

# Guide to Youth Advocacy





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# Introduction

**A**round the world, the future of emerging economies depends on their youth. For progress to take hold, young people must play an active role in advancing democratic and market-oriented reforms. This participation comes in many forms—including voting in elections and engaging in entrepreneurial activity—but it most importantly requires that youth become involved in decision-making processes. When youth have the ability to contribute their ideas and opinions in a meaningful way, they gain a stake in the process, which in turn solidifies their acceptance of, and reliance on, democratic dialogue.

Young people tend to be the most active participants in movements for democratic change, but they often lack the tools necessary to translate their enthusiasm and desire for change into concrete policy proposals. As a result, protests and other forms of activism are often the main avenue for expressing their opinions. While such activism can have a sparking effect for discussion around an issue, very rarely does it lead to direct policy response input. In the worst scenarios, over-reliance on protesting can lead to violent responses from authorities and the sidelining of youth actors. If young people around the world want to be heard, they must know how to move from being protesters to becoming reformers.

Youth engagement in decision-making provides substantial benefits. Young people can drive innovation

in policy by injecting new ideas and solutions into the policy process. These new attitudes not only have advantages for developing policies that directly affect youth, but for other topics as well. Youth are generally the first group to adopt new technologies and behaviors. For these reasons, factoring in the attitudes, expectations, and behavior of youth is crucial for the development of sustainable policy solutions.

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Of course, engaging youth in policy advocacy campaigns can be challenging. For starters, “youth” is a broad term that encompasses young people from different social and economic backgrounds, and its age boundaries are not well defined. Obviously, this diverse group is not going to share the same views on all issues. Additionally, while it is typically easier to mobilize young people, maintaining continued participation is difficult because advocacy takes time and effort.

This guide is designed to help you, leaders of youth organizations (or organizations that wish to support youth), as well as intrapreneurs who wish to develop youth campaigns within their organizations. For over thirty years, the Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE) has implemented proven advocacy strategies and capacity-building programs for private sector groups, including for youth, around the world to improve the quality of democratic and economic governance. Based on this deep experience, CIPE highlights best practices for organizing youth to engage in advocacy initiatives.

# What is Advocacy?

**A**dvocacy refers to the act of a person or organization trying to convince another person or group that they should support an idea or take a certain action. Advocacy involves promoting an issue or cause that you care about. More specifically, as the term is used throughout this guide, advocacy is a group effort focused on building support for issues or addressing concerns in an open and transparent manner. It is the effort of representing the views of members of a particular group—in this case youth—by making their positions known to decision-makers at the community, local, regional, or national level.

## Advocacy Goals:

- Changing the policies or programs of any institution
- Putting issues on the public agenda
- Providing solutions to issues of public interest
- Building public support for issues and solutions
- Making the case for/against a public position or policy

## Lobbying VS Advocacy

Because advocacy draws its strength from being a group effort and is conducted in a public and transparent manner, it is important to understand that lobbying is not always the same as advocating. Generally, lobbying means trying to influence the decision of a public official with regards to a narrow issue. The effort is aimed at securing a benefit for an individual, company, or on behalf of a very small group. Lobbying can have a negative connotation and is at times associated with “cozy deals” and preferential treatment.

Advocacy on the other hand focuses on an issue that impacts a large group. It involves an issue or cause that many people care about. Rather than representing an individual interest, advocacy campaigns are broad-based and can be characterized as “the voice of citizens” or “the voice of students.”

## What is Advocacy?

At its heart, advocacy is about raising awareness to achieve a goal—to pass a new law, to change the status quo, or to effectively implement an existing policy. Think broadly about the communities that you are part of—such as your university or municipality—and the policies or issues that you wish would receive more attention. The goal of advocacy is to influence decision-makers in your communities and organizations in order to make a difference in areas of shared concern.

While the specific topics that are most important to youth will vary from country to country based on the local context, there are a number of areas to which youth groups and other youth-supporting organizations should pay attention. Education is universally important since it is the foundation for ensuring youth are equipped with the necessary skills to succeed. Policies that govern how youth participate in the economy are also vital as youth can only benefit and thrive when they have access to economic opportunity. Other topics that concern the well-being of youth may include health, safety, and security.

### **Examples of Youth-Focused Advocacy Objectives:**

- Improve start-up funding sources for young entrepreneurs
- Increase national support for economic education
- Reduce the number of unemployed youth

# The Advocacy Process

In the same way that the country context will influence the policies and issues that are considered important, the shape of the advocacy campaign will also vary depending on local conditions. The practice of advocacy campaigning constantly changes and is subject to local realities. However, this six-step process represents the necessary actions that should be taken to conduct an effective campaign.

1. Form an advocacy task-force
2. Select your advocacy issues and research possible solutions
3. Develop your overall advocacy strategy
4. Develop targeted advocacy materials
5. Apply strategic tools
6. Follow-up and evaluate

## Form an Advocacy Task-force

Creating a task-force is an effective means of assigning responsibility for advocacy actions and tracking their progress throughout the lifetime of the campaign. The task-force should be representative of the diverse group for which you are advocating. For instance, if you are advocating to change a particular policy at your local university, then gather students from diverse backgrounds (in terms of gender, age, field of study, etc.) to be part of the task-force. Fair representation is important for ensuring the campaign does not devolve into a lobbying effort for individual special interests. Members of the task-force must be dedicated to the cause, be knowledgeable with respect to policy issues affecting the group, and understand the policymaking process. They must also be capable of working as a team, and have excellent communication skills as they will be the main points of contact regarding the advocacy effort.

The practice of advocacy campaigning is constantly changing and subject to local realities.

### Select Issues and Research Possible Solutions

One of the main challenges in advocacy is that there are always too many problems and insufficient resources (time, money, and people) to tackle them all. Identifying the importance and relevance of the various issues affecting your groups is a helpful way to prioritize problems and focus resources on solving the most pressing matters.

Effective ways of selecting priority issues include conducting surveys, holding focus groups, and hosting discussions. To gain a better understanding of the issues affecting youth, conduct these activities with groups such as students and young entrepreneurs. After gathering surveys and feedback, compile the results and determine which concerns are most widely held by the group. Starting at the bottom of the list, eliminate the least important issues until you have sufficient resources to address each topic. Even if this means you are left with only one issue area, your chances for success will be much higher focusing on one area than if you try to cover too much ground with limited means.

In addition to identifying problems, it is important to also provide possible solutions. Decision-makers are generally more amenable to advocacy efforts if they include suggestions of recommended actions to take that would help solve the problem. When developing solutions you should keep in mind the following questions:

- Why is this important?
- What are the positive and negative consequences of the proposal?
- What specific law, regulation, or issue needs to be changed?
- What language and wording would be most appropriate and effective?

Proposed solutions should be specific and supported by in-depth research. It can be tempting to skip this element, but it is important to ensure you are adequately prepared to discuss the topic before engaging with decision-makers and the general public. Failing to conduct sufficient research frequently backfires when campaign representatives are caught ill-prepared to talk about the specifics of their recommendations or support them with credible evidence.



CIPE supported the **Centre for Development and Enterprise (CDE)** in South Africa to identify obstacles facing youth entrepreneurs in Soweto and help improve the business climate for them to start businesses. To better understand the situation, CDE surveyed 25 entrepreneurs under the age of 35 in Soweto. Based on the findings, CDE selected priority issues and developed policy recommendations. The proposed policy recommendations were specific and included four areas:

- Young entrepreneurs need to organize themselves to take part in the policy process and help shape policies that determine how a business achieves formality as well as policies that govern labor legislation and address infrastructure improvements.
- To combat crime, the private sector should organize itself and work together with the police to form Business Improvement Districts (BIDs). BIDs are partnerships in which property and business owners in a defined area elect to make a collective contribution to the maintenance, development, and marketing/promotion of their commercial district.
- Soweto businesses should undertake outreach activities to communicate to the public the quality and uniqueness of local business.
- Business support organizations can do more to help local entrepreneurs in Soweto, including working with smaller business support organizations such as the Afro Hairdressing and Beauty Employers Associations of South Africa or the Soweto Tourism Association.

CDE based its advocacy priorities on research findings, and produced a short report with policy recommendations. It distributed the report to over 2,000 national, provincial, and local government leaders and business leaders. Read more about this case study: [www.cipe.org/publications/detail/supporting-young-entrepreneurs-soweto](http://www.cipe.org/publications/detail/supporting-young-entrepreneurs-soweto).

## Develop an Advocacy Strategy

### IDENTIFY KEY LEVERAGE POINTS

To better allocate resources and increase the chance of success, it is important to understand how the decision-making process works and at which points the most leverage can be attained. First, identify whether the issue is handled at the local, state/provincial, or national level, and then determine which body or organization would care most about the issue being addressed. At the local level, this may be the school board or the mayor's office, for example.

The task-force should then analyze the specific decision-making process related to the issue to determine how policies are made. In doing so, task-force members will gain an understanding of the points of leverage as well as the key people they must influence in order to achieve the advocacy goals. A list or chart that outlines the process and identifies key leverage points should be maintained and updated as necessary.

#### Important Advocacy Questions:

- What needs to be changed?
- Who can make changes?
- How much change should be made?
- When should changes be made?
- How can the case for change be made?
- How will the changes be implemented?
- How should time/money be budgeted?

### ANALYZE STAKEHOLDERS

In addition to the policymakers and officials responsible for enacting reform, there are other stakeholders that the task-force must identify. Stakeholders can be defined as any person, organization, or body that has a connection to the issue for which you are advocating. Anyone who will be directly affected (positively or negatively) is an obvious stakeholder. However, be sure to consider anyone who has an indirect stake in the success or failure of your campaign as well. Since policymakers are often influenced by interest groups, it is important that the task-force identify the key groups connected to the issue.

Once the stakeholders are identified, determine where they stand on the issue and why. Will they be proponents or opponents of the recommended solution? Discover why they hold those positions and whether they can be convinced otherwise. This information can generally be found in publications or statements they make as well as any websites they maintain. If necessary, schedule meetings to discuss the topic with the stakeholders to gauge their positions. When conducting

a stakeholder analysis it is important to take note of the tools and resources that each can bring to the table. Doing so will help to identify possible allies and preemptively address any obstacles that may arise.

### BUDGETING

Another important part of a strategy is budgeting for resources—both for time and money. When developing an advocacy strategy, you must consider what task-force members need, such as a plan for how they will move forward, who will do what, how often they will meet and where, and how to pay for expenses such as costs for renting space for events or printing materials. Young people usually have competing priorities (studying, jobs, community service, and other school and family commitments), so carefully setting aside time is crucial. Youth organizations usually have limited funding, so budgeting for activities is also key.

With a large youth population in Pakistan, the **Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI)** saw a need to create a National Youth Policy (NYP) incorporating economic and entrepreneurial content advocated by and for youth. Recognizing that involving youth in policy reforms is one of the keys to developing sound youth economic empowerment recommendations, ICCI engaged with diverse stakeholders. Over 130 representatives from the youth community, drawn from business, civil society, government, and academic institutions, participated in formulating recommendations on youth entrepreneur-friendly policies. Based on their feedback, ICCI led forums with private sector representatives and top officials from the Ministry of Youth Affairs to advocate for the recommendations. For more information about how ICCI developed stakeholder relationships and led its advocacy process, read CIPE's Feature Service article about this initiative: [www.cipe.org/sites/default/files/publication-docs/National%20Youth%20Policy%20Reform%20in%20Pakistan.pdf](http://www.cipe.org/sites/default/files/publication-docs/National%20Youth%20Policy%20Reform%20in%20Pakistan.pdf).

## Develop Targeted Advocacy Materials

### MESSAGE DEVELOPMENT

In order to advocate successfully, appropriate messages have to be developed. These messages aim to strengthen the commitment of original supporters, win the support of those who are undecided, and earn the support of some individuals and groups who were initially opposed. Because of these different goals, it is important to make sure that the advocacy tools you select are tailored to the target audience.

Effective messages will be specific to each group and contain an appropriate call to action. The length of each message is important to consider as well. In some cases short, straightforward summaries of the issue work effectively. At other times, longer and more persuasive arguments are warranted. Before making any messages public, it is a good idea to test them on friends and colleagues to ensure they are properly crafted.

## SELECT THE PROPER TOOLS

Success in advocacy hinges on swaying public opinion and influencing key decision-makers. These groups will have varying degrees of knowledge about the topic at hand and therefore it is important to use appropriate tools to gain their support.

The goal of swaying public opinion is to ensure that a large enough group of people are familiar and engaged with the issue to spur public officials to action. In order to do this, it is often necessary to educate the public on the importance of the topic and keep their attention through continued engagement. There are several ways you can share your opinion on specific issues:

- Hold public informational events or attend town-hall meetings
- Create a Facebook group advocating for the issue
- Use Twitter to share your message
- Publish op-ed pieces in your local newspapers, magazines, or blogs
- Appear on local television or radio shows

If you are dealing with public policies, the best tool for communicating your message to policymakers is the issue brief. Since policymakers and administrators typically have a limited amount of time to read comprehensive publications, short one- or two-page briefs are the most effective way to

convey key points. In addition to being short, issue briefs explain why the issue is important and what needs to be done in the short term to address the problem. Propose a specific recommendation that provides a clear solution to the problem and, when possible, present supporting data in graphs, charts, and other visual representations.

### Effective Messages...

- Appeal to the audience's self-interest.
- Are convincing and concise.
- Indicate what steps need to be taken.
- Provide answers to anticipated questions.

In 2013, for the first time in the history of Argentina, 16-year-olds were allowed to vote in elections. The **Center of Implementation of Public Policies Promoting Equity and Growth (CIPPEC)** in Buenos Aires saw this as an opportunity to engage teenage voters and candidates in policy dialogue during the country's 2013 legislative campaign. Given that younger generations are tech-savvy, CIPPEC, with CIPE support, led multiple social media campaigns to educate and involve the newly-eligible voters:

- Using both Facebook and Twitter as platforms, CIPPEC actively embraced social media in its communications efforts. Both platforms were used to share educational videos and promote online debates and publications.
- CIPPEC launched the first Google Hangout initiative for young voters in Argentina by hosting a series of online debates in the run up to the legislative election. Young voters had the opportunity to participate in the online debates by sending questions and comments to candidates. This was the first time that Google Hangout was used to hold a debate among candidates in Argentina.

Additional details are on CIPPEC's website at [www.cippec.org](http://www.cippec.org).

A **CIPE-Atlas Corps Think Tank LINKS Fellowship** participant from Syria, who was the executive manager of a Syrian think tank, became an intrapreneur at his organization after completing the fellowship. The participant learned first-hand from his host organization, the Project on Middle East Democracy (POMED), about the importance of producing quality policy analysis and reports as tools to educate constituents. In particular, the participant discovered the usefulness and popularity of POMED's newsletter, POMED Wire. As soon as he returned to his home think tank, he began producing a similar newsletter summarizing issues of interest to his organization. The newsletter was distributed to over 3,300 individuals (both within and outside Syria) on a weekly basis and became a key tool in the organization's communications strategy. He also began a video interview series with thought leaders on the Syrian transition. The participant also implemented a structured quality control system to review all of the Syrian think tank's products, based on knowledge gained from his time at POMED.

## Apply Strategic Tools

### EDUCATE AND MOBILIZE YOUR NETWORK

After the issue and proposed solutions have been identified, the next step is to start mobilizing your grassroots network. Begin by providing a summary of the results from the previous steps to those who participated in the surveys, interviews, and discussions. These results will show the participants that they are the ones who helped select the issues, thereby giving them ownership and increased motivation to become advocates themselves.

Once they are engaged, provide a short issue brief that explains why the subject is important and why you are advocating for the proposed solutions. Ask them to support the effort by educating their own networks of friends, family members, teachers, colleagues, professional groups, and others. The idea is to build broad involvement and representation throughout the community so that these networks can become powerful advocates for reform.

Once awareness of the issue has been raised, grassroots actors need to know how to strengthen the advocacy effort. The task-force should hold seminars that explain how the decision-making process works, why support from the network is crucial, and how they can contribute. Directing grassroots support will depend on your specific advocacy strategy. Some useful activities include making phone calls, using online-petitions like [change.org](http://change.org), or writing letters and emails to decision-makers in support of the campaign. Organizing social events that address the key issues and communicate your advocacy position are also a good way to spread the word and increase support.

### TARGET DECISION-MAKERS

While it is important to raise general awareness and build support among the public, the ultimate success or failure of an advocacy campaign rests with key decision-makers. Review your stakeholder analysis and identify those individuals or agencies that have the most influence over your issue. This will help to determine where to expend the most energy on direct advocacy efforts.

Be sure to provide the identified officials with useful advocacy materials and do your best to meet with them in-person to discuss pertinent issues. In addition to the officials, it is important to build good working relationships with their staff. Staff members provide officials with essential information and often act as gatekeepers. Building relationships with these individuals, based on frequent and useful communication, will increase your access to the official.

Regularly invite officials and their staff members to any events or discussions you hold and provide them with an issue brief in advance. Doing so will ensure that your efforts stay fresh in their minds. By the same token, keep track of the

official's schedule and attend relevant meetings and events when possible in order to participate in policy debates and voice your concerns.

To hold officials accountable, keep track of their statements, policy actions, or voting records and inform them that you are doing so. Publish this information and distribute it through your network and to other interested groups. Keeping their actions in the public eye is an effective method of increasing pressure on officials. Using fact sheets, email alerts, and leveraging social media are cost-efficient and timely methods of doing this.

Importantly, when an official is helpful or supports your cause, publicly thank them and recognize their actions. Host “recognition events” and send statements to the press and other outlets acknowledging their contribution to your efforts. Similarly, when a staff member for a legislator or other official is helpful, thank them in writing and provide a copy to their boss.

The **National Economic Research Center (CIEN)** in Guatemala formed an alliance called CINCOen5 (Five in 5) with five youth organizations to jointly advocate for sound economic, social, and security policies that deliver sustainable results. After identifying the pressing issues faced by youth (education, malnutrition, economy/employment, security, and infrastructure) and developing recommendations, CINCOen5 targeted key decision-makers to advocate for these changes. CINCOen5 approached the specific policymakers by:

- Submitting an educational reform proposal to the Deputy Minister of Education and members of the education committee in Congress;
- Leading roundtable discussions with local youth on malnutrition and engaging with local government officials from Guatemala City and five other cities;
- Presenting a nutrition reform proposal to the Parliamentary Front Against Hunger and Secretariat for Food Security and Nutrition;
- Leading roundtable discussions on employment and economy with local government officials from Guatemala City and five other cities; and
- Organizing a public meeting with the Deputy Minister of Economy to present an employment proposal, which was highlighted in Fox News Latino.

CINCOen5 was able to build relationships with key policymakers through these targeted campaigns.

Additional details are at: [www.facebook.com/Cincoen5](http://www.facebook.com/Cincoen5).

## **BUILD COALITIONS**

Advocacy campaigns draw strength from numbers. The greater the number of supporters and voters favoring a position, the more likely it is that decision-makers will listen. Advocacy, however, is a long and difficult process. Organizations that do not have the capacity or experience to run their own campaigns should partner with established organizations to implement advocacy efforts. This is why building coalitions is important.

Building coalitions with other groups or organizations who share an interest in your issue increases the visibility and credibility of advocacy efforts. By engaging other organizations in the campaign, you can also gain access to additional resources and supplement your own capacities with those of your partners. Easy connections to make include organizations similar to yours. Other youth groups and organizations that advocate on behalf of youth will have a natural interest in your cause and can generally support your efforts through their own networks and contributions.

Other organizations, not necessarily exclusively youth-focused, can also be strong partners. For example, a think tank that is part of a coalition can take on the responsibility of conducting in-depth research. As representative voices of the private sector, business associations and chambers of commerce can help rally the business community in support of your campaign.

When working with coalitions, it is important to assign a secretariat, or other coordinating authority, to ensure that all parties are working in concert. An unstructured babble of voices on the same subject is unlikely to impress lawmakers and regulators, so it is vital to synchronize the efforts of coalition members and present a unified voice. The assigned secretariat should have the authority to speak for the coalition and coordinate the actions of each member so that they complement one another and work toward the final goal.

## **WORK WITH THE MEDIA**

One of the best ways to shape public opinion on an issue and influence decision-makers is through traditional media or social media, specifically instances in which the media covers your advocacy campaign because it is deemed newsworthy. This is known as “earned media” and can be difficult to achieve. However, by fostering good relationships with journalists who are interested in your advocacy issues, it is possible.

A good place to start is having a member of the advocacy task-force who is familiar with the media develop and implement a media relations strategy. The purpose of this strategy is to ensure the media receives advance notice of campaign events and activities along with key materials that will be helpful for



their reporting. This can be done by emailing, tweeting, or calling the key media contacts, or posting the event information on Facebook.

Developing press kits that include fact sheets, background information, and other advocacy materials is also effective. By making it easy for the press to report on a topic and being a supportive partner, media professionals will come to respect your efforts.

### Follow-up and Evaluation

In order to ensure any advocacy campaign meets its goals and objectives, it is necessary to periodically assess the strategy. The task-force should convene at regular intervals during the campaign to review progress and determine whether past actions have been effective or adjustments are necessary. Such evaluations should consider the continued relevance of the issue and message as well as whether or not specific activities have proven effective. The policymaking environment is constantly changing and it is important to know that the correct message is still being conveyed to the proper audiences.

Before making any modifications, however, be sure to consider how the change might affect other components of the advocacy strategy. Changing the target audience may also necessitate a change in the message, for example. Any positive results that emerge from the assessment should be shared with supporters and partner organizations in order to demonstrate that the advocacy efforts are paying off.

Importantly, once the campaign has been evaluated, be sure to emphasize the successes rather than dwelling on failures. Advocacy is hard and setbacks are bound to occur. The task-force should recognize positive results and underscore key contributions from supporters and partners in order to sustain enthusiasm and attract new supporters.

#### Evaluation Questions Should Include:

- Has the issue changed in any way?
- Is further research required?
- Are we reaching the correct advocacy targets?
- Are the recipients responsive to our message?
- Does the message need to be fine-tuned?
- Are our advocacy tactics proving effective?

# Additional CIPE Resources

The following CIPE resources provide additional information on delivering advocacy campaigns. While these resources are aimed primarily at mature business organizations with well-developed advocacy capacities, youth advocates can gain useful ideas from them.

- How to Advocate Effectively: A Guidebook for Business Associations  
*[www.cipe.org/publications/detail/how-advocate-effectively-guidebook-business-associations](http://www.cipe.org/publications/detail/how-advocate-effectively-guidebook-business-associations)*
- Making the Most of Public-Private Dialogue: An Advocacy Approach  
*[www.cipe.org/publications/detail/making-most-public-private-dialogue-advocacy-approach](http://www.cipe.org/publications/detail/making-most-public-private-dialogue-advocacy-approach)*
- National Business Agenda Guidebook: The Voice of Business  
*[www.cipe.org/publications/detail/national-business-agenda-guidebook-voice-business](http://www.cipe.org/publications/detail/national-business-agenda-guidebook-voice-business)*
- National Business Agendas  
*[www.cipe.org/publications/detail/national-business-agendas](http://www.cipe.org/publications/detail/national-business-agendas)*
- Legislative Advisory Services Toolkit  
*[www.cipe.org/publications/detail/legislative-advisory-services-toolkit](http://www.cipe.org/publications/detail/legislative-advisory-services-toolkit)*



