



Case to Cause: Strategies for Channeling Direct Services for Poor People into Advocacy for Economic Justice

A Long Island Jobs with Justice Toolkit

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Introduction

Fifty years after President Lyndon Johnson declared a “war on poverty,” American poverty remains stubbornly persistent. According to a 2013 Brookings Institute study, *Confronting Suburban Poverty*, “for the first time, suburbs became home to more poor residents than America’s big cities. Today, one in three poor Americans—about 16.4 million people—lives in the suburbs.” Poverty is now growing at a faster rate in the suburbs than in cities, defying the suburban dream that in places like Long Island, wealth and prosperity are the norm.

Each day, religious congregations and nonprofit agencies provide direct services such as food, clothing and shelter to many thousands of poor Long Islanders. These charitable works save the local, state and federal governments tens of millions of dollars in tax-supported government programs. But as sociologist Jan Poppendieck noted in *Sweet Charity? Emergency Food and the End of Entitlement*, her seven-year study of U.S. food pantries published in 1998, “Feeding the hungry distracts us from the urgent challenges of deteriorating economic security and accelerating inequality.” While praising works of charity, Poppendieck pointed out that they have not, and cannot, replace the billions of dollars in government cuts to social programs that began during the Reagan Administration in the 1980s and continue today. **She calls on food pantry and all charity workers to move beyond direct-service “Band-Aids” to “educate,” “organize” and “advocate” for public policies that address unjust economic systems and structures which cause the poverty of their clients.**

The central goal of this Long Island Jobs with Justice toolkit, *Case to Cause: Strategies for Channeling Direct Services for Poor People into Advocacy for Economic Justice*, is meeting Professor Poppendieck’s challenge that direct-service providers educate, organize and advocate for public policies that support poor people. The toolkit contains resources and activities to help charity workers become community change agents who:

- I. **Educate themselves and their communities on how myths about the poor people they serve are barriers to public policies that support their needs;**
- II. **Strategically assess the societal causes of the hardships faced by the people they serve in order to create a specific, understandable and winnable public-policy agenda;**
- III. **Organize themselves, their clients and other community members to advocate for adoption of their public policy agenda.**

The information on poverty myths in Part I can be published as educational inserts in agency newsletters and congregational bulletins. The activities and resources in Parts II and III will help congregations and charitable agencies assess injustices that cause poverty in their communities and effectively organize advocacy campaigns for specific public-policies that address these injustices.

Long Island Jobs with Justice has several anti-poverty/economic justice campaigns that would welcome the knowledge, experience, passion, vision, energy and power of local charitable workers, such as:

- **The Long Island Bus Riders’ Union** that supports affordable, equitable, and accessible mass transportation.
- **Long Island Coalition for the DREAM Act** that advocates for passage of the New York State DREAM Act to provide undocumented students, going to a SUNY, CUNY or community college, with equal access to state-funded financial aid.
- **Comprehensive Immigration Reform** that advocates for just federal immigration reform which will legalize undocumented immigrants, provide them with a path to citizenship and guarantee them workers’ rights.
- **The Making a Change at Walmart Campaign** that empowers Walmart workers to advocate for their rights in the workplace.
- **The Minimum Wage campaign** that supports an increase in the federal minimum wage as well as better enforcement of the State minimum wage laws.
- **For more information go to: www.longislandjwj.org**



Part I

Myths about Poverty: Barriers to Government Supports

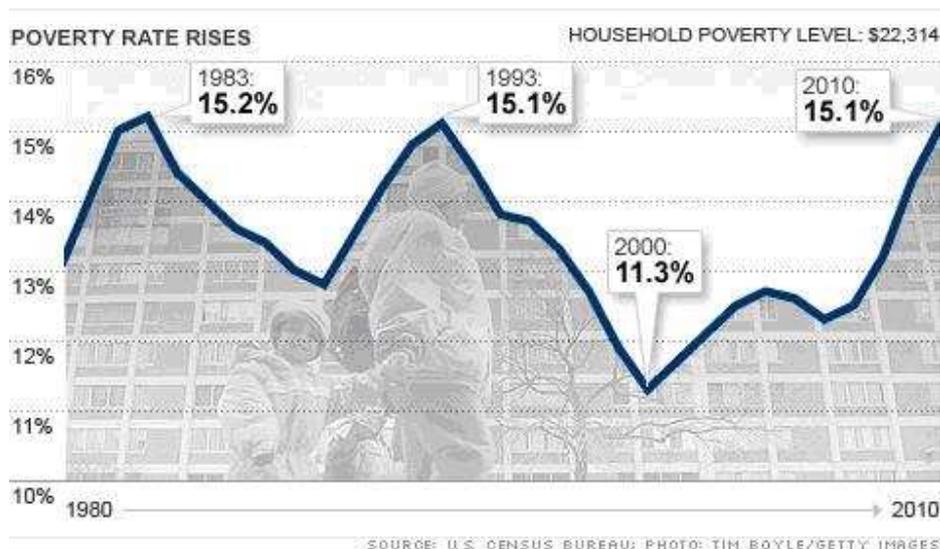
Common American Myths about Poor People

[By many economic measures, the United States is the wealthiest nation in the world. Millions of immigrants have and continue to come here for a better life. With a political, economic, legal and cultural system built on opportunities and individual liberties to pursue those opportunities, Americans have historically treated poverty as an aberration. Occasional business downturns cause poverty; then the economy rebounds. People grow up in poverty; then raise themselves into the middle class through hard work, self-discipline and individual drive. In this cultural setting, **poor people are themselves aberrations, viewed as causing their own poverty by not “getting with the program.”**

But these are distorted self-images about American prosperity and opportunities that mask some hard realities about America’s income inequalities and poverty while they feed stereotypes that blame poverty on the personal shortcomings of poor people. **Such myths create powerful barriers for adopting government policies to support poor people**, such as food stamps (SNAP), when elected officials at all levels of government must answer this question over and over again: **Why should taxpayers bail out poor people who refuse to help themselves?**]

Here are some harsh facts about poverty in the world’s wealthiest nation:

“[Some] 46.2 million [Americans live] in poverty or over 15% or 1 in 6, the highest number of poor in over 50 years. ... Government programs and nonprofit agencies are keeping many families going. If these programs are cut or funding reduced, a large percentage of people already on the brink of complete financial disaster will be in dire straits.



Where does the United States rank internationally?

- Of the 19 Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) nations, the USA has the highest rate of income disparity and poverty other than Mexico and Turkey. UN Poverty Index: US ranks 17th out of 19 countries.
- According to the OECD, the U.S. poverty rate is the highest in the developed world.

American Myths on Poverty:

- **Myth:** America is the land of opportunity and if you work hard enough, you will succeed and move up the ladder of success. **Truth:** Only 35 % of poor children will be middle class as adults.
- **Myth:** Americans take care of their poor. **Truth:** Compared to other Western industrialized nations, we have one of the highest poverty rates and spend the least on social programs to help the poor.
- **Myth:** Poverty is something that happens to the lazy. **Truth:** Close to half of Americans will experience poverty in their lifetime.
- **Myth:** Poor people don't work. **Truth:** Two out three families in poverty have one or more employed.

American Poverty Statistics:

- The number of poor in America has risen for the past 4 years.
- 91.6 million (30% of the population) in poverty at 200% of the Federal Poverty Level—equal to the entire populations of California, Iowa, Texas, New York and Massachusetts combined.
- Over half of Americans will live in poverty sometime during their lives.
- In America, a family needs twice the federal poverty level to provide basic needs. [On Long Island, with our high cost of living, families need at least three times the FPL to provide basic needs.]
- The suburban poverty rate is 11.8%, the highest on record since 1967.
- US poverty grew at twice the rate of US population growth.

American Children and Poverty:

- One in four children in the US lives in poverty with 194 million children receiving free or reduced price lunch.
- One out of every four children is at risk of going hungry.
- Less than half of the children receiving free or reduced lunches have had breakfast before heading off to school.
- US has highest child poverty rate of any industrialized nation.
- Childhood poverty is estimated to cost the United States 500 billion in lost productivity each year, or 4% of GDP.
- Study by the American Medical Association's Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine concluded that:
"American children face the highest levels of poverty and social deprivation of any children growing up in Western developed nations, and they have the flimsiest social safety net to fall back on."

Source: <http://www.povertyprogram.com/index.php>

WELFARE MYTHS AND REALITIES

AT THE TIME WELFARE REFORM WAS ADOPTED

Few Americans suffer more negative stereotypes than do welfare recipients. The 1996 "welfare reform" Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act was supposed to substitute "work" for "dependency." But this act was based on certain assumptions not supported by facts.

Assumptions Underlying Welfare Reform in 1996	Welfare Facts in 1996
Welfare is costly and bloated	Welfare support payments amounted to 1.1% of the federal budget in 1996
Welfare mothers have large families	The typical welfare family in 1996 consisted of a 29-year-old white mother with 2 children. The average number of children per welfare recipient was 1.8, about the same as the general population
Promiscuous single, teenage mothers are a strain on welfare	Of the mothers receiving welfare in 1994, only 2.6% were under 18 and 91% of them lived with their own parents or with other adults
Most welfare recipients are African American	Race of households receiving welfare in 1996: White 37.4% African American 36.4% Hispanic 19.9%
Once on welfare, most people stay dependent on welfare	How long people stayed on welfare before 1996 Less than 2 years 37% 2-4 years 19% 4-8 years 20% 8+ years 25%
Welfare recipients are lazy and don't want to work	Almost half (46%) of welfare mothers surveyed in one study were already working, most off the books

Sources: Peres, K. & Masters, B. (1997). *Meeting the Political Challenges of the 1990s: A Rank and File Economics and Political Action Training Program*. Communications Workers of America, p. 28; Edin, K., & Lein, L. (1997). *Making Ends Meet: How Single Mothers Survive Welfare and Low-Wage Work*. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation Publications. P. 150.

Myth: Poverty is Rare on Long Island

Fact: 10% of Long Islanders Seek Help at Food Pantries; 20% Are Poor

In 2010, Island Harvest and Long Island Cares released the Long Island section of a national study, *Hunger in America 2010*. The study reported that 283,700 (one in 10) Long Islanders sought help at a food pantry or soup kitchen in one year, a 21% increase since the last hunger study was released in 2006. About 64,900 different clients receive emergency food assistance in any given week. **Almost half live in households with one working person.** Other data and studies – including the US Census - reveal that poverty on Long Island is more widespread than commonly believed.

WHO RECEIVES EMERGENCY FOOD ASSISTANCE ON LI?

- 39% are under 18 years old (110,643 children.)
- 74% are food insecure, according to the U.S. government’s official food security scale; 37% have very low food security.
- One study showed that food pantries did not prevent hunger:
 - 34% of clients had times when they were hungry but could not eat;
 - 33% skipped a meal or cut the size of their meals;
 - 42% of the children did not eat enough and 12% skipped meals.

MANY CLIENTS HAVE TO CHOOSE BETWEEN FOOD AND OTHER NECESSITIES

- 47% had to choose between paying for food and paying for utilities/heat.
- 49% had to choose between paying for food and paying their rent or mortgage.
- 36% had to choose between paying for food and paying for medicine or medical care.

MANY LI CLIENTS ARE IN POOR HEALTH

- 30% of households had at least one household member in poor health.

POVERTY ON LI IS WIDESPREAD

- While the federal government defined poverty for a family of four in 2014 as an income of \$23,850, research has shown that **the “true poverty level” for Long Island, due to our high cost of living, is 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) or \$47,700 a year.**
- Other studies have shown that a LI family of four requires *at least* \$75,000 a year to make ends meet (pay for basic necessities.)
- Using the federal government’s “official” definition, only about 6% of LI families are “poor” compared with a US poverty level of about 15%.
- **But almost 20% of Long Island families are poor, using the \$47,700 “true poverty level” definition.**
- **In 2014, for the first time, working-age people made up a majority of Food Stamp recipients rather than children and the elderly, according to a study by the University of Kentucky.**

(Read the complete LI hunger study at www.islandharvest.org or www.licares.org. Sources for the LI poverty data: US Census, American Fact Finder, 2010; *The Self Sufficiency Standard for New York*, 2010; *Struggling in Suburbia: Meeting the Challenges of Poverty in Suffolk County*, Welfare to Work Commission of the Suffolk County Legislature, December, 2012, *Workers Use Food Stamps*, *Newsday*, January 27, 2014.)

Myth: Most Poor People on LI Are Minorities Who Don't Want To Work

Fact: Poverty on LI Affects Working People of All Races in Most Communities

Perhaps the most common American stereotype about poor people is that they are “lazy,” uneducated and are primarily people of color who live in segregated slums. In a place like Long Island, with one of the nation’s best school systems, with a median-family income of \$94,000, twice the national median, how could anyone be poor? On close examination, however, it turns out that **the real myth is that most Long Islanders are wealthy and that the poor are confined to minority communities where people don’t want to work.**

The U.S. Census reported in 2011 that between 2000-2010, the number of people living at the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) increased by 66.2% in the suburbs compared with an increase of 46.8% cities. Using the FPL definition of poverty (\$23,050 for a family of four in 2011) in Nassau and Suffolk, 161,000 people were “officially” poor.

Who are the “officially poor” on Long Island? In Suffolk, for example:

- 8% (5,731 people) of **working-aged adults** in poverty worked full or part time, year round
- 36% (19,424 people) of poor adults age 25 or older **have a high school diploma**; 37% (19,942 people) **have some college** or an associate’s degree or a bachelor’s degree
- 27% (4,161 families) are **married couples** with children
- 16% (2,418 families) of poor families **receive public assistance** or Supplementary Security Income or SSI (Social Security benefits for needy people who are aged, blind or disabled)
- 71% (63,994 people) in poverty are **white**; 12% (11,030 people) are **black**; 28% (25,255 people) are **Hispanic**
- The average salary for the 25 most-in-demand jobs in Suffolk in 2000 was only \$11.69 an hour (\$15.20 today adjusted for inflation) or only about \$30,000 a year. U.S. salaries have been generally flat since 2000.

Low wages and the lack of affordable housing make life even tougher for many working Long Islanders:

- Long Islanders leaving welfare for work earn, on average, only about \$11.00 an hour, which is close to the federal poverty level for a family of four.
- 40% of LI homeowners and 47% of renters are spending more than 35% of their income on housing. Many, especially renters, are spending 50% of their income on housing. (Note: 35% is the standard of family income that should be spent on housing costs)

These data challenge a number of stereotypes about poor people. The vast **majority are white** rather than people of color. Only 16% of “officially-poor” families receive public assistance or SSI. **Almost 36% had a high school diploma and another 37% had some college education or a college degree.** And a significant number of families are married couples with children. The data confirm poverty’s heavy toll on certain populations. The percentage of whites who are poor is just 4% compared with almost three times that number of African Americans (12%) and seven times that number of Hispanics (28%). The data also **reveal low-wage levels for many Long Islanders and a shortage of affordable housing** which lead to family budget stresses such as a high portion of income going for housing costs, leaving too little for other expenses such as food or child care.

Myth: The FPL of \$23,550 is the “Actual” Poverty Level for LI

Fact: Try Living on this \$47,100 Budget

WHAT DOES A FAMILY OF FOUR (2 ADULTS, 1 PRE-SCHOOL AND 1 ELEMENTARY-AGE CHILD) NEED TO GET BY ON LI?

WHAT IS MISSING IN THIS BUDGET SUCH AS ENTERTAINMENT, VACATIONS, COMPUTER SERVICE?

WHAT IF THEY HAD TO PAY UTILITIES (\$200) HEALTH INSURANCE (\$509) OR CHILD CARE (\$712) A MONTH?

Budget Item	Monthly Expenditure
Food (standard 14% of budget)	\$550.00
Fair Market Rental for 2 bedroom apartment (with utilities)	\$1,583.00
Telephone	\$70.00
Auto maintenance: gas, insurance, repairs, loan	\$395.00
Clothes	\$172.00
Miscellaneous: household, personal hygiene, bedding, etc.	\$245.00
Federal/state taxes	\$910.00
Monthly Total	\$ 3,925
Annual Total	\$47,100
	Twice the “official” Federal Poverty Level (FPL)

Myth: \$47,100 is Enough to Make End Meet on Long Island Fact: \$75,000 is Long Island’s Base Income

Long Island Association Chief Economist Pearl Kamer testified that for a family of four, an annual income of \$75,000 was needed to cover basic necessities on Long Island. Dr. Kamer reported, 409,063 Long Island households (1.2 million people) had incomes below \$75,000. Here is Dr. Kamer’s base family budget:

Basic Monthly Budget for a Family of Four in Nassau-Suffolk, 2012

Item	Cost
Housing	\$1,529
Food	643
Child Care	1,372
Transportation	447
Health Care	547
Other Necessities	522
Taxes	932
Monthly Total	5,993
Annual Total	\$71,913 (adjusted for inflation to \$75,000)

Source: *Struggling Suburbia: Meeting the Challenges of Poverty in Suffolk County* can be accessed at:
<http://legis.suffolkcountyny.gov/clerk/cmeet/wwc/2012/SWTWC-StrugglinginSuburbia121812.pdf>



Part II

Assessing the Causes Behind Your Cases

Analyzing the Causes of Poverty: The “But Why” Technique

[INTRAC (International NGO Training and Research Centre) is an international agency located in Great Britain that provides training, consultancy and research services to international development and relief organizations. (See more at: <http://www.intrac.org/#sthash.ncM5tKLn.dpuf>.) This “But Why?” technique for problem and issue analysis was designed to help aid workers in Third World countries. While the examples used here are for Third World problems and issues, the “But Why?” technique applies just as well to problems and issues related to poverty on Long Island.]

What are "root causes?"

Root causes are the basic reasons behind the problem or issue you are seeing. It helps you to focus on the causes instead of the symptoms of problems. Trying to work out why the problem exists is an essential part of finding the right solution and helps to guarantee the right responses.

What is the "but why?" technique?

The "But why?" technique is one method used to identify underlying reasons or root causes that affect an issue.

The "But why?" technique examines a problem by asking questions to find out what caused it. Each time an answer is given, a follow-up "But why?" is asked.

For example, if you say that people in poor communities don't have access to clean drinking water, you might ask yourself "but why?" Once you come up with an answer to that question, probe the answer with another "but why?" question, until you reach the root of the problem, the root cause.

For example, does the problem start with lack of hygiene education resulting in people not caring about clean water, or is it because they don't know how to dig safe drinking water wells? Or is it a result of government's failure to implement well digging programs? If it is a government failure, why is this happening? Is it because of lack of money? Why is there a lack of money for drinking water wells? etc.

How does the "but why" technique work?

Example:

The immediate problem

Children are not going to school

Ask why?

They keep falling ill

Possible response: provide medicines

Ask why?

They drink bad water

Possible response: dig a well

Ask why?

The local government said it would dig a new well last year but it hasn't

Possible response: dig a well or lobby local government to provide the well

Ask why?

Central government has not released the funds they promised

Possible response: dig a well/put in a pipe or lobby central government to release the funds

Ask why?

The bilateral donors haven't released the pledged aid funds

Possible response: dig a well/put in a pipe or lobby bilateral donors

Many causes and solutions may apply to your problem, so it is up to you to find the ones that seem most important and that your organization has the capacity to work with.

The "But why?" analysis by itself doesn't lead automatically to the area you should choose for your work but it does highlight the different causes of the problem and the different paths you may take to solve it.

Why should you identify root causes?

Identifying genuine solutions to a problem means knowing what the real causes of the problem are. Taking action without identifying what factors contribute to the problem can result in misdirected efforts. This wastes time and resources.

It will uncover multiple solutions for a certain problem and allow the user to see alternatives that he or she might not have seen before. It increases the chances of choosing the right solution, because many aspects of the problem are explored during the "But why?" exercise.

When should you identify root causes?

When there is support for a "solution" that does not seem to get at the real causes of the problem. For example, if there's hunger in community, let's distribute free meals.

When there is ignorance or denial of why a community problem exists.

Whenever you are planning advocacy on an issue.

Of course, the "But why?" technique is not perfect but it is an efficient way of exploring a variety of solutions to a problem. And it is a quick and inexpensive technique that can be used by anyone, at any time, anywhere.

Complementing "but why"

Once you have identified root causes, and to ensure broader involvement in your advocacy, you will need to complement your initial problem analysis with consultations with the people affected, and with desk research into policies and case studies.

(Adapted by Hilary Coulby for INTRAC (International NGO Training and Research Centre) from the Advocacy Course Community Tool Box, Pp. 9-10)

Applying the “But Why” Technique:
Why Do Ten Percent of Long Islanders Need Help from Food Pantries?

The immediate problem: Long Island’s median income for a family of four is \$94,000 a year which is twice the national median family income. Long Island is one of the ten wealthiest suburbs in the United States. Yet, one in ten Long Islanders does not earn enough to make ends meet and has to rely on a local pantry for food.

Ask why? So many Long Islanders are hungry

Possible response: Wages are too low to meet the high cost of living on Long Island

Ask why? Wages are too low

Possible response:

Ask why? Families have to choose between paying their rent and feeding the children

Possible response:

Ask why? Rents are so high and there is so little affordable housing on Long Island

Possible response:

Ask why? Parents have to choose between paying the child-care provider and feeding their children

Possible response:

Ask why? Child-care costs are out of reach for many working families

Possible response:

A Model for Assessing Causes, Consequences and Solutions to the Problem of Poverty

Sample Issue: Poor primary health care services in a Third World country

CAUSES	CONSEQUENCES	SOLUTIONS
<p>Local Understaffed clinics Low morale among health workers (low wages, some poorly trained)</p>	<p>Inadequate healthcare high infant mortality high prevalence of infectious diseases Effect on productivity (GNP)</p>	<p>Educate people about their right to healthcare</p> <p>Grassroots advocacy to hold district level administration accountable</p>
<p>National Government has other priorities and poor who need healthcare most don't make demands</p> <p>"Brain drain" of skilled personnel to other countries</p>	<p>Health given low priority in Poverty Reduction Strategy</p> <p>Health Minister has low status within Cabinet and lacks political clout</p> <p>Lack of trained doctors and nurses</p>	<p>Reform national health policy to emphasize primary and preventative care</p> <p>Increase health budget</p> <p>Increase pay and qualifications of basic healthcare providers</p>

(Adapted from Veneklasen and Miller, A New Weave of Politics, People and Power, 2002 for INTRAC (International NGO Training and Research Centre) from the Advocacy Course Community Tool Box, P. 15)

**Applying the Causes, Consequences and Solutions Model
To Long Island Issues:
Immigration Reform and Child-Care Funding**

Causes	Consequences	Solutions
Immigration Reform		
Local: Undocumented immigrants who work in Long Island's "underground" economy are often afraid to take advantage of worker protection laws such as the right to join a union or minimum wage laws.		
State: New York State Legislature fails to adopt the DREAM Act allowing undocumented children to access State college tuition assistance.		
Federal: Tea Party conservatives force the Republican House majority to reject the Senate's Comprehensive Immigration Reform bill that would have legalized 12 million undocumented immigrants and given them a path to citizenship.		
Child Care Funding		
Local: Suffolk County lowers eligibility for subsidized child care from 200% of FPL to 100% of Federal Poverty Level.		
State: NYS uses a Child Care Block Grant funding formula that penalizes Suffolk \$5 million over four years for using federal stimulus (ARRA) funds to provide child care.		

How to Choose a Strategic Public-Policy Issue

- Successfully addressing the issue will result in a real improvement in people's lives [i.e., the issue is specific to resolving a problem faced by your clients]
- The issue is significant/important to your mission and stakeholders
- It is consistent with your organizational priorities
- It is a 'root' issue that will block progress on other problems if not addressed –but dealing with it successfully will unlock possibilities for other changes
- Successfully dealing with issue will magnify the impact of your work
- The issue fits your expertise, experience or analysis
- You know what it is you want to change, why it should change, and how it should change.
- There are opportunities/possibilities to make the changes needed [i.e., the issue is winnable]
- Your supporters and donors will support your work on the issue [i.e., the issue is marketable]
- Your partners and constituents (beneficiaries) believe the issue is important [i.e., the issue is understandable]
- The risks involved in addressing the issue are manageable
- Your organization has a unique contribution to make on the issue and/or can bring added value to it
- Work on the issue allows you to integrate program and advocacy work for greater impact
- Change can be achieved using methods you are comfortable with

(Hilary Coulby for Intrac with thanks to Kim Bobo, Jackie Kendall, and Steve Max: Organizing for Social Change: A Manual for Activists in the 1990 for INTRAC (International NGO Training and Research Centre) from the Advocacy Course Community Tool Box, P.16)

Channeling Charity into Advocacy: What You Can Do To Make Your Case

In *Sweet Charity? Emergency Food and the End of Entitlement*, sociologist Jan Poppendieck's landmark seven-year study of U.S. food pantries, she argues that drastic reductions in federal social-welfare programs, begun during the Regan Administration, led to an explosion in the number of food pantries and other charitable agencies that unsuccessfully tried to compensate for the cuts in government programs. Her provocative conclusion is that these well-meaning private acts of charity have contributed to a less just society by enabling governments at all levels to continue cutting programs for poor and vulnerable people. Her recommendation: **charitable agencies must advocate for public policies and government programs that address the causes of the poverty suffered by the clients they serve such as restoring federal cuts to Food Stamps.**

Here are some tips on how you can use your direct-service work to advocate for just public policies that address the causes of poverty:

1. **Document Your Services:** Annoying as this may be when you are overwhelmed with helping people in need, **keep statistical records of the number and types of cases you serve**, showing changes in the number of clients and the nature of their cases over time. These are invaluable data when making the argument that charities alone cannot solve the problem of poverty; government supportive programs are also needed.
2. **Tell Your Stories:** Elected officials often argue that when it comes to justifying funds for government services to support poor people, they want facts, not anecdotes, which is why it is critical that you document your services. However, in the end, **it is often the stories that move elected officials to action.** Record the stories of the people you serve either by having clients write their stories or making an audio or video recording of their stories. Identify clients who are willing to tell their stories at a press conference, legislative hearing or some other forum. Publish the stories in local newspapers, congregational bulletins or newsletters and other publications. Be sure to respect the privacy of your clients. Use first names or pseudonyms if requested.
3. **Publicize What You Do:** On January 11th, 2014, the PBS Weekend Newshour aired a story about poverty in Suffolk County. Some of the on-line comments were vicious, such as this one referring to a single mother profiled in the story: "Spay and neuter early and often." For some reason, these kinds of bigoted comments about the poor often accompany on-line publications about poverty. While you need not enter into electronic debates with bigots, **the public should know the truth about your clients, about your services and how you are often filling in the gaps caused by government cutbacks to the poor.** When a story appears in the local media about poverty, write a letter to the editor using your data and/or your client stories to help educate the public about the needs of their poor and vulnerable neighbors.



Part III

Organizing and Advocating for Change

Do Charitable Organizations Have Political Power?

Americans often say, “You can’t fight city hall.” It’s sad that one of the world’s founding democracies now has so many people who feel they don’t have enough power to influence government leaders.

Our voter turnout is among the lowest of the industrial nations: only about 50% of us vote in presidential elections; 30% in Congressional elections; 10% in school board elections.

For nonprofit agencies – especially those that are faith based - there is an additional complication: they think that laws governing tax-exempt organizations as well as the First Amendment’s separation of church and state prevent them from getting involved in politics. Not so, as explained on **page 21** of this toolkit, **nonprofit agencies and religious congregations can take political action so long as it is not partisan (e.g., Democratic or Republican Party) activity.**

So what power do nonprofits and faith groups have in the public square? Consider:

- **Standing:** Direct-service providers have first-hand knowledge of the problems faced by the poor people they serve in their food pantries and outreach centers. **Their charitable experiences – and the respect that their services command – give them moral and political standing as advocates for social justice:** they know what policies will help the people they serve. And elected officials know that their charitable services are saving millions of dollars in taxpayer-funded government programs.

The testimony of parish outreach coordinators about the problems faced by low-wage workers they served was a major factor in the Suffolk County Legislature’s adoption of a Living Wage Law in 2000.

- **Numbers:** While the media often focus on the drop-off in religious attendance in our secular society, in fact, **congregations still reach an enormous audience.** For example, about 300,000 Roman Catholics (Long Island’s largest denomination) attend Mass on any given Sunday. They live and vote in the districts of elected officials and, if organized, **they can add a powerful moral voice to public-policy debates in the halls of government.**

During March of 2012, about a dozen congregations on Long Island collected almost 1,000 letters at the request of LI Jobs with Justice in support of a State increase in minimum wage – which passed. Politicians believe that each letter counts as 40 voters.

- **Education:** Through their pulpits and weekly bulletins, **congregations can educate tens of thousands of Long Islanders about poverty and how their faith calls them to do both works of charity and the politics of justice** to alleviate the suffering of poor people.

When MICAHA (Mobilized Interfaith Coalition Against Hunger) was launched by Catholic Charities in 2007-2008, weekly bulletin inserts on the extent of hunger and poverty on Long Island were published in almost 100 Protestant, Catholic and Jewish congregational bulletins on a weekly basis, reaching a potential readership of over 170,000 people each weekend (about 45% of *Newsday’s* weekend circulation.)

What Political Actions Are Nonprofit Agencies and Congregations Legally Permitted to Do?

Nearly every religion teaches compassion for the poor, but how can we tell the difference between advocacy on behalf of neighbors in need, which is always right, and partisan politics, which not-for-profits must avoid? How can your congregation stay out of trouble in an election year, when candidates and their supporters want you to aid their campaigns? Houses of worship (and clergy acting in their official capacity) and nonprofit (tax exempt, 501 C-3) agencies ***cannot legally support or oppose any particular party or candidate for office. They may support social justice, but should not:***

- endorse candidates from the pulpit or in congregational newsletters, either explicitly or implicitly, not even their own members who are running for office;
- distribute campaign information that favors one party or candidate, even a member of the congregation;
- post signs on their property that favor or oppose any party or candidate;
- organize voter registration or get-out-the-vote efforts for the purpose of electing any given party or candidate;
- raise money for a candidate or party;
- provide membership lists to candidates, even if the candidate is a member of the congregation.
- invite a candidate to speak during an election season without providing a comparable opportunity to his or her opponents;
- rent your building to a campaign.

Doing any of these things puts your tax exemption at risk and alienates people who respect the law. Even some things that may be legal--inviting elected officials to preach during their campaign or giving a candidate an award shortly before an election--are still bad ideas.

Houses of worship (and nonprofit agencies) can and should:

- take positions that reflect their values on public policy, including legislation, through public education, petitions, letter-writing, and meetings with elected officials;
- organize non-partisan voter registration and get-out-the-vote drives;
- encourage members to volunteer as poll watchers on Election Day;
- host candidate forums, at least if all candidates are invited and the format favors no candidate or party. If you cannot invite those who disagree with your faith community's position on an issue, don't hold a forum.

Further information on how to do the right thing and stay on the right side of the law is available from the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism (<http://rac.org>) and the Internal Revenue Service (www.irs.gov/charities/charitable/article/0,,id=179773,00.html). Source: The Rev. Thomas W. Goodhue (tomgoodhue@optonline.net) Long Island Council of Churches www.liccnyc.org

Power Analysis - Who Will Help or Hinder Your Advocacy? Case Study: Restoring Suffolk Child-Care Funding

Case Study: Between 2008-2012, the New York State Office of Family and Children’s Services (OCFS) reduced Suffolk County’s State child-care block grant by \$5 million, in part because Suffolk used federal stimulus funds to meet the demand for child care. As a result, Suffolk had to cut about 2,000 children of working-poor families whose parents were receiving government subsidies to help pay their child-care costs. It did this by reducing the eligibility for the child-care subsidy from 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) - \$47,100 for a family of four in 2013 - to 150% of FPL - \$35,200. Suffolk has argued that the State formula which assigns county child-care funding is flawed and unfairly penalized the County for using federal funds to meet the actual demand for child care. In 2013, OCFS restored \$1 million in funding but refuses to change the funding formula. How would you advocate to get Suffolk County DSS to increase the eligibility for subsidized child care from 150% of FPL back to 200% of FPL?

Targets:

Decision-makers; people who have the power to make the necessary changes; people with influence over decision-makers

Who are your targets?

Constituents:

The people you work with and for; those who are expected to benefit from your advocacy

Who are your constituents?

Allies:

Those who share your aims and can help to influence or put pressure on the decision-makers

Who Are Your Allies?

Opponents:

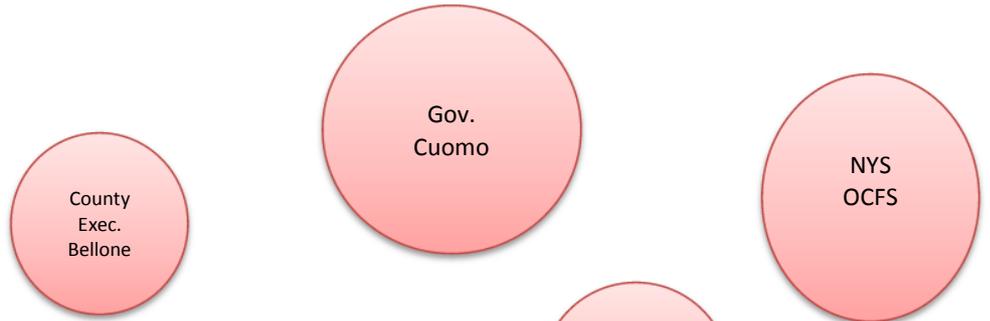
Those who are opposed to what you want to achieve and will try to block the changes you want to see

Who Are Your Opponents?

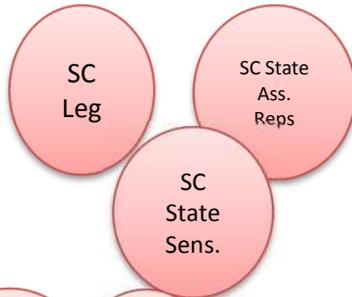
See the sample Power Analysis chart on the next page

An Example of a Power Analysis: Increasing the Eligibility for Suffolk's Child Care Subsidy to 200% FPL

10
(Key
Decision
Makers)



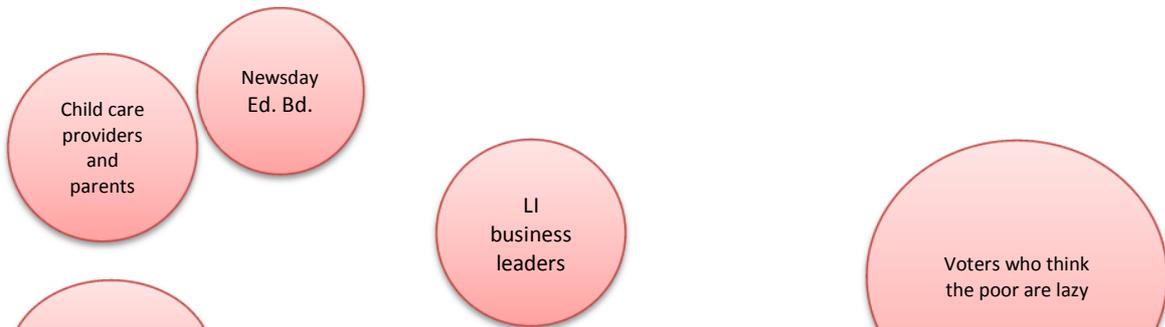
8
(Active
Participants)



6
Have Some
Influence)



4
(Can Get
Attention)



2
(Limited
Influence)



Die-Hard
Pro-

Active
Pro-

Leaning Either
Way

Active
Anti-

Die-Hard
Anti-

Developing a Public-Policy Campaign

- STEP ONE:** Ask yourselves why you need to have a campaign.
 What are you concerned about? What needs to change?
 Why hasn't change happened already?
 How would communicating with a wider public audience help?
- STEP TWO:** Decide on your target audience(s) for the campaign – be specific.
 Who is most likely to respond to the issue? Who do you want to be involved?
 You must know your target audience really well.
 What media do they read/watch/listen to?
 What are they enthusiastic about?
 What styles and approaches would they respond to?
 What would alienate them?
- STEP THREE:** Develop your message.
 Remember this is a campaign not an exercise in classroom education.
 Communicate one message only. Be straightforward and simple.
 Start from where your audience is, don't assume they know anything about the issue.
 All issues are complex but your campaign must not be. Complexity demotivates people, makes them confused and reduces their willingness to listen to what you are saying.
 A good picture is worth a thousand words.
- STEP FOUR:** Design, plan, timetable and budget your campaign activities.
 You need to have clear objectives and know exactly what you are going to do from the start.
 Are there any volunteers who could help you with campaign activities? Would any businesses sponsor you by providing services?
- STEP FIVE:** Before you launch your campaign, inform other potential ally groups about it.
 Ask them if they would like to join.
- STEP SIX:** Establish a way of recording the names and addresses of campaign supporters.
 If resources permit, provide them with feedback as the campaign progresses – this will maintain their enthusiasm and interest and allow you to call on them for further support in the future.

(Hilary Coulby for INTRAC (International NGO Training and Research Centre) Advocacy Course Community Tool Box, P. 26.)

How to Craft a Clear, Winnable Message

"If you can't write your idea on the back of my calling card, you don't have a clear idea." (David Belasco, theatrical producer)

A message is a concise and persuasive statement about your advocacy objective that captures:

- What you want to achieve
- Why you want to achieve it – positive or negative consequences of no action
- How you propose to achieve it
- What action you want taken by the audience

Messages should encapsulate everything you need to say – they are not the same as slogans or sound bites.

A good basic message:

- Can be tailored to fit specific audiences
- Uses clear, brief arguments that will persuade the audience
- Uses simple and unambiguous language that can be easily understood

EXAMPLE OF A GOOD MESSAGE

If you find a fire

- Raise the alarm
- Go immediately to a place of safety
- Call the fire department

EXAMPLE OF A BAD MESSAGE

If you find a fire

Communicate with the immediate community in your building. Advise them of the situation.

Make sure elderly people are aware of what is happening.

Look for the nearest fire exit or other convenient way out of the building. Walk slowly and calmly towards it and make your way out.

Does the fire look serious? If it is bad, call the fire department. Either use your mobile phone or ask someone in a neighboring building use their landline. Make sure everyone stays a safe distance away from the fire.

(Hilary Coulby for INTRAC with thanks to Marquita Bowen for INTRAC (International NGO Training and Research Centre) Advocacy Course Community Tool Box, P.30)

TIPS ON HOW TO TALK TO PEOPLE WITH POWER

Pre-meeting “jitters” are normal. Here are a few tips as you go into the visit:

- You have power! Elected officials work for you. You hire them; you can fire them.
- Don’t be intimidated by the trappings of power: receptionist, fancy desk, flags. You're meeting in an office YOU paid for with your tax dollars. This is public space – your space.
- Do be willing to meet with an aide who sometimes has more knowledge on the issues than the elected official.

How do I get started?

- ✓ Introduce yourself and the congregation or agency (his/her constituents) you represent.
- ✓ Open with a summary of your key concerns. (Let the team leader do this.)
- ✓ Be formal (public). Don’t be seduced by private (personal) flattery, etc.

What are my credentials?

- ✓ Don’t overstate your power base: you do not speak for the entire organization.
- ✓ Yet, you do represent the positions of many Long Island people of faith and community-service agencies.

Do I know enough to speak on these issues?

- ✓ The values you articulate can be more important and persuasive than technical policy details.
- ✓ Your experience serving the poor is powerful testimony. Tell stories of real people you have served in your congregation or agency in his/her district.

How do I get my point across?

- ✓ The passion of your delivery may be more persuasive than your eloquence.
- ✓ Try to maintain a conversational rather than argumentative tone.
- ✓ Try to find common ground with the elected official or his/her aide – in either values or policy details. (E.g., “We’re talking about helping people who work 40 hours a week for poverty wages. Don’t you agree that we should support them?”)

How do I stay on message and what do I ask for?

- ✓ Stay focused on the key issues YOU want to raise.
- ✓ Politely move the legislator away from tangents. If he/she “filibusters” – i.e., talks endlessly – politely interrupt and bring the conversation back to your issue.
- ✓ Be assertive, not aggressive; be respectful, not deferential.
- ✓ Any public policy conversation will contain disagreement. Don’t take it personally!
- ✓ Ask for specific action, e.g., to support and/or co-sponsor the bill.

TIPS ON HOW TO WRITE TO AN ELECTED OFFICIAL

Note: to find the member of Congress or State senator or State assemblyperson who represents you go to:
<http://nymap.elections.state.ny.us/nysboe/>

Politicians tell us that each individual letter counts for 40 voters.

- ✓ It is best to write to the district office rather than the Albany or Washington office where there can be delays in delivering your letter.
- ✓ Hand-written letters are preferable to form letters that are preferable to petitions or post cards that are preferable to e-mails.
- ✓ Congregations can be very effective collecting letters after services and hand delivering them to the elected official's office. Ask for an appointment to see, preferably the elected official or, if necessary, an aide, to deliver the letters and discuss the issue.
- ✓ Write or type the letter clearly.
- ✓ Include your name, address and telephone number.
- ✓ Be brief, be thoughtful, be personal. Share your knowledge and experience with the issue. If you work with poor people, tell a story.
- ✓ Be specific and confine your letter to one topic. Cite the bill number or title. Ask for specific action (e.g., voting for and/or co-sponsoring the bill.)
- ✓ Mention any groups or communities that you belong to. There is strength in numbers.
- ✓ Be courteous and express appreciation for something positive that the elected official has done in the past.
- ✓ Try to keep the letter to one page.
- ✓ Ask for a response.

Source: "Your Voice Counts: turning Lobbying Upside Down" study guide. NETWORK Education Program.

What Makes an Effective Advocacy Campaign?

To run an effective advocacy campaign it needs to pass the **TEA** test:

- Touch
- Enthuse
- Act

An effective campaign needs to **Touch** people. It needs to make a connection with its target, strike a chord and prompt a response

But it needs to do so much more than that. It is all very well touching your target with your message, but they might decide that it is all so depressing or difficult that there is nothing that they can do.

A campaign needs to go beyond touching people to **Enthuse** them. An effective campaign convinces its target audience that there is a solution that could remedy the problem that has touched them. The campaign must contain elements that will enthuse people and deflect any defeatist or negative thoughts.

But touching and enthusing are no good for the campaign if you cannot move onto the third part of the TEA test. You need to touch and enthuse to ensure that the recipient of the campaign's message decides to **Act**.

Campaigning is all about believing that there can be change to address a problem in the world. And it is about influencing decision makers, at whatever level, to show and then demonstrate their agreement with the campaign's ambitions.

To achieve this goal, you need a campaign message that passes the TEA test: ask yourself, do your campaign messages pass the TEA test? A good campaign makes use of all or some of the following:

- Clear message
- Simple solution
- Clear outrage
- Use of the media
- Political support
- Alliances
- Public Action
- Celebrity

It is important to focus on **one** message.

(Taken from Jonathan Ellis - Campaigning for success – how to cope if you achieve your campaign goal, National Council for Voluntary Organizations, UK, 2007 for INTRAC (International NGO Training and Research Centre) Advocacy Course Community Tool Box, P.29.)

Two Jobs with Justice Examples of Case to Cause

The New York State Minimum Wage: In 2012, Long Island Jobs with Justice led a coalition advocating for an increase in the New York State minimum wage from \$7.25 an hour to \$9.00 an hour. Direct-service providers played a critical role in winning this campaign. At that time, over 300,000 Long Islanders sought help at food pantries each year. Many were working people earning the \$7.25 minimum wage which was not enough to pay their bills. Many of these food pantries are located in religious congregations where pantry volunteers witnessed first-hand how workers earning the minimum wage had to rely on charity to get by. They had a unique perspective and a powerful story to tell. When we targeted Senator Owen Johnson in the 4th Senatorial District (Babylon) as a critical vote needed to pass the minimum wage bill, we organized a half dozen congregations with food pantries in Senator Johnson's district to collect 1,000 letters over a two week period in May, urging the Senator to support the increase. On May 24th, representatives from these congregations joined about 100 demonstrators in Babylon Village, rallying for the increase. We then marched to Senator Johnson's office to present the letters. One of the speakers, Kim Luisi, was the Parish Outreach Coordinator at Our Lady of the Assumption Church in Copiague. She spoke movingly about the many clients she supports with food, clothing and emergency assistance because they earn the minimum wage which locks them in poverty. News 12 and Newsday covered this story. Senator Johnson voted for the increase, which passed and was signed into law by Governor Andrew Cuomo.

The New York State Dream Act: Every year, an estimated 65,000 undocumented students living in the U.S. graduate high school, but only 7-10% of these students move on to attend college. The major barrier to attending college for many undocumented students is the lack of financial aid available – they are denied federal and state financial aid. While New York's in-state tuition law, which allows undocumented students to pay in-state tuition rates at SUNY and CUNY colleges and universities, has been helpful, the rising cost of a college education continues to prevent many from going college, especially when financial aid is not available. With over 120 school districts on Long Island, and nearly 30% of them having a Limited English Proficient (LEP) student population of more than 5%, we know that there are many undocumented students graduating from Long Island high schools. Since 2011, Long Island Jobs with Justice has been working with high school guidance counselors across Long Island by providing them with trainings and resources on the educational rights and opportunities of undocumented students. Along with providing meaningful access to information, we also encourage educators to participate in advocacy efforts for the NY DREAM Act, a piece of legislation that would provide New York's undocumented youth access to state financial aid (TAP). Many educators, having direct contact with undocumented students, recognize that providing students with information is not enough and that getting involved in efforts to pass the NY DREAM Act is necessary. In 2013, guidance counselors from Freeport and Port Jefferson Station high school joined our Long Island DREAM Act Coalition and participated in press conferences calling on the Governor to support undocumented students. Guidance counselors from Port Washington and Huntington high school also helped collect hundreds of petition signatures from students and parents that were delivered to our Long Island senators. *Newsday* has consistently covered events on the NY DREAM Act, including our press conference at Nassau Community College, where NYS United Teachers (NYSUT) representatives and other educators spoke out about the need for the NY DREAM Act, and we announced our Long Island lobby trip to Albany to meet with Senators. Immigrant rights advocates, including Long Island educators, continue to fight for the passage of the NY DREAM Act!

Tips on How to Organize Your Congregation for Advocacy

Many religious traditions call for acts of both charity (individual service) and justice (advocacy for structural change.) Nevertheless, many clergy and many congregants are wary about mixing religion and politics even though the laws allow them to, as outlined above on page 21. Here are some suggestions for getting started with advocacy in your congregation:

1. If your clergyperson is inclined to the work of justice, ask him or her to **identify congregants interested in social justice issues** who can be personally invited to a meeting to form an advocacy committee.
2. **Include prayers for poor and hungry people on Long Island in your weekly service.** Go to the website of Interfaith Worker Justice (www.iwj.org) for excellent prayers.
3. **Publish pages 5-10 from this toolkit (myths and facts about poverty) in your congregational bulletin.** This is best done by working through the staff person who is responsible for the bulletin.
4. **Be sure that you are on the e-mail list of Long Island Jobs with Justice** by contacting Anita Halasz at ahalasz.lijwj@gmail.com so you can receive Long Island faith-based advocacy resources and actions including bulletin inserts and public-policy updates.
5. **Organize a voter registration drive after services.** The materials can be obtained at the county board of elections.
6. When called upon, **organize a letter-collection drive after services.** One such drive yielded 3,000 letters Island-wide in a single weekend. **Politicians tell us that each letter counts for forty voters!**
To collect letters effectively:
 - Get the approval of your clergy leader.
 - If possible, publish briefing notes in your bulletin in advance of the letter collection, explaining why this policy issue is of concern to your faith community. Frame the policy notes in religious terms. (Jobs with Justice will provide you with these briefing notes.)
 - Jobs with Justice will provide you with the sample letter. Publish the letter in your bulletin the week before and make an announcement calling the congregation's attention to the letter that will be collected the following week.
 - Have your advocacy committee set up a collection table that does not block the passageway into or out of the worship area. Have pens available.
 - Have copies of the letter sorted by legislator (many congregations are represented by several elected officials.)
 - Make an appointment to visit the legislator to deliver the letters and explain your position.

