

Advocacy and Organizing 101

Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin? Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator shall go before you, the glory of the Lord shall be your rearguard. Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry for help, and God will say, Here I am.

-Isaiah 58:6-9 (NRSV)



What is the Office of Public witness?



- OPW is the public policy, information, and advocacy office of the PC(USA) General Assembly.
- Our mandate is to advocate, and to help the church to advocate, the social witness policies approved by the GA.
- We are in Washington to represent the church and to serve you.

Reformed theology teaches that because a sovereign God is at work in all the world, the church and Christian citizens should be concerned about public policy. Presbyterian forefather John Calvin wrote, "Civil magistracy is a calling not only holy and legitimate, but by far the most sacred and honorable in human life."

Public Witness Ministry

Organizing and Advocacy: Building Political Power

Sources of Power in a Democracy

- Position
- Organized Money
- Organized People

Types of Power

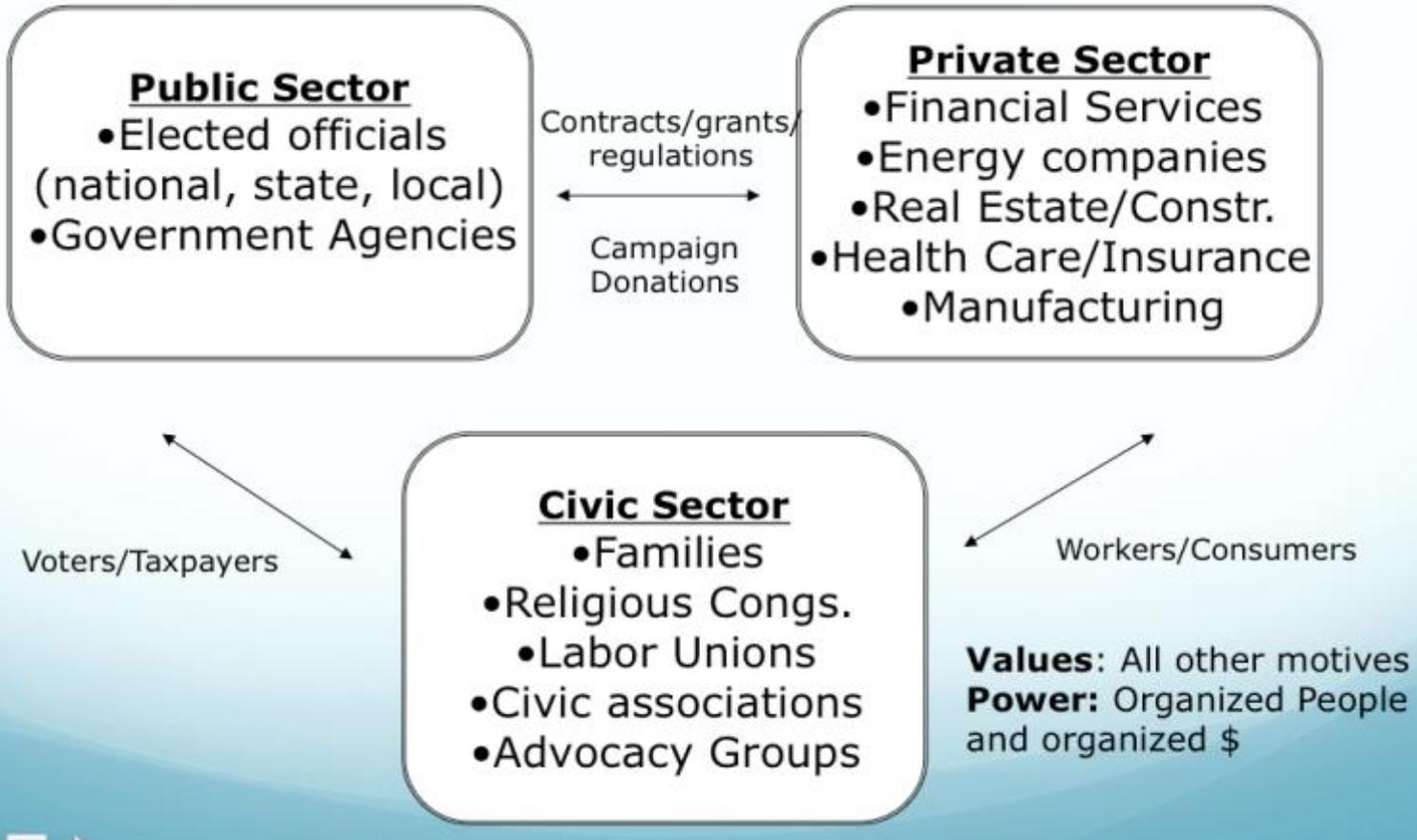
Ways of Understanding Power

- Dominant Power
 - Unilateral (one-way)
 - Zero-sum
 - Power “over”
- Relational Power
 - Multi-lateral
 - Increasing
 - Power “with”

Context for Community Organizing

Values: administration/control
Power: Position

Values: Profit
Power: Organized \$



Forming a Social Justice Group/ Ministry

- Most people are moved to action through individual conversations and through identifying their own self interest in an issue
- Who is already providing leadership in the community?
- Ask them out for coffee and ask open ended questions. A good rule of thumb is to talk 30% of the time and listen 70% of the time
- Invite everyone to a kick off meeting

Qualities of Healthy Groups

From SONG

- A magnet for involving people (meals, meaningful content, good relationships, fun)
- Shared values and principles
- Shared decision making, leadership development, political analysis
- Skill building for everyone
- Group responsibility and accountability
- Clear communication and transparency
- Timely and principled conflict resolution
- Attention to mind, body, and spirit

The Toolbox

In Person Meetings

- Personal meeting
 - No need to travel to Washington DC, be tenacious about setting up an in-district meeting

Tips for an effective personal meeting:

- **Know your legislator**, including his/her committee membership, legislative record, and priority issues.
- **Understand yourself**, including your own influence and the ability to communicate that. *(Are you a clergy person? The chair of your church's Justice Committee? A community leader? The director of a service agency? A member of a civic association? How many people do you influence?)*
- Be prepared to **share directly your concerns** with the legislator as well as to respond to any questions he/she may ask.
- **Send a thank you letter** to the legislator , even if the meeting does not go well.
- Advertise what you're doing

Make A Call

- **Capitol switchboard at (202) 224-3121.** Ask for the office you want by name.
- **White House comment line at (202) 456-1111** or submit a comment through the website.
- Participate in “Call-In” days organized by the Office of Public Witness

Write a Letter

Tips for writing a letter to your legislator:

- **Be brief** (a few sentences; a few paragraphs at most).
- Be polite.
- Draw on **personal experience**
- Ask questions.
- **Follow up** after they respond (with another written letter).

Send an Email

- Make sure you include your mailing address so they know you're a constituent
- The OPW's online action center contains many sample letters on various topics
- It is unlikely you'll receive a personal response from a legislator or staff, but be assured your opinion has been recorded

Amplify your Voice: Get Published

Tips for Op-Eds

- Keep it between **500-750 words**.
- **Get to the point** quickly.
- **Anticipate the counterarguments** and refute them with facts.
- Have **at least one memorable phrase** for them to easily quote.
- Close on a **powerful and thought-provoking** note.
- Use **stories and personal experience**.
- Ask clergy to Co-Sign

Tips for Letters to the Editor

- Submit your letter quickly – **less than three days** after the appearance of the original article to which you are responding.
- **Always refer to the original article** by title and date.
- **Keep it concise** by only making one point.
- Use firsthand experience, but also sound reasoning.



Social Media

Twitter

- Almost every legislator in the House and Senate has a **Twitter handle** (username).
- To tweet your legislator, you will need to put the "@" symbol followed by their twitter handle with NO SPACES. Twitter only allows 140 characters (including spaces) to be communicated, therefore keep brevity in mind.

Facebook

- Most legislators have a **Facebook page**, which has a "wall" that can be written on.
- Find a status that you want to share with others, and click the "share" button beneath the post. You can then publish it to your own profile or send it to a friend.

A Relationship with Your MOC

Ongoing contact with MOC and Staff

- In district meetings
- OP Ed's
- Greeting at public appearances
- Introductions to influential members in your community

Example:

- Criminal Justice Reform in 2015-2016

Deep Dive: Town Halls

- Goals:
 - Build a relationship with your MoC
 - Get them on the public record making a commitment to a justice agenda
 - Build stronger relationships in your community through the process of organizing a Town Hall question series

Town Halls

- Preparation:
 - Find out when your MoC's next public town hall is
 - Send out a notice of the town hall to your group and get commitments
 - Prepare several questions heads of time
 - 5-10 questions
 - Unified theme

Town Halls: Sample Question

- “As a person of faith, I am concerned with the dignity of all people, including those like my family members who rely on Medicare. You have gone one record opposing the privatization of Medicare, can you commit here and now to voting “NO” on Bill x that would cut Medicare?”

At the Town Hall

- Get there early, get organized and spread out
- Make sure your voices are heard by asking good questions – raise your hand early and often
- Stick with the prepared list of questions
- Be polite and persistent but demand real answers
- Don't give up the mic until you're satisfied with the answer
- Make a recording with your smartphone, but familiarize yourself with state and local laws that govern recording

After the Town Hall

- Reach out to media
- Traditional press can be contacted with a media advisory, but you can also approach reporters present at the town hall
 - Tag reporters on Twitter like this:
 - *.@reporter I was at Rep. Smith's town hall in Springfield today. Large crowd, I have video and am happy to chat*

Stay Informed

The PC(USA) Office of Public Witness in Washington, DC, maintains several online platforms to better serve you.

Website: <http://www.pcusa.org/washington>

Blog: <http://officeofpublicwitness.blogspot.com>

Find your elected officials:

<http://capwiz.com/pcusa/dbq/officials/>

Social Media:

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