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# 10 Reasons Why Advocacy Programs Fail!

By  
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## **Another One Bites The Dust**

Time and time again I heard the horror stories from associations that have started advocacy programs only to have them fail within the first year. The reason they were not successful can be attributable to one or more of the key principles that must be in place in order for any program to succeed.

**Reason #1: No Vision Statement .** Everything that we do requires a purpose, a need, in order for a clear understanding to be developed of what it is that we want to accomplish. This vision must be put in writing and accepted by the policy making authority. It can be as simple as several words or it can be 2 to 3 sentences. It describes what the program will become. No vision, no direction.

**Reason #2: No Mission Statement.** Ok, the same principles apply here as they do with a “vision statement”? The mission statement is more precise and builds on the vision statement. It breaks the parts down into manageable portions. They are measurable and create accountability. The “mission statement” must be in writing and accepted by the policy making authority.

**Reason #3: No Goals and Objectives.** Without goals and objectives there is no direction. Its like being in a boat without a rudder. You keep moving but go nowhere. Goals are the building blocks created from the mission statement. Objectives are the steps used in reaching developed goals which in turn complete the mission and allows the program to become the vision that everyone supports. Goal and objectives must be in writing, measurable , and create accountability.

**Reason #4: No Advocacy Plan .** The advocacy plan is the written plan that incorporates the “vision statement”, “mission statement”, and the “goals and objectives. It is the advocacy road map for the association or business that brings credibility and accountability for the program. No plan, no program.

**Reason #5: No Budget.** How can you implement a plan, bring people together, and execute objectives when there is no realistic budget available for the advocacy program? Time and time again, this very important component is overlooked or the funding doesn't reflect the political realities of the legislative environment. Budget responsibly. Don't be cheap!

**Reason #6: No Support.** When there is no buy in, the program will not work. If committee members do not feel that they have the support of the policy makers there will be less then satisfactory work accomplished.

The committee members will cease being committee members and the program ceases to exist. Have buy in from leadership or don't do the program.

**Reason #7: No Training.** Seems reasonable that volunteers, members, anyone associated with the advocacy program should have a basic understanding of what it means to be an advocate; of the environment that they will be working within; and how are they to interact with the public policy makers. Your chances for success will be greatly enhanced if you take time to train and give your people the tools and understanding of the process to do their job. Do not delay educate them today.

**Reason #8: No Professional Assistance.** When your car doesn't run you take it to a mechanic. When you have a toothache, you go to the dentist. When you have an advocacy program you hire a advocacy professional—A lobbyist. In order to maximize your opportunities to assure that your advocacy program is a success, using a lobbyist is a must. These professionals know the legislative environment, political environment, and the members of the legislature that you must interact with in order to have a successful legislative session. Do not overlook the value of a professional lobbyist. Again don't be cheap.

**Reason #9: Unrealistic Expectations.** Many associations and businesses who become involved in the political process have unrealistic expectations as to the accomplishments that they can expect with their programs. They are guided by established association or business practices that work in the real world. The assumption is that the political decision is obtained in the same manner as any other business decision. Weight the facts, determine the direction and the resources necessary and bring about the desired end. Simple Right! WRONG! The political process is a culture unto its own. What works in the real world doesn't work in the political world. This is an environment that requires interacting with all bodies that are affected and finding ways in which negotiation and compromise can prevail. Mediocrity is the standard. The status quo is the norm.

**Reason #10: Lack of Commitment.** Entering the political arena requires careful consideration. The process is ruthless, demanding, complicated, expensive and unfair. It is not for those faint of heart. If you cannot make the commitment for the long haul, I would encourage you not to become involved. Building your status and clout in the political arena means a long term commitment. If you can't do this, don't get involved.

### **Do It Now!**

If any of the 10 points is overlooked or not supported the chance for a successful advocacy program is diminished. Incorporate these principles, follow them closely and you can be guaranteed a dynamic, successful, results oriented program. Happy Travels