2022

Advocacy Toolkit.

TRUE COLORS UNITED.

Welcome!

We know that homelessness is a community issue. We've seen that community organizing and advocacy are powerful tools to leverage when moving toward a vision of homelessness prevention for LGBTQ youth.

In this toolkit, **you will learn an array of advocacy tools to get you started** on your very own campaign of change. As you learn about everything from how a bill becomes a law to digital advocacy techniques, think about your own communities and what change you want to bring about to better the lives of your friends, family, and neighbors.

> The more people who co-create the future, the more people whose concerns will be addressed from the foundational level in this world.

— **adrienne maree brown**

2021

RACIAL EQUITY TOOLKIT

TRUE COLORS UNITED.

Recommendation

To make sure you center individuals most marginalized within your community, **True Colors United** greatly recommends reading our *Racial Equity Toolkit* before diving into this one.

Key Terms

Before we get started here are some key terms that are important to understand and will be used throughout the toolkit.

A

Allies
Groups or people who support your goals.

B

Base
People working on your campaign.

Beneficiaries
The person or people that receive benefits from your advocacy/actions.

C

Community Members
Anyone involved in the local area where the issue is being targeted. Community members do not necessarily reside in the particular area, but can be members based on identity, community of choice, and common interest.

Constituents
Residents of a defined geographical area that is politically connected to where the issue is being targeted.

D

Decision Makers
People who are in positions of authority to make decisions over your goals.

I

Influencer
Anyone who has influential power and can sway your target audience.

Key Terms

M

Members
A person with a formal relationship to a certain organization.

O

Opponents
Groups or people who oppose your Goals.

P

Power Players
These are all the people for and against your goals who hold power/influence over them.

S

Stakeholder
Anyone affected by or having the power to affect the issue or outcome being addressed by your campaign.

T

Tactic
An action or strategy carefully planned to achieve a specific end.

Target
Person/people who can make your goals happen.

The Elements of Advocacy

The idea of advocacy and public policy can feel daunting and like a very abstract idea, in this section we will break down the elements of advocacy into more digestible pieces. **Let's look at an example** of an actual movement to better understand the elements that make up advocacy.

Please note that the following example is copied directly from *www.blacklivesmatter.com*

Movement

A movement describes a large coalition of individuals and organizations taking action toward a shared vision of an inspired future.

In 2013, three radical Black organizers — Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi — created a Black-centered political will and movement building project called **#BlackLivesMatter**. It was in response to the acquittal of Trayvon Martin's murderer, George Zimmerman. 8 years later, they've grown into Black Lives Matter Global Network Foundation, Inc. in the US, UK, and Canada.

Vision

A vision is an articulation of an ideal reality that is different from the one in which we currently live. A vision should be bold and imaginative with the goal of challenging the status quo to make the world a better place for marginalized communities. Dream big, and check in often with your vision, updating it as you gain the ability to see even further.

The **Black Lives Matter** mission is to eradicate white supremacy and build local power to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes. By combating and countering acts of violence, creating space for Black imagination and innovation, and centering Black joy, we are winning immediate improvements in our lives.

Issue

Now that your movement has a bold, beautiful vision, it's time to choose what specific issue you'd like to tackle. Not sure which issue to tackle first? Organize a gathering bringing together those people most affected by these possible issues; they are the experts on what the next graceful step is.

The space that **#BlackLivesMatter** held and continues to help propel the conversation around the state-sanctioned violence Tamir Rice, Tanisha Anderson, Mya Hall, Walter Scott, and Sandra Bland experienced. Black Lives Matter particularly highlighted the egregious ways in which Black women, specifically Black trans women, are violated. **#BlackLivesMatter** was developed in support of all Black lives.

Campaign

A campaign is the vehicle through which you will address your specific issue. It encapsulates organizing a diverse team to plan logistics and direct your advocacy efforts to achieve your goals.

As **#BlackLivesMatter** developed throughout 2013 and 2014, it became a platform and organizing tool. Other groups, organizations, and individuals used it to amplify anti-Black racism across the country, in all the ways it showed up.

Strategy

A strategy is the overarching, grand plan from beginning to end of a campaign to bring the movement's shared vision into reality. A campaign strategy is where we start to think practically about community, capacity-building, and action by using a variety of fun and effective tactics.

Darnell Moore and Patrisse Cullors organized **a national ride during Labor Day weekend** 2014 after Mike Brown was murdered by Ferguson police officer Darren Wilson. It was called the Black Life Matters Ride. In 15 days, a plan of action to head to the occupied territory to support our brothers and sisters was developed. **Over 600 people gathered.**

Organizers from 18 different cities went back home and developed **Black Lives Matter** chapters in their communities and towns — broadening the political will and movement building reach catalyzed by the **#BlackLivesMatter** project and the work on the ground in Ferguson.

Tactic

Tactics are the very specific actions that help your organization to achieve each piece of your campaign strategy. Tactics vary greatly by design, though share some commonalities. A tactic should be collaborative, effective, and fun!

As organizers who work with everyday people, **BLM** members see and understand significant gaps in movement spaces and leadership. Black liberation movements in this country have created room, space, and leadership mostly for Black heterosexual, cisgender men — leaving women, queer and transgender people, and others either out of the movement or in the background to move the work forward with little or no recognition. As a network,

Black Lives Matter always recognized the need to center the leadership of women and queer and trans people. To maximize the movement muscle, and to be intentional about not replicating harmful practices that excluded so many in past movements for liberation, **BLM** made a commitment to placing those at the margins closer to the center.

Target

A target is a specific person that you hope to influence with your campaign. Targets are chosen because they have the power to make the change you want to win your campaign. Targets are often politicians, heads of companies or organizations, and others with the power to make decisions.

The **BLM** goal is to support the development of new Black leaders, as well as create a network where

Black people feel empowered to determine destinies in the Black community.

Power

Power is the ability to use resources and relationships in order to influence the outcome of a decision-making process. Advocacy work requires understanding more than just relevant language. Your organizing team needs to understand the power dynamics relevant to your issue. Host an event inviting your entire team to take a close look at power including who has the power to make changes and what can influence those with power to support your vision, campaign, and movement.

Here is a power mapping worksheet from **Physicians for Human Rights**, that can help you get started.

It became clear that organizing and building Black power across the country needed to continue. People were hungry to galvanize their communities to end state-sanctioned violence against Black people, the way Ferguson organizers and allies were doing. Soon the **Black Lives Matter Global Network infrastructure** was created. It is adaptive and decentralized, with a set of *guiding principles*.

Power Mapping

Power mapping is an effective tool used to identify who has power and influence in the community and determines how those people/institutions could influence your target. Before creating your power map, consider creating a strategy chart that helps identify goals, resources that your group already brings to the campaign or initiative, and who your constituents, allies and opponents, campaign targets, and tactics are.

Strategy Chart

Goals	Organizational Considerations	Opponents	Targets	Tactics
1. List the long-term objectives of your campaign. 2. State the intermediate goals for this issue campaign. What constitutes victory? How will the campaign: • Win concrete improvement in people's lives? • Give people a sense of their own power? • Alter the relations of power? 3. What short-term or partial victories can you win as steps toward your long-term goal?	1. List the resources that your organization brings to the campaign. Include money, number of staff, facilities., reputation, canvass, etc. What is the budget, including in-kind contributions, for this campaign? 2. List the specific ways in which you want your organization to be strengthened by this campaign. • Expand leadership group • Increase experience of existing leadership • Build membership base • Expand into new constituencies. • Raise more money 3. List internal problems that have to be considered if the campaign is to succeed.	1. Who cares about this issue enough to join in or help the organization? • Whose problem is it? • What do they gain if they win? • What risks are they taking? • What power do they have over the target? • Into what groups are they organized? 2. Who are your opponents? • What will your victory cost them? • What will they do/ spend to oppose you? • How strong are they? • How are they organized?	1. Primary Targets A target is always a person. It is never an instituion or elected body. • Who has the power to give you what you want? • What power do you have over them? 2. Secondary Targets • Who has the power over the people with the power to give you what you want? • What Power do you have over them?	1. For each target, list the tactics that each constituent group can best use to make its power felt. Tactics Must be • In context • Flexible and creative • Directed at a specified target • Make sense to the membership • Be backed up by a specific form of power Tactics Include: • Media events • Actions for information and demands • Public hearings • Strikes • Lawsuits • Voter registration and voter education • Accountability sessions • Elections • Negotiations

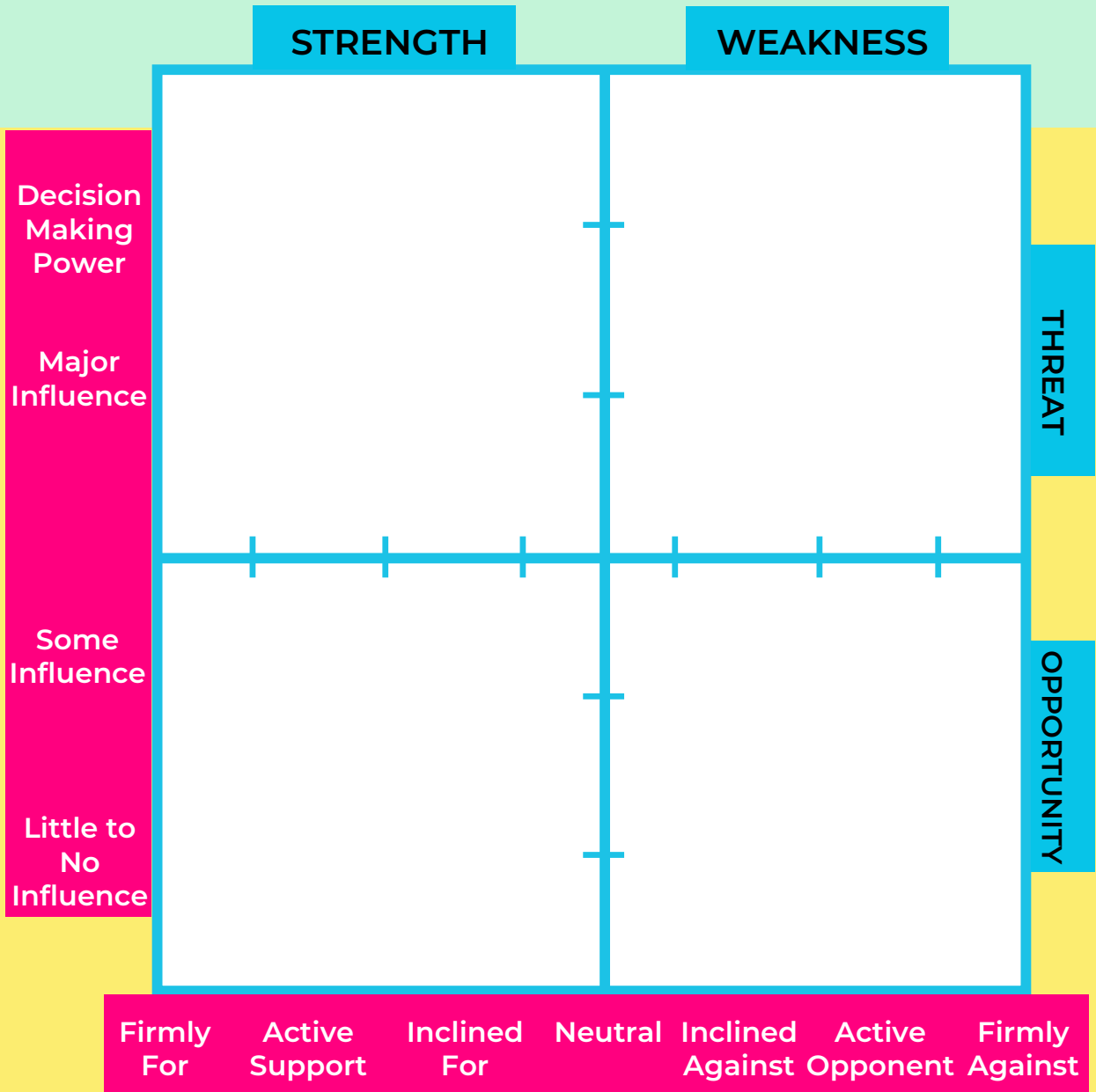This strategy chart is directly copied from the Midwest Academy.

S.W.O.T Power Mapping

Power Analysis

A S.W.O.T. power mapping matrix is a tool that helps to identify strategic strengths and weaknesses as well as the opportunities, and potential threats of an individual/ organization's goals and agenda.
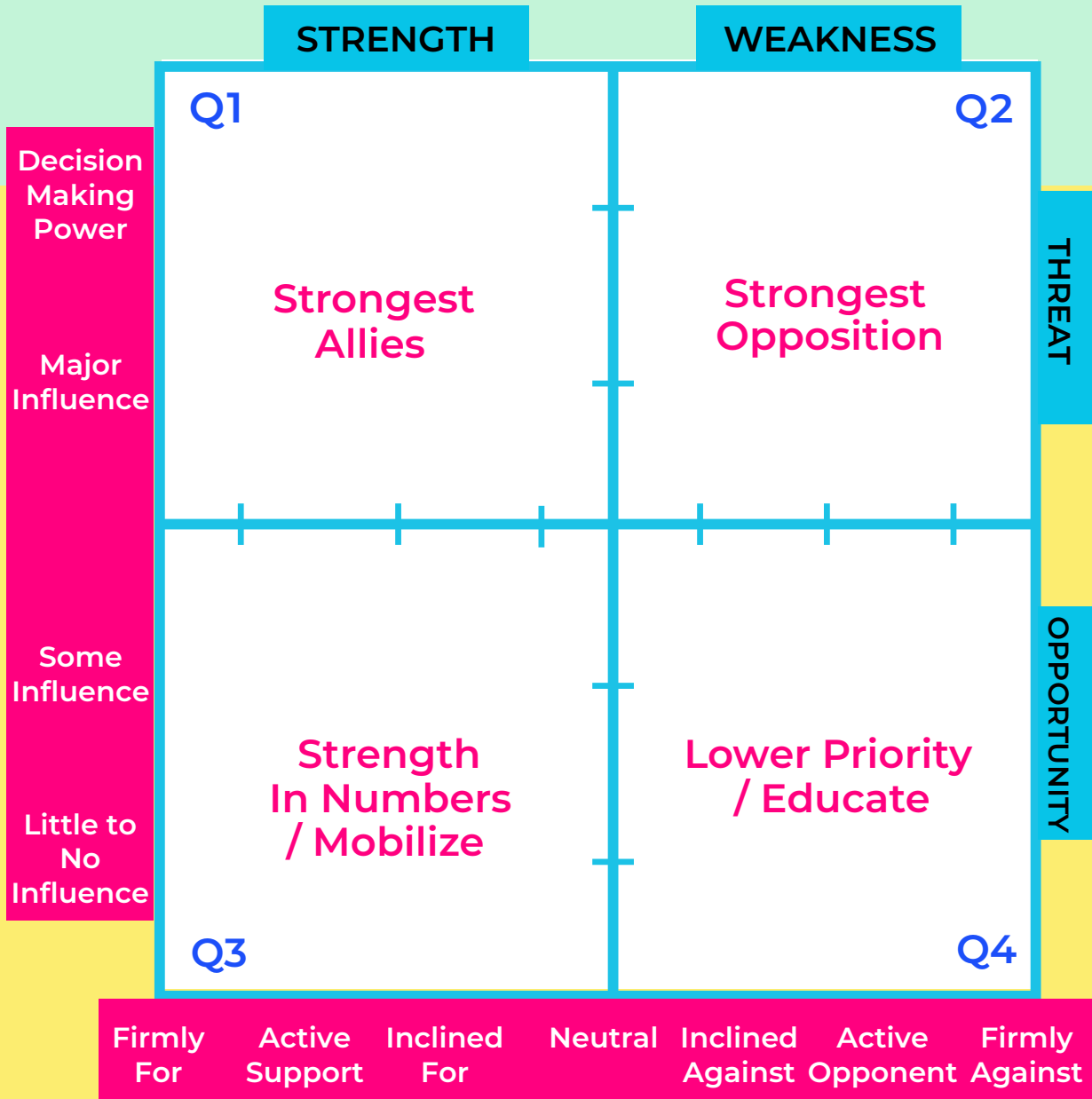
Questions to Consider:

1 Who are your clear allies and opponents?

2 Who are the major power players in the decision making?

3 Who are the potential targets?

4 How influential are the involved individual(s)?

5 What goals do you have and what do you hope to accomplish?

	STRENGTH	WEAKNESS	
Decision Making Power			THREAT
Major Influence			
Some Influence			OPPORTUNITY
Little to No Influence			

Firmly For	Active Support	Inclined For	Neutral	Inclined Against	Active Opponent	Firmly Against

S.W.O.T. Power Mapping

Quadrant Descriptions

Q1 These are your strongest allies. They have power to make decisions and will greatly aide you in your goals. We suggest prioritizing these connections.

Q2 These are your strongest opponents. Your targets will likely be in this quadrant. We suggest you keep a close eye on these individual(s).

Q3 This is your base. You have the opportunity to mobilize this group and need them on your side for strength in numbers.

Q4 This is your opposition's base. While they may be a lower priority, you have an opportunity to educate them and potentially sway them to your side.

	STRENGTH	WEAKNESS
Decision Making Power / **Major Influence**	**Q1** Strongest Allies	**Q2** Strongest Opposition — THREAT
Some Influence / **Little to No Influence**	**Q3** Strength In Numbers / Mobilize	**Q4** Lower Priority / Educate — OPPORTUNITY

Firmly For · Active Support · Inclined For · Neutral · Inclined Against · Active Opponent · Firmly Against

Types of Action

What is an action? An action, or action plan, is a one-time, coordinated series of tactics that further the mission of a campaign toward its stated vision. In 2014, a year after the inception of **Black Lives Matter**, co-founders Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi organized an action in response to the murder of 18-year-old Mike Brown by a police officer in Ferguson, Missouri. The Freedom Ride to Ferguson inspired activists from across the country to take direct action in the form of fundraising, joining protests, holding space for community healing, and overall building of a community base in support of justice for Mike Brown and Black lives everywhere.
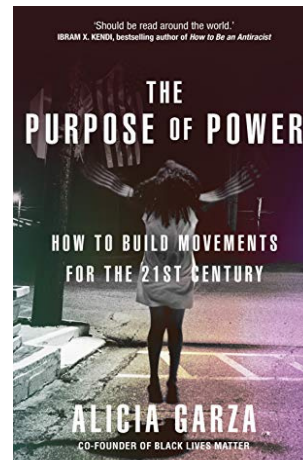
Read More

The Black Lives Matter Freedom Ride to Ferguson as told by its co-founders:
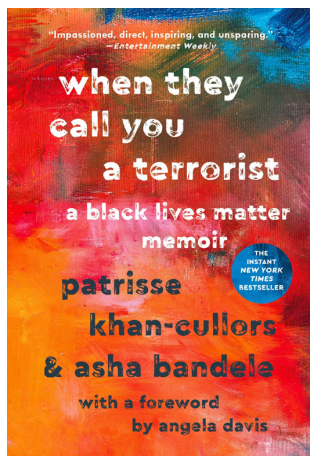
When They Call You A Terrorist: A Black Lives Matter Memoir

Patrisse Khan-Cullors & Asha Bandele

### The Purpose of Power: How to Build Movements for the 21st Century

Alica Garza

HOT TIP!

Just as important – **often more important** – than your ability to advance legislative policy in your state legislature is your ability to stop harmful legislation in its tracks. Advocates working to defeat bills that would hurt efforts to prevent or end youth homelessness will find that the strategies and tactics laid out in this toolkit work just as well to that end. You'll still need to build coalitions, mobilize the public, and make the case to lawmakers for your position. In that situation, you'll want to focus your message on the consequences you've identified as possible or probable should the bill become law.

Below is an overview of different types of actions that you and your organizing community can take to further your own mission and vision. These are not the only possible actions, so be creative; can you think of a few actions that would fit well with your organization's capacity, power, and mission?

For support when planning a large-scale operation like a march or protest, you can check out our *Project Management for Communities toolkit* and *course*, which will help you plan and execute your advocacy project.
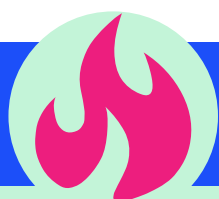
Hot Tip!

Midwest Academy's 3 Principles of Direct Action

1   Win real, immediate concrete improvements in people's lives

2   Give people a sense of their own power

3   Alter the relations of power

Continue Reading

The **Midwest's Academy**'s Organizing For Social Change

Start by Asking

What is it?

Sometimes what you want is just an ask away and the best action is often the one of least resistance. Call a state legislator and ask for a meeting, visit legislators during office hours, or send an email. It's also important to remember that even if asking works initially, you will likely have to keep the pressure on your target to ensure follow-through.

When to use it

Take this step after your organization has done the internal work to develop your list of demands, conduct your power analysis, and make sure that the voices of all your members are heard, especially centering those voices most affected by the policy you're looking to change.

After you have consulted with your team and used your *power mapping analysis* to figure out what your demands are, then you can make the ask to your target.

Pros

Low cost and minimum time and effort required to make the ask. At the very least, you are taking a step toward clearly asking for what you want and can point to this moment in future actions.

Cons

If what you're asking for demands a lot of time, energy, and funding from your target, you may need to use your power and employ several of the below actions and tactics to move your target into action. Remember, even if you get an agreeable response from your target, further action may be necessary to ensure follow-through of your demands.

Petitions

What is it?

A petition is a statement that defines a problem and offers a specific solution that members of a community can sign to show their support.

When to use it

The goal of a petition is to show your target or other stakeholders that a large number of constituents agree with your campaign goals. Other goals of a petition could be to raise awareness in the community, to educate community members and constituents, to recruit new volunteers for your campaign base.

Oakland, CA-based social and racial justice organization Color of Change has *a free, useful petition-builder tool* to help you get started.

Pros

A petition can be a powerful tool to show that many community members agree with your campaign goals. A large enough petition might get you a meeting with your target or a chance to speak at an exclusive community meeting. The question remains, however, how large is large enough?

Cons

If what you're asking for demands a lot of time, energy, and funding from your target, you may need to use your power and employ several of the below actions and tactics to move your target into action. Remember, even if you get an agreeable response from your target, further action may be necessary to ensure follow-through of your demands. Ask yourself and your fellow organizers: is a petition the best way to achieve your stated goals?

Phone Banking

What is it?

Phone banking is a great way to make human to human connection, even if it has to happen remotely. **Best practice is to make sure you have or create a script** that introduces yourself, names your organization, and makes several asks. Asks are clear and concrete requests you make of the person on the other end of the phone. Examples of asks include: showing up to an upcoming campaign event or action, donating time or money to the campaign, or pledging a vote for a policy that advances your mission.

Established nonprofits and political campaigns often have access to voter contact lists, which they can use to supply phone bankers with phone numbers to call. However, if you're organizing phone banking without those resources, you can do what's called "**relational organizing**" in which volunteers call and text their family and friends using the phone banking script as a discussion prompt.

Hot Tip!

A phone banking script should be built to feel like a real conversation. **Remember that you're speaking with real people**, and you want them to have a positive experience with you on the phone! What would make you feel more connected if a stranger called you on the phone?

When to use it

Phone banking is most useful days or weeks leading up to an important election or event. Make sure you have a reason for calling and that you make your ask clear and concrete.

Pros

Phone banking with friends might feel less scary than doing it on your own, and you can bond over the experience! Calling constituents and community members over the phone is also quicker and cheaper than other methods of communication.

Cons

Campaigning over the phone leaves out the benefits of face-to-face communication, though sometimes it really is the best way to reach people where they are at.

Sit-ins

What is it?

Following *your power mapping analysis,* you might find that the best way to get attention or to meet with your target is to organize a sit-in at their office or other relevant location. A sit-in is where several of your members take over a space (usually sitting down) until very specific demands are met. As with all actions, make sure participants know the risks and prepare to keep everyone safe and informed throughout.

When to use it

When urgency to be heard by your target is most important, a sit-in might be the appropriate action to plan. Which other tactics have you considered or tried before deciding on a sit-in?

Pros

Disruption tactics such as these can increase the urgency in campaign targets to at least agree to a meeting to discuss demands. A sit-in is a potent opportunity to include the media in your campaign to show the seriousness of your demands.

Cons

Protesters participating in the sit-in must be aware of the consequences that may result, such as *police violence*, arrest, and related fines. Consider as an organization how you can **safety plan or fundraise to mitigate these risk factors.**

Protests, Marches, and Rallies

What is it?

Whether you are marching in the streets or setting up a stage for speakers at a rally, a protest is useful to show just how many people agree with your campaign and the people power you have on your side. A protest can help sway key decision makers, or targets, such as politicians or business executives, while also building your community base and activist buy-in, or willingness to support, and also demand for, your campaign objectives and goals. Proper planning is essential to ensure the safety of participants, especially Black and Brown protesters who are more often targeted with violence by law enforcement or counter protesters. Know-your-rights trainings, legal and medical support, and the establishment of a buddy system are all tools to make for a safe and successful protest.

When to use it

Preparing a protest, march, or rally serves many purposes by nature of the breadth of logistics, visibility, and people power. As with any tactic or action, use the planning process to build capacity, leadership, and buy-in among your members. Plan a protest, march, or rally when you want to show the strength of your campaign through sheer numbers, and when you want to drum up excitement for the campaign. Remember, actions should be fun for participants!

Hot Tip!

Actions are best employed when they not only build the skills of your membership but are also fun! Your base should be excited to show up and take action. Imagine all of the logistical planning that went into *this creative action by ACT UP*. How would you go about beginning to plan a protest, march, or rally?

Pros

These actions provide lots of opportunity for building capacity, leadership, and buy-in among your members; every action must prioritize this capacity-building, in fact. A large public event is exciting and will build the momentum of your campaign!

Cons

Protests, marches, and rallies take a lot of time, energy, and money to pull off. In the end, it will likely be worth it, just as long as you have the people power to make it happen. Remember to choose actions that fit the current structure and assets of your organization.

Do Your Research

Young people experiencing homelessness, who are **disproportionately Black, Brown, and LGBTQ, regularly experience violence at the hands of the police**. Anything involving large crowds is inherently going to be more dangerous and unpredictable than other actions mentioned above, and we want to make sure you set your community up for success and safety, as much as possible. Again, do your research and use _BLAC_ as a resource to deepen your understanding of possible danger for your Black and Brown community members during protests, including understanding _your own implicit prejudices_ and _police violence_.

Digital Advocacy

Using digital tools for advocacy and organizing your campaign has its own set of challenges and advantages. Below are tips from the True Colors United digital advocacy team:

Choose the Best Platform for You

Be where your audience is and where you can "convert" the most people to join your campaign. To avoid spreading your energy and resources too thin, you shouldn't commit to being on every social media platform.

In 2022, these are some of the most popular social media platforms. Click on the icons below for an example of digital advocacy specific to each platform:

Depending on the platform you choose, hashtags can help you organize and track the conversation around your campaign. It's great if a bunch of people are tweeting about LGBTQ youth homelessness prevention. It's even better if they all use the same hashtag so you can search for them and track what and who is joining the conversation!

Advocacy

True Colors United's **#TrueColorsDay** provides supporters with (a) information on the issue through livestreams, social media, and resources on our website and (b) the means to take action quickly and easily online.

The day also serves as a vehicle for supporters to take their support to the next level through fundraising and advocacy. **#TrueColorsDay** supports True Colors United's long-term strategy by spreading our strengths-based message of youth resiliency and showcasing our new brand, voice, and values – making a deeper connection with our supporters than ever before.

Hot Tip!

- See what hashtags are out there and see if you can combine conversations to extend your reach.

- Each campaign should have one main hashtag.

- Keep it simple, not too long, and make it catchy! **#HashtagHero**

Make it Accessible

Make digital participation the easiest thing for your audience. Depending on your campaign goals, ask yourself how it would be best for your audience to engage, and then make it very simple for them. Make it as universal as possible. If the campaign is international, how can you make it make sense for as many people as possible?

Find the Humanity

Remember that even when you're engaging with screens, there are real people on the other end! Consider adding a human touch to your ask. For example, ask your audience to post a selfie with a sign or message that says "I believe housing is a human right." Attaching a face to the message makes it personal for the individual, and it applies pressure for others to do the same. Influencers and celebrities are good for this kind of positive peer pressure. Make it self-identifying, make it human, and make it personal!
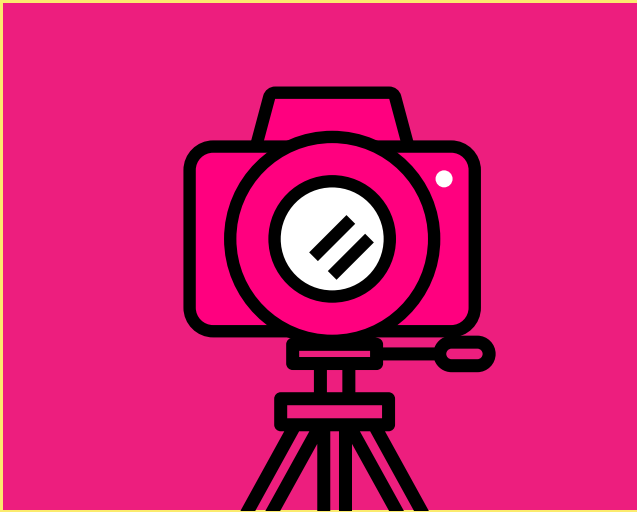

Don't Do it Alone

Running a campaign doesn't mean you have to run it all by yourself. Your job is to make the advocacy work easy and fun so that others will hop onboard and do a lot of the work for you!

Post a resource kit on your campaign website describing the types of actions folks can take to add their voice to your campaign.

Here are some ideas to get you started:

Set up a selfie booth at your event featuring your campaign hashtag.
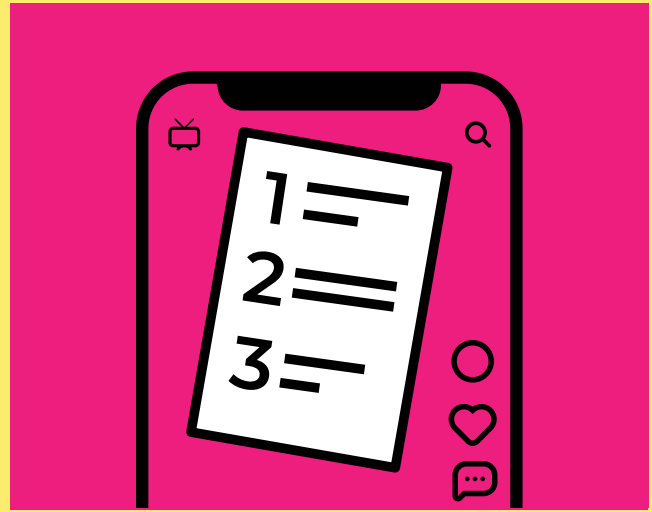
Provide a step-by-step guide to posting about your campaign on Twitch or TikTok.

What other easy and fun actions can you recommend to your audience?

Build out your network by partnering with other organizations. Cross-coalition building is useful for digital and on-the-ground organizing. Identify membership organizations, companies, and schools who share part of your vision and reach out to someone who has access to a network of people eager to get involved.

Measure Impact

Anticipate tracking your impact in the planning stages of your campaign. Each social media platform has its own impact-tracking tools, many of which are free to use, so explore your options and choose what works best for your needs. Make sure also that the goals you set in the beginning can be tracked at the end of your event or campaign. The goal in measuring your impact is to determine what works for your campaign and what doesn't.

Keep in Touch

Build your list of emails and phone numbers so that even when you aren't actively promoting an event, you can send campaign updates. Keeping your audience engaged will make them more willing to jump into your next campaign when the time is right.

Segment your contacts according to how they engage. Be intentional about how frequently you reach out to each group depending on how they previously responded to your communications. For example, keep track of who signs your petition versus who has set up a monthly donation to your campaign. Then you can tailor your next ask to each group based on their level of engagement.

Hot Tip!

Be mindful of how you reach out. Knowing your audience will help you use the contact method that works best for them. There's always a fine line when reaching out to people on their personal devices.

Be Mobile-Friendly

Even if you're building most of your digital materials on a computer, **most of your audience will engage on their mobile device**. When you're building your site, make sure it's mobile friendly. When it comes to the action itself, make sure it's simple, can be done on the go, and doesn't need the use of a desktop computer.

Universal Design

Universally designing your digital (and in-person) content and events means making sure that all people are able to access them without undue barriers. When considering whether to make an accommodation, the question must always be asked: **this is a burden to whom?** The answer must be that **you** take on the burden (financial, physical, logistical, etc.) to make sure that your campaign welcomes and encourages otherwise disabled folks from adding their invaluable skills and strengths to your team.

Paid Tools

This toolkit features many free resources throughout, though sometimes it is to your benefit to access a paid service to help you organize your digital campaigning. Below are a few paid tools that could be worth the price:

- *Fiscal Note*/*Voter Voice*

- *Muster*

- *KeyHole*
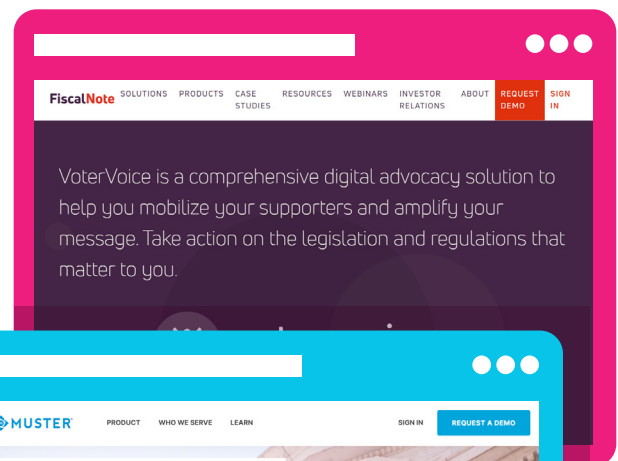
Hot Tip!

Nonprofit Law, Advocacy, and Lobbying

Leaders of IRS-designated 501(c)3 public charities are often under the impression that their organizations are prohibited from engaging in lobbying and advocacy. However, all 501(c)3 public charities can engage in these activities to some extent, depending on their budget and other program activities. A general rule of thumb is to **keep your spending on lobbying (including staff time) below 20 percent of your annual budget.**

TRUE COLORS UNITED.

This toolkit was developed by **True Colors United**, which implements innovative solutions to youth homelessness that focus on the unique experiences of LGBTQ young people.

For more information on the rules nonprofits are subject to related to lobbying and political activity, we recommend the resources provided by **Bolder Advocacy** at *www.bolderadvocacy.org*

How to Change a Policy or Law

First let's dive into a brief overview of the typical state's legislative process. Every state (except for Nebraska which only has one legislative chamber) has a bicameral legislature, which means it is made up of two separate legislative bodies that work together. The states that are bicameral have a "lower house" that is often called the House or Assembly, and the "upper" house referred to as the state Senate. Bills can start in the house or senate, but have to move through both to become law. States differ in the timing and length of their legislative sessions. Often legislative sessions have restrictions related to what kinds of legislation can be filed. Visit *your state legislature's website* for specific information on its calendar and rules.

Phase One: The Legislative Chamber

The Bill Is Introduced

1

First Committee Hearing:
Ammendments can be made by the committee. Then the committee votes whether to send the amended bill to the full chamber.

2

Full Chamber:
The bill is then debated by the full chamber. Amendments can be made, then the whole chamber votes whtether to pass the amended bill to the next step.

3

First Committee Hearing:
Again, amendments can be made by the committee. Then the committee votes whether to send the amended billl to the full chamber.

4

Full Chamber:
Lastly, the bill will be debated by the full (second) chamber.

How to Change a Policy or Law

Phase Two: Reconciling Different Versions Passed

5a
If passed by the second chamber with amendments, sent to the original chamber where they vote to accept changes.

5b
If passed without amendments, sent to the government.

See phase 3.

6a
If the original chamber rejects any amendments, sent to conference commitee with members of both chambers to negotiate a version all can agree with.

6b
If other chamber accepts amendments, sent to governor.

7a
If the conference committee doesn't reach an agreement, the bill does not become a law.

7b
If the conference committee reaches agreement, they send the final version to both chambers for approval.

7c
If one or both chambers doesn't approve the final version, the bill does not become a law.

7d
If both chambers approve, the final version is sent to the governor.

See phase three.

How to Change a Policy or Law

Phase Three: The Governor

8a
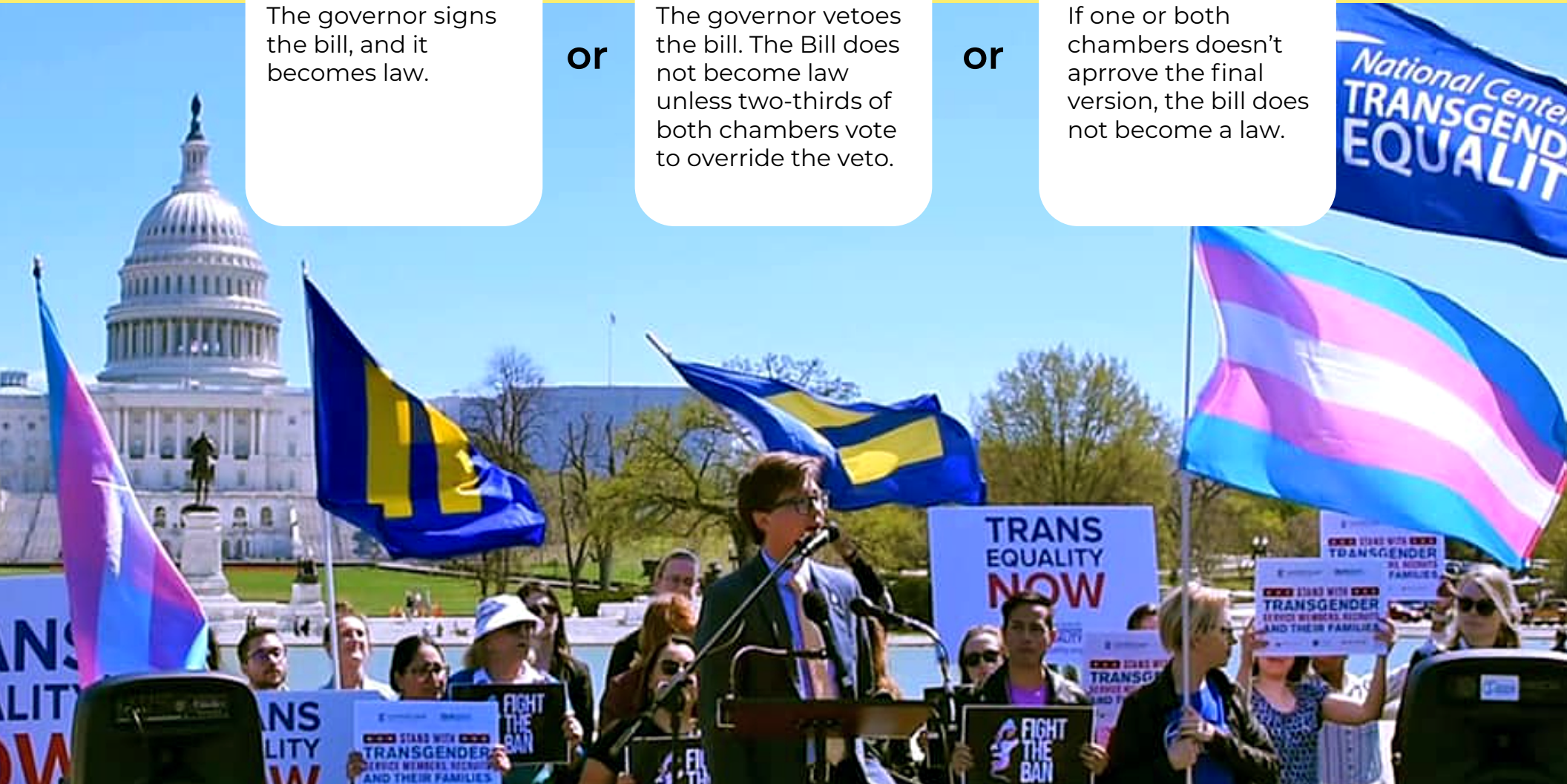The governor signs the bill, and it becomes law.

or

8b
The governor vetoes the bill. The Bill does not become law unless two-thirds of both chambers vote to override the veto.

or

8c
If one or both chambers doesn't aprrove the final version, the bill does not become a law.

Increasing Access to Child Care Assistance for Homeless Families

In 2014, I was a **junior staffer with no legislative experience** at a Louisiana non-profit organization working to address poverty, economic disparities, and social inequality. I decided that I wanted to work on legislation to help families experiencing homelessness better access community and social safety net supports. In this case study, we'll walk through the steps I took to identify a pressing need of families experiencing homelessness and then craft a legislative solution.
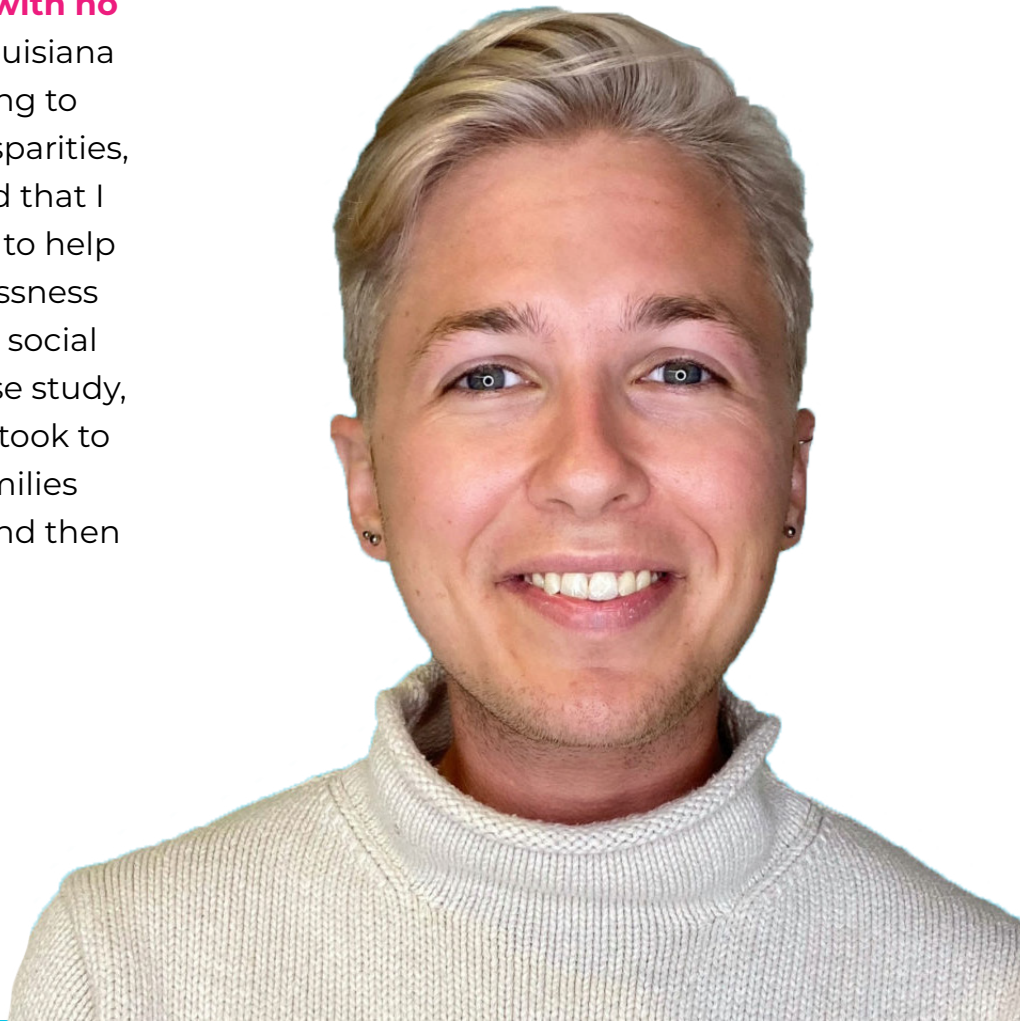
Dylan Waguespack
CEO, **True Colors United**

Research

I started by researching model legislation that had been introduced in other states to help people who were without housing. After gaining a better understanding of what policy solutions were being pushed in other states, I contacted a **national homeless advocacy nonprofit** to discuss the policy landscape in Louisiana. They identified a number of needs that could be addressed in Louisiana's statutes.

Next, I set up meetings with executives at nonprofits who provided direct services to individuals and families experiencing homelessness to discuss what needs they were having difficulty addressing for their clients. These meetings helped me **identify a pressing need** that, after reviewing other possible approaches, such as agency policy or executive order, I determined could only be solved by legislative action due to language in state law that prevented other types of policy solutions.

Findings

Many families experiencing homelessness were unable to search for employment due to an inability to access child care. Shelters and drop-in centers that serve homeless families could only watch children when the parent was present. There were too few openings in the local Head Start programs for all families experiencing homelessness and long waiting lists for openings to become available. And because Louisiana's Child Care Assistance Program **required that participants work thirty hours per week** to meet eligibility criteria, homeless families were stuck in a **catch-22.** They had to work in order to access child care, but they couldn't look for a job without child care.

Drafting

After identifying this priority, **I decided to look for a model policy** addressing child care access for homeless families, on the off chance that this issue was being discussed elsewhere in the country. I found federal legislation filed by Senator Patty Murray (*S.834 of the 113th Congress*) that mirrored the goals of the necessary state-level legislation, and I adjusted it to conform with the specifics of state jurisdiction. What's important to note here is that I didn't draft up a new bill from scratch, but rather updated a similar bill to better meet the needs of the folks impacted. Once adjusted, I submitted it to the stakeholders who I'd met with previously, both the national advocates and the local service providers, for review, and then incorporated their feedback into the draft. Ultimately, the bill draft removed the work requirement for families with documented homelessness so that the service providers who helped them navigate resources would be able to find child care for them through the **Child Care Assistance Program.**

Recruiting a Lawmaker

The next step to having my bill introduced was to **recruit a state representative or state senator to file the legislation.** There are 105 members of the Louisiana House of Representatives and 39 members of the Louisiana State Senate, so I found it necessary to conduct more research in order to narrow my prospects to a reasonable number. I looked on the legislative website for bills filed in previous years addressing child care assistance or homelessness and found that only a few legislators serving at the time had ever filed legislation on either issue. Ultimately, I secured a meeting with a Representative who had a strong record of legislating on early childhood education. The Representative reviewed the bill and offered to introduce it.

Hot Tip!

Most states have websites that include all legislative information. A quick google search can point you in the right direction for your state.

Preparing for the Legislative Session

January-February 2014

Now that the bill had an author and the legislative session was around the corner, it became important to produce talking points on the legislation that addressed what the bill's effects were and why it was necessary. **It was also important to determine what opposition to the bill might look like** and how to refute possible opposing points. I worked with the bill author to draft those talking points and a policy brief to prepare for committee and floor debate. This preparation period was also when it became necessary to begin negotiating with the state agency who would be responsible for implementing the legislation, the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS). Those negotiations led to amendments to the bill that created a specific six-month time period that families would be able to access child care assistance while job searching, rather than open-ended eligibility for the duration of homelessness.

Legislative Session

March-June 2014

The bill was introduced when the legislative session began in March of 2014, and its first committee hearing was in the House Committee on Health and Welfare, which has jurisdiction over the DCFS. During the weeks leading up to the hearing, I worked to secure support from nonprofit service providers and social welfare organizations throughout the state, who submitted statements of support to committee members in advance of the hearing. I also engaged the public, asking them on my organization's social media channels to call and email the committee members to ask for their support.

This hearing took place in the beginning of May, and it advanced without opposition to the House floor, where it passed one week later without opposition. **I leveraged social media and relationships with stakeholder nonprofits** to mobilize support for the bill in the Senate, where its committee hearing and floor vote were also unopposed.

Signing and Implementation

June 2014

The bill was signed by Governor Bobby Jindal on June 19, 2014 and **became Act 787 of 2014,** the Improving Access to Childcare for Homeless Families Act. It went into effect the same day. Its language required the DCFS to create rules for its implementation, and I followed the rulemaking process and submitted public comment on the rules they proposed and ultimately adopted. It was also necessary to follow the implementation of the law by staying in communication with the service provider nonprofits to ensure that DCFS employees were processing applications appropriately and not continuing to deny applications based on the previous rules.

NEW LAW
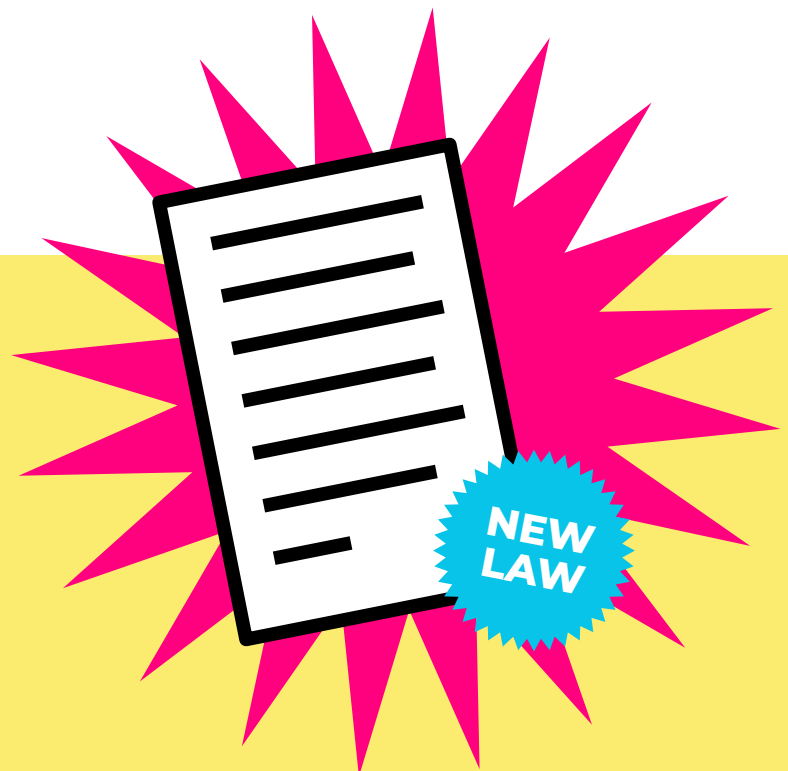
Conclusion

This case study is an example of how **someone without legislative experience can change laws to help nonprofit organizations** better serve their clients. This formula can be followed by anyone who wants to change state laws. However, the results may not be the same, depending on the issue, the opposition, and the stakeholders involved. We recommend using what you learn throughout this toolkit to study the feasibility of a legislative item and then make a determination on whether and/or how to move forward based on the likelihood of your success, the importance of the issue, and the amount of education the legislature will need in order to act. Note that if this bill had been an item of greater controversy, it still may have made sense to move forward with it, knowing that it may have taken an additional year or more to convince legislators of its necessity.