

Thinking Drinking II

Services as advocates

Larry Pierce, Executive Director

Vanessa Long, Manager
Manager, Workforce Development



Background

The Network of Alcohol and Other Drugs Agencies (NADA)

Peak Body in NSW for more than 27 years

Organisations as members : approx 115

Predominately health funded : State & Commonwealth

Vision is to have the non government sector recognised as integral to a strong and progressive system of alcohol and drug services in NSW. This recognition will be financial, structural and reflected in partnerships with government and other sectors.

What is advocacy?

Traditionally : active support especially of a cause (Collins)

Most people define it through the tools advocates use (Repertoires of contention).

Protests and letter writing tend to be culturally specific and historical, we inherited these from the 60's but new electronic ways evolving (culture jamming)...

Levels of advocacy:

- On behalf of individuals that may become representative of broader movement eg Nelson Mandela, David Hicks, Clients
- On behalf of organisations eg kids line, factory closures
- For a client eg access to mental health services
- For a sector eg farming sector, non government sector
- Sustained collective challenges/ social movements eg feminism, gay rights

Does not have to be aimed at politicians

– could be seeking social attitude or institutional change

Perspectives on advocacy

Rage against the machine v's If you cant beat 'em join 'em

Is there a balance?

NADA's advocacy

- dependant on clear outcome – capacity of sector.
- Manage relationships to the mission not the government agenda
- do not want to overthrow bureaucracy but position as an expert and influencer.
- vital underpinning is the trust and respect of the membership.
- advocacy power is from membership: democratic and mandate issues

Key advocacy issues : Alcohol

- Working with the alcohol industry
- Crime and Diversion

Alcohol is not a political priority but crime and safety are.

- Target messages with caution.
- Build understanding not fear within political agenda.

Principles of advocacy

- Credibility
- Preparation
- Relevance
- Build the competencies and skills you need

Credibility

- A working trust: friendly, fair, frank, foreword, firm, focused, frequent communication
- Reliable : Who do you represent and what mandate do you have if any? Do you do what you say you will?
- Consistent : Clear mission and vision that inform decisions.
- Manage to goals not personalities
- Working relationships maintained and negotiated

Preparation

- Know how the policy making system works. Eg government departments work in silos.
- Know specifically what you would like to change.
- Acknowledge the ideological / political drivers of the government.
- Have the research handy & use it
- Start building relationship with targets of advocacy

Relevance

- Are you talking to the right people?
- Is it linked to current plans and priorities?
- Are you staying true to your mission and vision?
- Is everyone singing the same tune?

Skills needed

- Communication (written and spoken)
- Passion & energy
- Building connectiveness
- Diplomacy and negotiation

Influencing and Changing Policy

Simple working definition of policy:

What governments do (the scope), or not do, how they do it (the means) and the impact (the effect) of what they do

Development is not simple or linear, it is a cycle that incorporates

- social and economic influences
- systems of power and influence
- dominant ideas and values
- formal institutional structures
- policy process itself

Set the agenda

Infinite number of policy questions to consider
Issues most likely to get on agenda

1. Those already receiving attention
2. Potential to attract strong public support
3. Driven from the top by influential elites

Political strategies

- Lobbying
- Service provision
- Advocacy
- Strategic research
- Community organising
- Public education
- Protest (repertoires of action)

(Vromen, A (2006) Political strategies of the Australian Third Sector, Third Sector Review, V 11 No. 2)

Change Management

- Anxiety : create a new anxiety that is greater than the anxiety about the change (Edgar H Schein, Sloan Management Review, Winter 1993, p21)
- Disconfirmation: Convince them with evidence the current situation is not working
- Create positive anxiety: Connect with the need for change with something they care about ie if they fail to change they will loose something they care about
- Create Safe environment: People feel supported in the change

Manage the agenda

- While identifying options and developing their indicators
- Opportunity to be involved in working parties, discussion groups etc

Larry Pierce
larry@nada.org.au

Vanessa Long
vanessa@nada.org.au