

ORGANIZING A GRASSROOTS EFFORT

One of the most important elements of passing a bill is organizing the constituents who support the bill to contact their legislators. In order to win, you need to demonstrate that people support the legislation. This also gives a voice to the people who are impacted by the cuts to insurance coverage.

You want to think about creating a system of communicating with activists and volunteers to get the word out and generate action. The people who have worked on state parity bills are individual amputees, their families and friends, and prosthetic providers.

To get the effort going, you can send postcards, letters and e-mails asking people for their help, their feedback and their stories. Most people will be willing to do whatever they can. Some will be able to give money. Others will be willing to volunteer their time. And some can do both. They *are* out there. You just have to know how to find them!

You want to make sure each legislator hears from people in his or her district. This section includes information on how to do that effectively.

WHY DO WE ORGANIZE?

There are two types of power in the world: money and people. Activists will never have the financial resources of insurance companies, but we'll always have access to the second form of power: people.

Five Basic Rules to Effective Organizing

- 1) Recruit:** It takes a critical mass of activists to win, but it only takes one or two to recruit them.
- 2) Plan:** What is your goal? Who are you targeting in a campaign? Why should they listen to you? What is your timeline? If you can address these questions, you will have a chance at true success and the beginning of a strong plan.
- 3) Budget:** You'll need money to run your campaign, but fundraising is also a great way to raise awareness about your group and involve people in your efforts, and it is a must for any lasting organization. Be creative; use your fundraising outreach to build your activist base, and vice versa.
- 4) Listen:** Not everyone is going to have as sophisticated an analysis of the political structure as you may. The new, shy volunteer may not want to testify at a hearing, but might have a great story that he or she could tell in a letter. Figure out what people are good at and use your resources wisely!
- 5) Delegate:** No matter how bright you are, you can't do everything. Delegate projects and tasks to other volunteers. This way, everything will get done, you won't burn out, and other people will take ownership in the campaign.



See: *Sample Letter to Legislators, Sample Petition in the Appendix.*

Some motivators for action include:

- 1) A personal relationship with you or another member. Many will join a group or volunteer time simply on the strength of their personal investment in who you are.
- 2) Opportunities to influence other people. Some are motivated by the excitement that comes with being part of an organization that has the potential to effect change.
- 3) Personal gain. There are many people out there fighting their own personal battle for insurance coverage. Giving them an outlet to help themselves is an empowering way to meet their needs.
- 4) Someone simply took the time to ask them. Everyone wants to be needed and needs to be wanted.

HOW TO LOBBY

Lobbying is a lot easier than most people think, and it's effective. Don't be overwhelmed by the prospect of a lobby visit; it's simply an opportunity for you to tell your elected representative what you think about a certain issue or bill.

Guidelines for Planning Your Lobby Visit

- 1) **Requesting the meeting.** Make your request in writing. Suggest specific times and dates for your meeting, and specify what issue you want to discuss. For elected officials, make sure they know that you are a constituent.
 - 2) **Preparing for the meeting.** Decide who will attend the meeting. Bringing more than four or five people can be hard to manage, so if you have a large group, you may want to schedule more than one meeting. You should also agree in advance on several talking points, with an exact meeting plan (who takes what point, etc.).
 - 3) **During the meeting.** Keep it short! Stick to your talking points! You will likely have no more than 10 to 20 minutes. Highlight personal and/or local examples of the impact of the legislation or issue. Ask the decision-maker to take specific actions and wait for his or her answer. You should never leave a meeting before obtaining an understanding of the specific steps the decision-maker will take in resolving your issue.
- It's a good idea to have information to leave with the office. This can be information on the issue such as fact sheets or influential materials such as copies of petitions in support of your bill.
- 4) **After the meeting.** Each person should send thank-you letters promptly. Follow up in a timely fashion with any requested materials and information. If the decision-maker cannot state a position on the issue in a timely fashion, ask him or her to set another deadline. Be persistent – your elected officials work for you! This is your opportunity to build a relationship with your elected officials and to demonstrate that there is a constituency for prosthetic parity in your district.

Tips for Lobbying Your State Legislators

- 1) Get to know your legislators.** It's important to know who they are and what they care about. Know something about their district and the part of the state they represent. Make sure you know what committees they sit on and which issues are most important to them.
- 2) Bring people from their district.** The most effective legislative communications come from constituents. If you have coalition members from their district, make sure they attend this meeting.
- 3) Be clear about the reason for your meeting.** Remember, legislators are very busy and have a lot of meetings to attend. Make sure you're prepared in advance to clearly outline the reason for your meeting and what you hope to gain. Have your three or four talking points outlined in advance. If there is an area of specific interest for this legislator related (even indirectly) to prosthetic coverage, make sure you highlight this point. This could be an interest in diabetes treatment or healthcare access.
- 4) Make sure you have the facts.** Back up your key points with research data. To the fullest extent possible, make sure you know how many people are impacted in your state. Importantly, don't make up numbers if you don't have them. You want to make a solid case for your issue with reliable data.
- 5) Make it personal.** If there are people from their district or at least the state who have a story to tell, either have them at the meeting or share their stories on their behalf. Hit the key points of the stories without going into all the details. Remember, you probably only have a few minutes to get the pertinent information across.
- 6) Ask for their support.** Always make sure they understand you are asking for their support, and then listen for their response. Their answer will help provide you with valuable information for your vote count. If they are undecided, don't pressure them. Ask them if there is additional information they may need to help them decide. If they are solidly opposed to the legislation, politely thank them for their time and move on to your next meeting.
- 7) Follow up with a thank-you letter.** It is critical that you thank them for their time. If they told you they will support you, thank them for their support and tell them you will stay in touch. If they are undecided or leaning against you, try to provide them with additional information that will help them change their mind.
- 8) Grassroots follow-up.** Get your coalition members and others within your network to reinforce your meeting. If they are supportive, make sure members from within their district send thank-you notes to reaffirm that support. If they are undecided or opposed, have members within that district make phone calls, write letters, and send e-mails to try and persuade them to support your bill.



See: *Sample Letter to Legislators, Sample Fact Sheets in the Appendix.*

WRITING TO YOUR ELECTED OFFICIALS

Letters and faxes are an extremely effective way of communicating with your elected officials. Many legislators believe that a letter represents not only the position of the writer but also many other constituents who did not take the time to write.

Tips to Increase the Effectiveness of Your Letter

Keep it brief. Letters should never be longer than one page, and should be limited to one issue. Legislative aides read many letters on many issues in a day, so your letter should be as concise as possible.

State who you are and what you want up front. In the first paragraph, tell your legislators that you are a constituent and identify the issue about which you are writing. If your letter pertains to a specific piece of legislation, it helps to identify it by its bill number.

Hit your three most important points. Choose the three strongest points that will be most effective in persuading legislators to support your position, and flesh them out.

Personalize your letter. Tell your elected official why this legislation matters in his or her community or state. If you have one, include a personal story that shows how this issue affects you and your family. A constituent's personal stories can be very persuasive as your legislator shapes his or her position.

Personalize your relationship. Have you ever voted for this elected official? Have you ever contributed time or money to his or her campaign? Are you familiar with this person through any business or personal relationship? If so, tell your elected official or a staff person. The closer your legislator feels to you, the more powerful your argument is likely to be.

You are the expert. Remember, your legislator's job is to represent you. Be courteous and to the point, but don't be afraid to take a firm position. Remember, your elected official often may know no more about a given issue than you do.

NOTE: E-mails are a great way to send a quick message. But if you have an extra few minutes, take the time to print out your message and mail it to them. A letter always adds a special touch!



See: *Sample Letter to Legislators in the Appendix.*

HOW TO PLAN AN EVENT

Whether you're planning a small cocktail party or a huge reception, the most important point to remember is to plan well in advance! Early planning will allow enough time to prepare thoroughly for an event and to resolve problems that may arise along the way. Let the following points serve as ideas, but by no means should you limit yourselves to these.

Planning an event is more than just about having enough chairs and making sure that the juice is cold. A successful event has three distinct planning phases: planning, publicity and turnout. These are all equally important and inextricably linked.

Event Planning: Getting Started

Organize committees. Organizing a major event is too much work for one person. Organizing teams or committees should meet regularly at least once a week. Consider delegating responsibility based on the following chairpersons and committees: event chair, treasurer, logistics team, publicity/media team, and fundraising team.

Determine the purpose for your event. Think about what you want to accomplish: public education, raise funds for your own group, influence legislators, etc.

Set solid goals. How many people do you want to attend the event? This helps direct your publicity and media efforts. Sometimes there are multiple goals for an event. Be sure to identify and prioritize your goals!

Set a date. Consider the availability of the space you want, the availability of featured speakers or performers and other major events being held that day.

Identify Your Target Audience

- Who do you think would be most interested in attending the event?
- While you want **everyone** to come, identifying your target audience will help direct your publicity and outreach efforts. For example, if you're planning an event about the need for prosthetic coverage legislation in your state, approach local doctors, Shriner's Hospitals, patient advocacy groups, medical schools, healthcare associations, etc., for help with publicity, cosponsorship and fundraising.
- Think about approaching and working with influential people in the community, such as the leaders of other organizations, government representatives, healthcare contacts at your local press outlets, and allied faculty/staff at local colleges and universities.

Planning Tips

Make a timeline. Create a timeline outlining the tasks that need to be completed each week leading up to the event, including event logistics, publicity/media strategy and finances.

Know your budget. The easiest way to do it is to work backwards. How much money do you hope to raise? How much money do you have as a budget? What are the expenses? Add up all of the expenses and then project a conservative number of people you expect to attend.

For example, if expenses total \$500 and you hope to attract 100 people, then you need to charge at least \$5 per ticket in order to break even. But you don't want to just break even. The whole idea is to make some noise and actually raise some money.

Pick a hot date. When do you want to do the event? You have to know this before you can set anything else in stone. However, you can accelerate the process by talking to speakers and other guests you want to make sure can attend. Pick your date strategically, considering your availability and the availability of your volunteers, what nights more people are likely to come, and any deadlines you are facing. It's also helpful if you have some kind of an anniversary to set your date on, such as a state or national day of awareness or the anniversary of a high-profile story around a local person with limb loss who is speaking at your event.

Volunteer recruitment. Make sure you have enough people there to help you do everything that needs to be done: watch the front door and take money, crowd monitoring, trash pickup, and to generally be on the prowl, paying attention to make sure it goes smoothly.

Pull out all the stops. Publicity is key. Put fliers everywhere. Take out an ad in a local independent newspaper or on the city Web site. Post about the event on Web boards. Send notice out to e-mail lists. Be creative. It's also helpful to send out a press release and invite the media to generate press around your efforts.

Turnout. The invitations are out and the posters are up. Great, but you have to remind people. Send out e-mails. Contact local coalition partners and community groups. Make phone calls to your volunteer and core group list.

The next day. Make sure to thank all of your volunteers and anyone who helped with the event. At some point, meet with the committee to debrief what went well and how to improve your next event.

You will use the same basic principles for planning events that are not aimed at fundraising, such as briefings or lobby days.

HOW TO USE PETITIONS

Petitions are a great way to raise awareness about your efforts. They also help to build your activist base and demonstrate public support.

- You can collect petitions at work, church or school.
- You can ask local facilities to put petitions in their lobby or at their sign-in desk.
- You can attend local events like concerts or farmer's markets and collect signatures.

Crowd Canvassing

Canvassing simply means "covering an area." This common campaign tool is a great way to reach a large number of people in a short time.

- **Where should I go?** Any busy public area where there are a lot of people gathering or waiting in line.
 - Entertainment or sports events where people are waiting in line
 - Big events that draw crowds, like fundraising walks, parades, fairs or farmer's markets
- **What do I need to bring?** A clipboard or something firm for people to write on, copies of your petition, and pens
- **What do I do with the petition?** You should follow-up with everyone who signs right away. Send them an email or make a call. Ask them to volunteer or make a donation. Get them involved while they still remember talking to you.

Canvassing Tips

- It's best to partner with someone else.
- Approach people standing around in groups.
- Make eye contact.
- Get the person's attention by asking a direct question or offering something like a sticker or flyer.

Use Your Petitions Effectively

- Follow up with signers right away and get them involved.
- Keep a list of everyone who has signed your petition, to make it easier to get in touch with them.
- Send copies to the ACA, so they can receive national alerts and materials.
- Send copies to elected officials to demonstrate public support.



See: *Sample Petition in the Appendix.*