



# A Step by Step Guide to Mobilize Your Collective Voice for Change

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Advocacy is defined as any action that speaks in favor of, recommends, argues for a cause, supports or defends, or pleads on behalf of others or a collective group<sup>i</sup>.

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Advocacy is important because it enables ordinary citizens to communicate with individuals in positions of power, and illustrate their concerns on issues or policies, that directly or indirectly impact them as part of a group. Advocacy is an effective strategy to influence change because it educates both decision makers and the general public on the experienced reality of a population, while growing the collective voices of those most affected by the issue. Anyone can be an advocate, it requires no special certification or degree; it only requires the passion to make change, the courage to speak up, and the capacity to organize and be persistent.

## Step 1. Know the Facts

It is crucial to have a strong and factual analysis of the situation you wish to address. Do your research, know the data, and understand any relevant current policies in place (here's where your collaborations can be helpful, Step 2). Utilize the facts to educate others and organize effectively around identifying your goal.

## Step 2. Partner and Build Alliances

People with common concerns or who are affected by the same issue(s) are the most effective when they come together and unite. Reach out to student/local community groups to determine and discuss shared concerns and issues. Recognize the strength in numbers, so long as everyone agrees on the collective goal and objectives (Step 3).

- ✓ Different groups have different perspectives; clearly articulate and agree on the needs of each group.
- ✓ Be clear on each group's strengths and limitations.
- ✓ Respect each other's differences.

## Step 3. Identify Your Goal & Objectives

It is important to have an overarching goal that reflects the core purpose—(for example, the [Afrikan Black Coalition](#)<sup>ii</sup> (ABC) sought to have the University of California System wholly and indefinitely divest<sup>iii</sup> its direct and indirect financial interests from the private prison industry).

It is also important to develop specific, measurable objectives to help determine the progress toward your goal. (ABC wrote a resolution for prison divestment with eight specific objectives to support its goal). You can have multiple objectives, but fewer are more manageable than many.

## Step 4. Decide Who You Want/Need to Influence

It is important to figure out who has the authority to make the decision(s), and what influences matter to the decision maker(s) (ex. Student/faculty opinion, public relations, funding, etc.). Sometimes there are multiple decisions, decision makers, and influencing factors. Sometimes, a decision maker or institution can be influenced



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either directly or indirectly. Your strategies must be tailored to who the decision maker is, and take into account what is most likely to influence them.

## Step 5. Determine What Decision Can Be Influenced

It is important to understand the context and constraints on the decision maker. Expect to be given the “*It’s out of my hands*” rhetoric, and have a plan to challenge that context. Don’t be afraid to ask, “*Whose hands is it in?*” It is equally important to understand the timing of the decision. (The ABC divestment goal was ideally timed, as the conversations around race and the criminal justice system are at an all time high).

- ✓ Follow the money. Funding/revenue streams are often cited constraints by decision makers. Make a point to highlight viable and legitimate alternatives, by researching similar situations with different outcomes.
- ✓ Focus as much as you can on a specific decision at a specific time. Remember, advocacy is often an uphill battle, and it will likely be up to you as an advocate to put the issue on the agenda, with a “due date”.

## Step 6. Choose Your Methods of Advocacy

Be clear on your goal and objectives, and develop a strong case for your cause (using facts, step 3). Make sure the message is clear, understandable, & appealing.

- ✓ Writing letters and making phone calls (to the appropriate decision maker[s]).
- ✓ Public education: Forums on the issue, written articles, opinion editorials, rallies with dissemination of reports and fact sheets, etc.
- ✓ Meetings with decisions makers, administrators, etc.
  - Be persistent; Have a clear agenda; Be prepared with specific requests; Be respectful; Show extent of support; Seek ongoing dialogue; Use media.
- ✓ Do not be afraid to get creative.

## Step 7. Review and Adjust

As your efforts proceed and progress, review your objectives, facts, and participants, and adjust accordingly. Arrange meetings and discussions to keep participants current, engaged, and on the same page. Address strategies and new concerns.

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<sup>i</sup> Alliance for Justice, What is Advocacy? Definitions and Examples [https://www.mffh.org/mm/files/AFJ\\_what-is-advocacy.pdf](https://www.mffh.org/mm/files/AFJ_what-is-advocacy.pdf)

<sup>ii</sup> Williams, A. (2015, November 30). University of California Has Millions Invested in Private Prisons [Web blog post] Retrieved from Afrikan Black Coalition Blog <http://afrikanblackcoalition.org/2015/11/30/university-of-california-has-millions-invested-in-private-prisons/>

<sup>iii</sup> Afrikan Black Coalition, Prison Divestment Resolution. Retrieved from <http://afrikanblackcoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Prison-Divestmen-final-resolution.pdf>