Recruitment of Grassroots and Grasstops Advocates

Grassroots and grasstops advocates are essential to the success of advocacy campaigns. Community members, particularly those with real stories to share that illustrate the problem you are seeking to solve, are extremely persuasive messengers. “Real people” who support your advocacy goal can speak with both passion and legitimacy – to decision makers, the media, and fellow community members. So...where do you find them and how do you recruit them?

Possible grassroots and grasstops advocates include:

- Those who are affected first-hand by the problem you are seeking to solve;
- People who will benefit in some way from the policy or system change you are working towards;
- Individuals who have special expertise on your issue of focus (such as a physician if you are working on tobacco control issues or a teacher if you are working on education issues);
- Volunteers and Board members of your organization;
- Volunteers and Board members of your coalition partner organizations;
- Activists in the community that support similar issues;
- Neighborhood groups;
- Faith leaders and church groups;
- Youth groups or youth-serving organizations;
- Individuals that have supported your previous advocacy campaigns;
- Friends, neighbors, and colleagues.

Strategies for recruiting grassroots and grasstops advocates:

- Personal invitations from current advocates to others they know who might be interested;
• Presentations by staff, coalition partners, and/or volunteers at community-based organizations, civic groups, churches, etc. to talk about the campaign and invite folks to sign up to get involved;
• Hosting community meetings to discuss the campaign and ask residents to sign up as advocates;
• Informational house parties, hosted by a grassroots advocate, to recruit their own neighbors, family, and friends;
• Articles in church bulletins, school newsletters, online bulletin boards, and community newspapers;
• Appeals to your volunteers and Board members;
• Appeals from your volunteers and Board members to their personal networks;
• Appeals from coalition partners to their volunteers and Board members;
• Information tables and sign-ups at community events, such as fairs, festivals, and farmers’ markets.

Important elements for your recruitment messaging:

• Your message should be as inviting, encouraging, and personalized as possible. Make people feel that they are really wanted and needed and that they have a real opportunity to make significant change.
• Lead with your vision and get folks excited about it – describe how the campaign will improve the community and the lives of those who live there.
• Remember that sharing information about your campaign is not the same as extending an invitation to participate. Ask explicitly!
• Try to be specific in your invitation about what people are being asked to do and how much time will be involved. Many individuals are reluctant to commit to an activity that could go on forever, preferring instead a limited time commitment.
• Be enthusiastic! Nobody wants to be part of something that sounds boring, but everybody wants to be part of something exciting.
• Explain why this individual is so important to this campaign. Help him/her understand how critically important it is to demonstrate to decision makers that “real people” care about this issue and support the policy or system change you are proposing.
• Emphasize that getting involved in the campaign will be easy – make sure people know they won’t be asked to do anything too difficult or too time consuming.
• Ask for their opinions and their advice about the campaign, about how to recruit other advocates, and about what advocates could do to support the campaign.