Creating a Public Policy Platform
CSN Training – July 15

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In the beginning....

- Y1: Strategic Plan & Board (2013)
- Y2: Policy Committee (Board and non-board members) (2014)
- Y3: Limited Agenda (2015) - 3 issues: “low hanging fruit”, central to our mission, and a “reach” goal

Today....

- Led by Research & Policy Director
- Public policy work is highly supported by our community (funders, collaborators, donors).
- Advocacy is intertwined in all other facets of our work
  - Programs
  - Research
  - Grant-making
  - Public Awareness
How to Develop Your Agenda

Begin with the experts – those members of the community most impacted by systemic barriers & front-line program staff who work closely with community members.

Work with existing partners and coalitions; partner with more experienced advocates.

Research – What do we know about the problem and our proposed solution?
Organizational Considerations

Mission alignment
• How does this issue relate to our mission, vision and values?
• How does this align with our current funding and program priorities?

Evaluating our role
• Is our voice necessary? Helpful?
• What can we contribute?
  • Funding, coalition management, research (data, information), public education, community stories and engagement, relationships, lobbying
• Who else can we bring to the table?
• What is our level of commitment?
• How do we ensure sufficient capacity and resources for our staff/community of supporters to engage?
• Who will be on the other side of this issue and how are we prepared to navigate their opposition?
Foundational Equity Considerations

- Who is being centered in this policy work? Who does it leave out?
- Have we considered all the ways gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, ability, class, or sex impact this policy?
- Does the research supporting this policy reflect the diversity of identities impacted?
- Do diverse lived experiences inform this work?
- Are we seeking out/listening to/giving space to people and organizations whose identities/experiences may differ from ours?
- Are we looking for what we do not know and what/who is missing?
- How are we providing a safe space for marginalized voices to speak out?
- How are we making the advocacy available to everyone who wants to engage?
Advocacy Basics

Get your board “on board”
• Bring in an expert to present; form an Advocacy/Policy Committee, including key board members.

NONPROFITS CAN LOBBY but advocacy is more than lobbying.
  o The term “advocacy” encompasses research, public education, lobbying, and voter education - all can influence public policy.
  o See Bolder Advocacy resource – “What is Advocacy”

Familiarize yourself with federal & state lobbying laws
• 501(h) election - See “Lobbying Under the Insubstantial Part Test,” from Bolder Advocacy.
• Be careful around elections - cannot engage in “partisan” activities. See AFJ’s “Election Checklist for 501(c)(3) Public Charities”
• When in doubt, call Alliance for Justice’s Free Technical Assistance Hotline: 1-866-NP-LOBBY or 202-822-6070
Advocacy Entry Points

• Join CSN and other associations/coalitions engaged in advocacy
• Follow other advocacy organizations – join their email list, follow on social media.
• Utilize Bill Tracker
• Build relationships with elected officials – invite them for a tour, meet & great with staff/clients
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