

Grass Roots – How to Mobilize the Masses

National Health Freedom Coalition

National Conference for Health Freedom Advocates, September 10 – 12

Launie Sorem and Jerri Johnson

WHAT IS GRASS ROOTS MOBILIZATION?

Building support among the public for social change or to prevent change. May be leveraged into change at the legislature in the courts, in the economic system, or other areas of society. It is developing awareness of an issue among large numbers of people in order to support an action.

IMPORTANCE OF GRASS ROOTS MOBILIZATION IN PASSING LEGISLATION

Increases power of a movement. The more you mobilize, the bigger the movement. Mobilizing the public increases the energy and power of the movement.

Risky to introduce controversial bill without major support from many groups and the public. Takes a lot to pass a bill and can't just do it because you have some good contacts.

Expands your influence. Reaching more people who care about your issue will inevitably come across people with good contacts, with influence, with power. You don't know those people till you start building the process.

Brings in people with expertise. You need all kinds of skills to pass any legislation which is far-reaching or controversial. You need lobbying, website, database management, drafting, public speaking, writing, media, etc. As you reach more people, those people will materialize to help you.

Lets legislators know this is an important issue to the public. They pay attention when they get 4 or 5 calls from their own constituents – then they know it is a “really big bill”.

Helps to educate legislators on the issues when they hear it from their own people – not just lobbyists. Health freedom bills are about real live people issues – people wanting to have control over their own health care and healing choices.

Lays the groundwork for future work that is important to the natural healing community. It has been said that the natural healing community is the largest unorganized community in the country. It is time that we found our voice and started to exert influence over the things that we care about. Once a network of communication and a base of respect as a constituency has been established, your group has the capability of taking on future challenges that you care about.

GOALS IN DOING GRASS ROOTS MOBILIZATION

Reach lots of people
Educate them on the issues
Mobilize people to action
Ultimately make the changes you want to see happen

STRATEGIES IN BUILDING A GRASS-ROOTS MOVEMENT

Develop Your Message

Can't effectively contact anyone till you know what you want to say to them!

The Problem

What is the problem that needs to be solved? Most important part of message. If don't understand the problem well, won't communicate it well. If don't communicate it, will never motivate people to care and take action. Can't just tell them you want to pass this bill. They need to care about it. Example: Practitioners prosecuted for "practice of medicine without a license" or "practicing outside of standard of care" How does this make them vulnerable? How does that affect their practice? How does that affect your access as a consumer?

The Solution

What have you developed to address this problem? Is it a proposed legislative bill or something else? Exactly what does the bill do? Why did you choose this solution and not other solutions that may have been considered?

The Strategy

How are you going to go about accomplishing this solution? What is your group doing to make this happen? What will be the steps involved and what is the current update?

What You Can Do to Help

Make it clear what you want people to do – now and/or in the future. Do you want them to join your steering committee? Become a member of your organization? Help spread the word? Call their legislator? Donate money? This will change as time goes on but at any given time, don't give a message without empowering them to help. If nothing else, they can always sign up with their contact info for future action.

IDENTIFY WHO YOU SHOULD MOBILIZE AND HOW TO REACH THEM

Consumers of holistic healing services, products and information:

Most important constituency is not practitioners but consumers. Keep your campaign focused not on the right to practice, but on the right of consumers to have access to the healing products, services and information that they deem best for their own health. Legislators may be wary about practitioner groups bringing bills to the capitol to give them special rights to practice, and often reflexively react negatively to giving them special rights. But they are much more receptive to their constituents telling them they want to make their own choices about their health. Even if they don't understand or respect alternative healing methods, they do usually respect your right to make that choice for yourself.

Practitioners and suppliers of holistic services, products, and information:
Practitioner groups have a special stake in health freedom legislation if it deals with their right to practice legally. But always emphasize that your legislation is not a restrictive solution that is going to take away rights from other practitioners.

Network with groups of people already organized who share your concerns

- Consumer groups which share a philosophy of natural, holistic ways of life, .i.e. shoppers at organic groceries or health food stores, environmental groups
- Consumer groups who have a certain disability or chronic illness .i.e. people with chronic fatigue, environmental illness, mercury toxicity from vaccines or dental fillings
- Practitioner groups already organized in your state, such as holistic doctors or nurses, herbalists, homeopaths, massage therapists, etc.
- Practitioner groups not organized but who might take this opportunity to coalesce if some leaders get motivated by your goals
- Schools which prepare their students to be practitioners who will be affected by your legislation

HOW TO BUILD A NETWORK WITH SUPPORTIVE ORGANIZATIONS

- Contact members of the board or executive director. Set up a meeting to explain how the issues affect their organization and how your solution can help them.
- Ask to make a presentation to their board
- Educate their board on the issues and your solution and strategy
- Communicate to the board how they can help
- Can you address their whole group at a meeting? Put an article in their newsletter? Can they email all of their contacts? Will they take an official stand in support of your position or bill? Will they contribute money? Will they mobilize their membership to get involved, help, or call their legislators?

BUILD YOUR DATABASE OF INTERESTED PEOPLE

Set up a database with fields that will be useful: Name, address, phone, EMAIL, possibly also profession, donations, interest in helping, skills.

Use every opportunity to add more names to database. People who have indicated support, and also people you feel should stay informed, whether they have indicated support or not.

Look for groups that you can add – try to add whole memberships if you can. If not, at least the leaders and ask them to pass on information to their members.

Have booths at wholistic fairs and exposes to reach more people.

Always ask for email addresses. These are the most effective means of reaching a large number people quickly and cheaply.

LEVERAGE THIS ENTHUSIASM OF LARGE NUMBERS OF PEOPLE

- Don't just educate people – empower them to take action
- Always ask people to sign up and get involved. Identify their skills and interests
- Use your database to keep them informed and updated on what's happening and what they can do next
- Make it easy for them to communicate with their legislator or other key people. Give them written information that is succinct: The Problem – The Solution – What I want You to Do (support this bill...) Give the Bill Number and Name and legislative Sponsor
- Tell people how to find their legislators name and contact info
 - Here is the number to call to find your legislators name and phone number
 - Here is the email formula, i.e. Senator.firstname.lastname.state.FL

TARGET YOUR GRASS ROOTS MOBILIZING TO KEY LEGISLATIVE DISTRICTS

- Determine which committees will hear your bill first in the House and Senate. These are the most important policy committees, and the legislators who are members of these committees are the experts on your issue. They are the ones who will lead the debate on the full floor of the House or Senate.
- Determine the key leaders on these committees – Who is the chair and vice chair and minority leader? The chair decides whether your bill will get a hearing. Find out which legislators are most influential on these committees.
- These legislators are the most likely to influence your bill behind the scenes or when the bill gets to the floor. Other legislators will look to them for their expertise on your issue.
- These leaders need to know that a lot of their own constituents care about this issue. They need to hear from lots of people in their own district.
- Find the legislative districts of these key leaders and develop the constituency to support the bill. Go to the district and find people who care about your issues. Use your database to identify people in these districts.
- Build your database of people in this district. Contact individuals who support your bill and ask them to help mobilize their district for this cause.
- Set up a meeting of these key legislative leaders and their constituents
- Ask the identified leaders to set up a home meeting or a meeting in a church or community center with their legislators. At this meeting, have your lobbyist or a member of your steering committee who can articulate the issues well, present the message: The Problem and Your Solution, and exactly what the bill does. Then have the constituents share their stories about how the issue impacts their own lives and why they care about maintaining access to the healing services of their choice.

- Ask this group to get lots of constituents to contact this legislator. These legislators need to understand very clearly: the Problem, How your bill addresses the problem, How your solution avoids harming other interest groups. For example, in the case of health freedom bills, they need to understand how your bill protects your ability to make choices while still protecting the public from harm.

KEEP YOUR MESSAGE POSITIVE AND YOUR RELATIONSHIPS VIBRANT!

Effective networking recognizes the importance of people-to-people interactions and relationships. Maintain contact with your contacts. Keep them updated. Respect them for their part that they play in the world. Affirm them for their contributions. Avoid putting down any philosophy or group in the process of promoting your philosophy or group. Don't criticize conventional medicine in order to play up holistic healing. Rather, emphasize the importance of each person being able to make their own choices. Build a reputation as a strong, determined, committed, and positive group of people who are making the world a better place. Building a strong grass-roots base will make all the difference in your ability to succeed in making the social changes that are important to you.