

Section 5: Your First Few Meetings

Your first meetings

The following section is an examination of the first 3 meetings of the CAN at Oregon Food Bank. These notes should give you concrete examples of what could happen at your meetings.

For your first meeting, it's essential that you explain what the

purpose of the group is, get feedback on it, and find out why the volunteers decided to come to the meeting. It's also your first chance to help everyone to get to know each other, so you should first take some time to let everyone introduce themselves. The focus of the rest of the meeting is up to you. You may decide to focus on educating the members of the group on basic civics, advocacy, or the sociology of poverty. You might also focus on engaging in an advocacy activity, or having a broad discussion. Also, make sure to have your first meeting at a convenient time and place (weekend mornings seemed to work best for our volunteers).

For our first meeting, we decided to begin with introductions and a presentation to get everyone oriented. Then we talked a bit about what the group's mission was, and had a discussion on what everyone else's goals for the group were.

Long Introductions: We set aside the first 20 minutes of the meeting for introductions. We asked people to state their name, the reasons why they came to the meeting, and something fun that happened to them over the weekend. Not everybody showed up on time, so people who came a little late didn't miss much of the meeting. And the long introductions gave everybody a chance to get more familiar with each other, as few people knew each other. Also, some people really wanted a chance to vent their personal issues.

A presentation on poverty, government programs and advocacy in Oregon: Most people seemed interested for the first 20 minutes, but I think I lost everyone's attention for the last 15 minutes. It was too long, and I think people got bored, and even a little offended, when I discussed statistics related to poverty in Oregon for too long. Some participants said they "didn't need to be reminded that they were poor." If you try an educational program, you may want to keep it between 20 and 25 minutes, and only briefly discuss the state of poverty in your community. Most people know what's going on already. Focus on governmental programs and what it means to do advocacy. One of the more successful sections was on the shared interest everyone had in advocating for lots of different anti-poverty policies, which was intended to address the I/We divide (See Building A Strong Group Identity). A copy of the presentation comes with the CD included in this handbook.

Information on our vision: My co-facilitator and I spoke for about 10 minutes on our plans for the group. In retrospect, we should have discussed what people thought, taken more questions, and then had a discussion about everyone's goals for the group. See the "discussion" section from the

notes from the third meeting for a good examples of constructive conversation about the group vision.

Discussion about priorities and ground rules: Here, we established some ground rules, and then started talking about our priorities for the group. Both discussions went pretty well, though we probably should have been talking more about our vision for the group than the issues we cared about. We would learn at future meetings that people wanted to discuss the vision as well as group priorities. In retrospect, it might have been helpful to do what we did at the third meeting, where we went around the room and everyone stated a question they had about the group. That format let us discuss lots of different issues, give everyone got a chance to participate, and understand what the group needed to figure out to do advocacy. Plus, many of the people who come to your first meeting will not be present later on, and new people will show up at later meetings. You may want to hold off on a discussion of group priorities until you have a group of people who consistently come to meetings.

SAMPLE PUBLIC AGENDA

First Meeting of the Citizen's Advocacy Network
Community Room of Oregon Food Bank
Saturday, November 12th, 10:00 A.M.

Agenda

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| 10:00 | Introductions |
| 10:25 | Presentation |
| 11:00 | Meeting Norms and Vision |
| 11:15 | Goals Discussion |
| 11:45 | Debrief |

For our second meeting, we focused on letting members know

about action steps related to recent developments in the state and federal government. This was a product of circumstances; we happened to hold the meeting when the federal government was taking many important steps, and as our campaign to regulate payday loans was getting into full swing. Advocates at Oregon Food Bank thought it would be a good idea to have members of the CAN take advantage of upcoming opportunities to influence the political developments that we were paying attention to. We also thought that focusing on action would make our volunteers feel like meetings were worth coming to. Since many of the volunteers did participate in advocacy activities later, this focus may very well have paid off. All of the volunteers we mobilized showed up at the third meeting, and they brought friends.

Introductions: We allowed less time for introductions here than the first meeting (10 minutes), and it seemed to work fine. People just said who they were, and a little about something they did over the weekend.

Advocacy Review: We gave everybody a chance to talk about an advocacy activity that they had done between then and the last meeting. Quite a few volunteers had done something, and we had a lively discussion about what happened.

Legislative Update and Advocacy Alert: Oregon Food Bank had lots of things to update volunteers on, and we had a guest speaker from the SEIU talk about a campaign to organize unlicensed child care workers. We tried to do too much, and the speakers talked for too long. This may have worked better if we had prepared our speaker more. Make sure to let them know how much time they have. They might overshoot, otherwise. Also, be careful who you work with. The guest speaker was from SEIU, and some service providers who brought volunteers to our meeting were upset that we were working with them, even though we never made a formal partnership with the union.

We described the issues surrounding a budget bill we were concerned about and passed out an info sheet on it. We talked about a campaign to send postcards to public officials that would show support for payday loan regulation, as the City of Portland was considering adopting limited regulation of the industry. We passed out the postcards, and had advocates fill some of them out. We asked them to find other people to sign postcards, and provided them a manila envelope to send the filled out postcards back to us. This didn't work very well. We only received one of the envelopes back. We also mobilized people for a hearing of the Oregon House Committee on Payday loans, Many of the members showed up for the hearing.

Discussion of Trainings: After the extended advocacy alert, we had very little time left for the discussion we had planned. Interestingly, for the time that we did talk, the topic of conversation moved right into the purpose of the group. It seemed clear that people still had questions about the group's mission, as well as questions about the formal structure of the group. Members asked about

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Oregon Food Bank, Portland, Ore.

how much power will the group had over the agenda and determining group priorities. We decided to bring these questions up at the next meeting and postpone the discussion on trainings until these more important questions had been answered.

SAMPLE STAFF AGENDA FROM SECOND MEETING

2nd Meeting of the Citizen's Advocacy Network
State of Oregon Office Building, Room 140
December 13th, 2005. 6:00 PM

CAN Agenda

6:00 Announcements/Introductions

6:15 Immediate Advocacy Opportunities (w/ guest speaker Abby Solomon of the SEIU)

-A brief discussion with Abby Solomon of the SEIU, who is doing work on preventing cuts to federal child care subsidy programs

-Julie will talk some about what actions the Food Bank is taking now. Payday loan ordinances, etc. We'll talk to Angela about this soon.

-TANF update

-Food Stamps/Medicare Reconciliation Bill

-CASH

-Washington poverty event

6:45 Advocacy Action Heroes: What advocacy have we done?

-Goal: Share stories about the advocacy we've participated in since our last meeting

-the stuff we talked about, and the stuff you've done aside from that

7:00 Advocacy Skills: First Actions Discussion

7:20 Closing

-recruitment?

-next meeting?

-how do we feel about the way we've been communicating?

7:30 Adjourn

Materials

Paper+Board, pens

Mercy Corp stuff

How an idea becomes a law, etc

Advocacy Alert/Advocacy Menu

Food

Plates, Cups, Silverware

Sign-in sheet

Name tags

List of questions for the discussion

Some research on the reconciliation bills

SAMPLE PUBLIC AGENDA

2nd Meeting of the Citizen's Advocacy Network
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December 13th, 2005. 6:00 PM

CAN Agenda

- 6:00 Announcements/Introductions
- 6:15 Immediate Advocacy Opportunities (w/ guest speaker Abby Solomon of
the Service Employees International Union (SEIU))
 Goal: Inform everyone about advocacy campaigns/opportunities.
- 6:45 Advocacy Action Recap: What advocacy have we done?
 Goal: Share stories about the advocacy we've participated in.
- 7:00 Advocacy Skills: First Actions Discussion
 Goal: Have a discussion about the skills people need in order to
advocate.
- 7:20 Closing
 Goal: Sum everything up and plan our next meeting.
- 7:30 Adjourn

For the third meeting, we decided to keep things simple. We focused

on getting information about advocacy opportunities out to the members of the CAN and having a group discussion about the mission and structure of the group. Mostly, we decided to focus on these things because of what happened at the second meeting, where many volunteers showed concern about the direction of the group. We decided that we needed to know what everyone had questions or doubts about. We were also worried about time; at the last meeting, some things went on for far too long. An agenda with only a few items helped us manage time better. Also, we were concerned about attendance, as fewer than expected volunteers showed up to the last meeting. Prior to the meeting, we made extra recruitment and reminder calls to everyone active in the group. We also held the meeting on the weekend, and at a location that was much more convenient for almost everyone. As a result, we had our highest attendance yet- 17 people.

Introductions/Review of Advocacy Activities: We kept them short. Some people came late, and we made sure to have them give their names when they came. People again seemed to like talking about the advocacy activities they had done.

Advocacy Alert and Legislative Update: We passed out more campaign literature and action materials, like postcards and posters. Everyone was very enthusiastic about the literature. They took lots of it. However, it's not clear how much of an impact this type of exercise is making. We really don't know how many of these postcards are actually being sent. And the hotline for stories about payday loans, which is what the posters promoted, hasn't received any calls yet. What seems to work the best is to do advocacy activities at the meeting, like filling out postcards and handing them back to the facilitator.

Discussion: We went around the meeting room and had everybody ask a question about the group vision. It worked much better than the discussions we had where we asked people to talk about their goals for the group. We recorded all the issues that people had with the group. At the end of the discussion, I summarized what happened. It turned out that there was a wide variety of questions. We decided to try to hold off on answering them, but it did give us a great place to start more conversations moving into our next meeting. We then knew which discussions we needed to keep having.

Closing/Resource Sharing/Optional Speaking Engagement: One thing we've always wanted to do was give people a chance to share what they knew about resources that are available to low-income people. We didn't actually get to this, because of time, but you may consider doing something similar. The optional speaking engagement, on the other hand, was a complete success. We scheduled the meeting at the SEIU's office (again, not having partnered with them) in part because it was a convenient location and in part because the SEIU was speaking with a state representative's staffer that afternoon. After the meeting, about 6 of the volunteers who attended the meeting went to speak with the staffer. They observed SEIU as they prepared for the meeting,

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which some found helpful, and then spoke to the representatives about whatever they wanted. Everyone truly seemed to enjoy the experience. Many of the volunteers even identified themselves as members of the CAN, which made us think that we were well on our way to creating a solid group identity.

SAMPLE 3rd MEETING STAFF AGENDA

CAN Meeting

SEIU Office

January 14th, 2006. 1:30 PM.

Agenda

1:30 Introductions (Matt)

1:45 Review of CAN advocacy participation (Matt)

2:00 Discussion: What do we want the CAN to be? (Matt and Julie, with Julie as principle facilitator)

- Introduce the intent of the discussion. We're looking to find ways to share control of the group. Want to have CAN gain more structure. We don't have a solid answer for either of these issues. This should be a part of an ongoing discussion.
- Go around the room stating one question we have about CAN.
- Try to narrow questions down, and begin discussion. Make sure to say that we're not looking to answer any questions. Ensure equal participation. State our desires to focus on several anti-poverty issues and to have CAN members participate in OFB advocacy events.
- Assign minute-taker rotation

2:35 Legislative Update (Matt, Julie, Dena)

- Julie will talk about E-Board
- Matt will speak briefly on federal issues
- Dena will speak about payday loans. Matt may add some things.

2:45 Next Steps: What advocacy is there to do? (Matt and Julie)

- E-board things: Advocacy Alert
- Payday loan campaign: check up on postcards, more postcards? And story line.

2:55 Closing/Optional resource sharing session (Julie)

Materials

Food?	Agendas	Advocacy alerts
Sign-in sheet	Fliers	Extra postcards
Reimbursement forms	Story line posters	Handouts