

## **Contra Costa CoC Quarterly Meeting**

Friday, October 19, 2018

Nick Rodriguez Community Center, 213 F Street, Antioch, CA 94509

### **Welcome & Introductions**

#### **Advocacy 101**

- Presented by Zuleika Godinez
- Request slides from H3 or Homebase.
- Ensuring Opportunity is a countywide initiative to end poverty in Contra Costa by addressing root causes
- Equity is at the core of the network, so focus is on collaboration between different services, such as health, education, food, etc.

What is advocacy?

- Audience: Hope, voice, support, educating, representation
- Advocacy encompasses a broad range of activities that can influence public policy
- Advocacy activities: Research, Community organization, Educating legislators, Encourage voting, Litigation, Changing corporate behavior, etc.
- Nonprofits cannot engage in partisan political activities
- They can occasionally lobby on behalf of causes
  - a. Including raising funds for various PACs and initiatives
  - b. If people are interested in learning more about what lobbying and advocacy is legal for nonprofits, there are resources online

Common misconceptions about advocacy?

- Misconception #1: Advocacy is only for lobbyists
- #2: Advocacy is the same as fundraising or donating to charity
- #3: Advocacy consumes a lot of time; I'm too busy to get involved in advocacy
- #4: Advocacy is all about "politics"
- These are all misconceptions. Everyone can advocate, and there are fast and easy ways to make a difference

Who is an advocate?

- Anyone can be an advocate
- Citizens, nonprofit employees, community organizers

Why is advocacy important?

- To help the community
- To help "amplify" the voices of people that may not be heard
- To bring awareness to an issue
- To bridge the gap between a need and a resource
- To act as a conduit for services to the community
- Advocacy allows us to advance the issues that we care about and help bring about lasting change for the people and communities we serve

What are some of the ways that the audience engages in advocacy?

- By participating in meetings like this
- Presenting to and engaging with other organizations
- Having difficult conversations
- Being present, listening, documenting the problem, story telling, identifying a solution, asking for help

What are some ways to engage in advocacy?

- Prior to creation of a policy, individuals can identify and/or propose solutions that address the concerns of the community (e.g. use survey, focus group, etc)
- After the policy has been proposed, people can advocate by responding to policies or legislation at the local, state, or federal levels (such as writing letters, speaking at Board of Supervisors, calling representatives)
- After the policy has been passed, involved parties can help with the implementation of policies and advocate for improvements as needed

What are some ways to engage in advocacy?

- Audience: Public opinion is one of the most important parts of advocacy. It's critical to our work.
- Audience: We're finding that people have a certain perspective about what homelessness is—the person pushing the shopping cart down the street. But it's more than that, e.g. elderly couples being priced out of their homes. So we need to change the public opinion and help them realize what's going on so that there is more compassion.
- In addition to changing public opinion, sending letters to legislators, engaging in public awareness campaigns, budgets are an indicator of a government's priorities. Citizens can advocate on different parts of the budget to help provide more money for important priorities. There are different local agencies that advocate about the local municipal and county budget

What does Ensuring Opportunity do?

- Mostly engaged at the state and local level
- State legislative process is cumbersome
- Ensuring Opportunity partners with a variety of organizations (Housing California, Western Center on Law and Poverty, etc). These different partners are experts with the legislative process, and working with them and using their resources helps Ensuring Opportunity to target/strategize with their advocacy efforts

Concrete steps to take to start or deepen your advocacy?

- Train and support your staff, board members, clients, volunteers, etc
- Evaluate your organization's missions and goals, and examine whether current programs involve advocacy
- Collaborate and work in coalitions with different groups to build momentum and raise awareness
- Meet with your elected officials, including reaching out, sharing client stories, and propose solutions

#### Other Suggestions for Effective Advocacy from Audience:

- Use people-first language — “people experiencing homelessness” instead of “homeless persons,” or “the unhorsed.” This helps shift public opinion.
- Need to engage schools, because there are a lot of families that are living out of cars and motor homes.
  - a. H3 has recently been working closely with the county’s schools

#### **Elected official Panel Discussion with Q&A on Advocacy**

- Deanne Pearne: Introduces herself (Executive Director of Contra Costa Interfaith Housing) and the panel
- Rich Kenney, San Pablo Councilmember: There is a great divide between the everyday resident who sees people experiencing homelessness, and the people who actually have the resources to make a difference. I want to bridge the gap.
- Colleen Isenberg, Staff to Contra Costa County Supervisor Karen Mitchoff (District IV): I currently help constituents connect to their county agencies, such as Cal-Fresh. I also act as Mitchoff’s eyes and ears to the multiple cities in Contra Costa. I have also worked for state and federal representatives.
- Lori Ogorchock, Antioch City Councilmember: I want to bring solutions; we can’t bring about solutions without community help. It’s so important for constituents to bring issues forward so that we can address them. Everyone needs to come to the plate, because it’s a problem that we all must collaborate on.
- Diane Burgis, Contra Costa County BOS (District III): I ran a nonprofit for 10 years, and I’m looking at this position the same way I did that—what are my deliverables? Contra Costa has a \$3.5 billion budget, but the BOS only controls \$200 million. When you are trying to serve a county with so many competing needs, that doesn’t go very far, so I have to be strategic. In addition, I sit on 27 different committees.
  - a. Regarding homeless, we are working on strengthening out behavioral health department, in addition to a variety of other actions

#### What makes effective advocacy?

- Kenney: To get any city to work on a problem, it first has to be brought to their attention. First, citizens need to communicate their ideas and concerns; this can be done through letter writing or calling, etc. Then, City Councils can bring it up at the end of a meeting for the City Manager to address it.
  - a. People can also bring their issues forward during public comment. We can’t address them at that moment because it’s not on the agenda, but it gets it on our radar potentially for a future agenda.
  - b. City Council members need to be reminded, because it may not be something that they know is a problem
- Ogorchock: Like RK said, we can only address items that have been agendaized. Public comment is only 3 minutes long per person, so we cannot take much action on public comment. It has to be agendaized. Unlike other positions, City of Antioch Councilmembers do not have staff members. So we cannot do this on our own; we need you and your organizations to partner with us so we can address this as a group.
- Isenberg: In general, for meetings, make sure that you have a purpose or objective. A particular ask, a plan, or even just an update—these are all appropriate objectives.

- a. Educate your officials. It's impossible for officials to know about everything that is going on, the regulations involved, etc., so this is your chance.
  - b. Bring data to back up your ideas.
  - c. Say "I don't know" when you are asked a question, and follow up later with an answer. Do not try to make something up on the spot.
  - d. Make sure that what you are advocating for issues that are relevant to the constituents, because this is what the officials care about
  - e. If you are advocating for money and how it is spent, make sure there is a rough outline of what it will go to (not just a flat figure)
- Burgis: Actively listen, watch their body language, listen to the questions they are asking you. Identify whether they are pushing back or agreeing with you.
    - a. Important to understand the constraints of the other side and helping to move those constraints
    - b. Follow the avenues that are in place – don't just try to call the councilman without working with the staff first. Start off your interactions strong and professionally in order to be taken seriously.
    - c. Listen, have your story, come in with your evidence and data, bring credibility, and you will go far

What does not work?

- Burgis: Yelling, getting worked up. I had a constituent yell at me and I had a hard time "hearing" what they were saying because of the tone.
- Ogorchock: If you're advocating for something, have solutions. Don't make the assumption that this or that idea has been thought about before. People often come in demanding things, but then when asked how to do xyz, they say "I don't know."
  - a. Also prepare for the opposition. People often come in, assuming that everyone agrees with them on xyz and then they are unprepared when there is opposition.
- Isenberg: Don't come unprepared. Bring facts, ideas, evidence. Some people come with a stance or idea, but they don't come with related information.
- Kenney: Don't work in silos. When city councils, etc. see that all the groups are already working together on a shared mission, they invest more in that same mission. When groups are working against each other, the officials have a hard time identifying which organization/group to assist, or what the overall mission/goal is.

Are there other ways for people to be effective advocates for people experiencing homelessness?

- Ogorchock: Especially if you are trying to raise awareness and holding events, send them to our office – we can send them through an e-blast. Send your advocacy opportunities our way.
- Burgis: Talk to multiple supervisors, not just one.
- Kenney: Public opinion is probably one of the greatest and most effective ways to move political will.

The homelessness issue is often seen as a county issue. What is your experience with cities and counties working together on these issues?

- Burgis: East County has had the highest increase in PIT numbers. Some communities feel that by even putting a resolution on an agenda will scare constituents, because it implies a

“homeless issue.” But this is not just a county issue. It requires the nonprofits, the cities, providers, etc.

- Ogorchock: It really can vary from city to city, and depending on the amount of pushback. Some cities are reluctant to admit they have a homeless problem.
- Isenberg: Antioch works with the County.
- Kenney: San Pablo connects with the county on funds, as well as the county’s Council on Homelessness.

#### **Homeless Awareness Month—Advocacy on the Local Level**

- HAM toolkit is coming out soon
- H3/Jaime can support you with getting on a municipal BOS agenda to get a declaration passed
- There is a photography gallery/display about homeless awareness at the county BOS building at 651 Pine Street. in November

#### **Community Announcements**

- None.

#### **Pin It**