE PEOPLE HEARD

#### ARENAS OF INFLUENCE: MEANS OF INFLUENCE

##### **Mental Health and Addiction Services**

- Policy: *Significant and meaningful participation in committees, consultations, Board discussions*
- Services/Supports/Research: *Significant presence in governance (Boards), meaningful role in accountability process, advisory committees, ethics review*
- Rights/Advocacy: *Community development – create independent voice of people, support independent advocacy, legal redress, internal complaints processes, professional standards (professional colleges)*

##### **Government**

- Policy: *Lobby (public interest appeal, media attention, voters), meaningful participation in consultations*
- Funding: *Lobbying (sympathetic public eye), research on human and cost effectiveness*
- Legislation: *Deputations and submissions to government committees, contact with politicians, media*

##### **Justice System**

- Police: *Attend Police Board and liaison groups, effect police education*
- Lawyers: *Educate through law schools, Law Society, Legal Aid Ontario*
- Judiciary and Quasi Judicial bodies: *Appeal, gather facts and record/expose biases*
- Law (jurisprudence): *Acquire Intervener Status (provide good evidence)*
- Inquests: *Get Standing, witnesses*

##### **Media**

- Reporting: *Offer sources, contact media Ombudsman or Press Council*
- Authoring: *Articles, Letters to Editor, press releases*
- Media Attention: *Demonstrations, press conferences, tell reporters personal stories*

## Becoming an Effective Voice

**Community development** gives your voice more weight - although one persistent person can still make a difference. A group of people who have a direct interest in an area and are willing to be involved are difficult to ignore (without looking bad). Figure out what you stand for, and **stand together** to advance your priorities consistently.

Your voice should be **clear** – you represent who you say you represent. To be **credible**, your voice should be independent of conflicts of interest and hidden influences. If the group's views that you express are inclusive of the variety of people you represent, this makes it more difficult for one counterexample to marginalize you. It is perfectly valid to represent an exclusive perspective as well, when you are clear that this is the case.

When advocating (*ad voce* – *to give voice to*) it is more important to be an **authentic** voice than to modify your message overly much to suit the recipients of it. Some may always think you go too far, others will think you do not go far enough. People do not have to agree with you to respect you.

Bolster all your points with **evidence**. Personal stories of group members, research, survey or needs assessment results... all are evidence that can support your positions, making it easier for decision makers to justify adopting your request.

Decision makers need to be able to **rely** on what you say. The more work you do for them to support your case, the further along you move them toward a decision in your favour. Be straight forward, avoid absolute statements (except where true). While some matters are simply right or wrong, in the long run it conveys balance in your perspective to combine critique with constructive suggestions, positive with negative statements. Unadulterated criticism will not motivate people to work with you, while constant agreement means your voice is not adding anything new. Either extreme limits the guidance you can offer.

Assume that everyone wants to **do good**, and to **be perceived to do good**. (Some more of one, some more of the other...) The best motivation is enlightened self interest. You are offering an opportunity to feel good, look good, do good.

One of the biggest impediments to change is people not wanting what they have already done to be perceived as bad. This is one reason that change is slow. To get around it, emphasize the **change as progressive leadership**.

*The chart describes where you need to be in order to influence decision makers.*

How do you get there?

Seek out the contact points between the decision maker and the public. Be a presence there. Make allies. If you are already a group with some recognition but with limited power, try to increase your visibility. Media attention is an ideal opportunity to publicize what you are trying to achieve, appreciating what you have and speaking of how much more needs to be done. In terms of having influence, the fact that you can get media attention communicates as much as the content of it does.

Attention and recognition at public events by others achieves much the same ends.

When you have some visibility, try to meet with decision makers, with evidence that supports how you, your goals, and your means of achieving them will enhance their mandate. You may also have good will to offer, from the people you represent. (And of course a moral edge, because YOU are on the side of the angels.)

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