

## **“Bringing Advocacy Home”: A Local Grassroots/tops Mobilizing Menu for Supportive Housing Stakeholders**

Here are some simple strategies for advocating locally on federal policy issues affecting supportive housing:

- 1. Schedule a visit with your representative’s staff at his/her local office at any time, or with the representative him/herself when he/she is in the home district/state.**

Effective federal advocacy campaigns

### **Other handouts from CSH you might find helpful:<sup>1</sup>**

- The Structure of Congressional Offices lays out the typical staffing patterns and responsibilities for both the DC and local offices that Representatives and Senators maintain.
  - 10 Steps to an Effective Lobby Visit explains how to execute a lobby visit from preparation through follow through.
  - Where feasible, CSH maintains up-to-date Talking Points on high priority federal policy issues.
- 2. Get other groups involved in the issue, especially “grasstops” that you know have the ear of the target.**

The more local constituents a target and his staff sees on an issue, the better! Strategize especially around how to mobilize local “grasstops” – organizations and individuals that are seen within the community, and by the target, as opinion leaders—to join in advocating on your issue. Examples include the local housing authority, chamber of commerce, United Way, city economic development agency, churches, prominent local individual businesses and banks, and law firms (especially if they do pro bono work in the housing/homelessness area). It’s worth implementing medium and long-term strategies for building relationships with these grasstops—these relationships can pay off in other venues as well. Ultimately, you want them to attend meetings with you and write letters of support, (tip: give them a copy of the letter you wrote as an example, or, better yet, find out if they would prefer you to draft something for their review and signature.)

- 3. Invite the Congressman/woman to your organization for a tour of supportive housing.**

We all know that supportive housing projects and their tenants speak eloquently for themselves. And rare is the Congressional representative who does not want to know

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<sup>1</sup> All CSH advocacy handouts can be obtained either from our website [www.csh.org](http://www.csh.org) (under the Take Action button) or from Jenice Jones-Kibby at [jenice.kibby@csh.org](mailto:jenice.kibby@csh.org), Buck Bagot at [buckb@devinegong.com](mailto:buckb@devinegong.com), or Jonathan Harwitz at [jonathan.harwitz@csh.org](mailto:jonathan.harwitz@csh.org).

about great work that is being done in his/her home district or state (especially if there is some credit to be claimed and a good photo op to be had). While there are many tips and assistance that the Policy Unit and others at CSH National can offer around planning and executing a site visit, here are just a couple points to consider:

- ***Plan the event!***

While supportive housing and its residents are the interventions best spokespeople, productive site visits don't just happen.

- ***Think about whether you want to capitalize on the site visit as a media outreach opportunity*** (more on media below)

Politicians love photo opportunities!! The target may have a press secretary who will handle press coverage and photography for him or her. You should also have and use a press release related to the event.

- Make sure that the target and/or his staff understands the direct connection between success on your federal policy issue(s) and the great outcomes they are seeing.

While any site visit is likely to strengthen your relationship with the target, the most effective tours result in the Member and his/her staff walking away with more than a happy feeling about a pretty building and some heartwarming stories. Rather, a first-class advocacy-focused tour makes the target realize that the ongoing success of the project he/she just saw—and the likelihood that his/her community will be able to develop more such projects—depends on his/her “championing” of a particular policy.

***Other handouts from CSH you might find helpful:***

- Telling Our Stories is designed to help supportive housing tenants, providers, and others ensure that their compelling stories have maximum impact on policymakers.

**4. Generate media coverage of your issue in local papers, television, and on the internet.**

*Newspaper coverage* can range from human interest stories to letter to the editor, Op-eds, and editorials directly on the issue in question. The extent of the coverage you can generate will depend on your existing relationship with newspaper staff and the other competing events/issues of the day.

*Television coverage* is generally limited to human interest stories, with the exception of local public television and cable channels.

*Internet coverage* is an area which CSH is only beginning to explore. We are interested in local stakeholders' experiences with this medium.

***Other handouts from CSH you might find helpful:***

- Tips on Media Outreach offers “Dos” and “Don’ts” around seeking various kinds of media coverage to move your advocacy agenda

**5. Plan a “speak out” or other accountability event with the target.**

Speak-outs or accountability sessions can both inform and public pressure elected officials of the concerns of particular constituent groups. Such events can range in size from 5-10 people to more than 200 (with corresponding increases in the complexity of execution!). *Note:* Because of their public nature, speak outs can make a target feel “cornered,” an outcome that may be precisely the desired effect, but can also have negative ramifications; therefore, such events should be carefully considered and planned.

**Other CSH handouts from CSH you might find helpful**

- Planning and Executing a Grassroots Federal Policy “Speak Out” provides detailed tips on organizing a grassroots accountability event.