

# Trauma-Informed ADVOCACY

*Skills & Strategies For Transformational Change*



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# Foreword

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Advocacy is a necessary part of the healing process. As we make meaning of the triumphs and tragedies in our lives, putting action behind the principles we learn to make the world a better place for others is a critical part of learning and growth. Though society too often treats systems as though they are static, we know that organizations and systems are biocentric and, therefore, rely on input from their many component parts to improve.

In my process toward trauma-informed advocacy, I have been able to construct coherent narratives around traumatic lived experiences to develop a world that does not perpetuate harm in the future as it did to me.

My advocacy work began where I had experienced trauma at the hands of systems - education system, criminal-legal system, medicalized models of wellness, and stigma around mental health and addiction - though as time has gone on, I have become fluent in other areas beyond my own lived experiences and learn more consistently.

At the Campaign for Trauma-Informed Policy and Practice (CTIPP), we recognize that there is tremendous diversity among lived experiences. As we work to shape systems that allow all individuals, families, and communities to have the opportunities and supports necessary to thrive, there must be input across the different ways people interact with systems, the various cultural norms and values that must be attended to, and the perspectives that communities have about what better looks like to them.

True democracy is an antidote to trauma. A true democratic process requires patience and emotional management skills. It decentralizes power structures and creates conditions of empowerment, uplifting voice, and giving folks choice in how they wish to engage.

It also promotes opportunities for meaningful collaboration, which are a couple of the core principles of trauma-informed approaches. There are embedded opportunities for restorative justice where harm has been done, whether past, present, or both, and over time, helps to build trust among peers, which has cascading benefits.

We have focused efforts to organize advocates and support trauma-informed approaches to advocacy. Embedded within our multi-dimensional vision of what a more trauma-informed future can look like, there is a recognition that this movement will take many lifetimes to transform systems thoughtfully through a process of better policies and practices and reflection about what is working and not working to layer and loop learning to improve outcomes across all levels of our society.

With this understanding, we need to take care of ourselves and each other as advocates, as we must be in this for the long haul.

Trauma-informed approaches to advocacy support our own wellness and those we are advocating to, alongside, and on behalf of. This book and corresponding video series contain critical information about advocacy, the policy-making process, key considerations for building coalitions and modeling a trauma-informed model.

We hope you find these resources valuable, become a part of the movement, and work to bring others in and uplift other voices. It will take all of us in our pursuit of creating a better world. But we know we are stronger together.

We need you! Your voice matters and your experiences are important!

This is true for all people, and together, we can change the world.



Jesse Kohler  
Executive Director, CTIPP

# Predictions, Acknowledgments & Disclaimers for Moving Through This Book

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Before you dig into the denser and deeper parts of this work, we invite you to begin by considering the following predictions, acknowledgments, and disclaimers.

By embodying transparency, cultivating safety by letting you know what to expect, and offering you a choice in whether and how you engage with this book, we are striving to “model the model” of a trauma-informed approach – a recurrent theme you will notice throughout this book.

**Choose your own adventure!** We recognize that each reader arrives to this work with diverse lived experiences as well as varying levels of knowledge and exposure related to the content explored. In addition to striving to cover the key points concerning critical concepts so that anyone who reads this book will learn something useful, we also weave a variety of tools and resources that readers may choose to complete to facilitate application, reflection, and action planning.

We invite you to engage selectively with the content and activities that feel most relevant and meaningful to you, and in whatever order makes the most sense for you.

**Think of this resource as your compass instead of as turn-by-turn GPS to your destination.** This book explores and uplifts key concepts related to advocacy while providing a generalized, adaptable framework to guide you toward success (however you decide to define it). That means that we are *not* presenting a rigid set of instructions prescribing every turn to arrive at a predetermined destination.

In truth, there is no “one-size-fits-all” approach or “single right way” to engage in advocacy, and it is our best hope that this book provides you with tools, inspiration, capacity, and confidence to chart your own course ahead.

**Consider the full advocacy spectrum.** You will find that, while this book itself focuses significantly on advocacy centered on the policy process itself, we also explore and invite curiosity around a broad spectrum of advocacy roles and strategies that are essential to advancing systemic and institutional change.

We invite you to remain attuned to the many trailheads to transformation presented in this book, with recognition that direct engagement with your legislative representatives is only one of many possible pathways. Every role matters in this work!

**Quotations: inspiration and insight, not endorsement.** Throughout this book, you will encounter quotations intended to provoke thought, encourage reflection, and spark inspiration. It is important for us to note upfront that including these voices offers an invitation to engage with messages relevant to the concepts explored, and is not necessarily an endorsement of every quoted individual's broader viewpoints or actions.

**Ongoing iteration and integration shapes our journey forward.** This book is intended to be a living document, revised on a regular and ongoing basis as we continue to learn more about what facilitates large-scale transformation aligned with CTIPP's mission, vision, and values.

Please consider helping us ensure that the supportive resources we offer our network of advocates, activists, and partners in change are relevant and responsive to emerging and evolving needs by providing feedback on your experience engaging with this resource to our team.

**You are the expert of you!** Advocacy work is a deeply personal commitment, and we encourage you to stay connected to your expertise of your lived experiences, passions, and preferences as you consider all that is explored in this book. Numerous factors, from the needs of your local community to your own deeply-held personal values, will impact what the journey ahead looks like for you.

**Sensitive content ahead.** This book includes references to sensitive topics that may be experienced as activating or challenging to engage with, including discussions related to individual, family, community, systemic, and other collective forms of trauma and adversity.

We encourage you to care for your safety and well-being as you move through this book.





## Reflection Point

We invite you to consider what motivated you to engage with this book.

Did you stumble upon us through a Google search or a link sent from a friend/colleague? Did you intentionally seek out information on how to start participating in advocacy activities and found our work? Are you already doing the work alongside CTIPP and found yourself curious about what other information you might be able to glean and take action around by taking a look at what we've compiled in this book?

Additionally, now that you are here with us, please consider: what are your best hopes for engaging with this series? In other words: what will be different for you once you have moved through this book?

Do you wish to emerge with action steps to start a movement in your community? Do you seek to identify an issue to target in the first place to help you find where you fit best to join the on-the-ground work happening done to advance change? Do you hope to generate some ideas about what advocating for a particular issue could look like and to devise a plan for an existing group with which you work?

As you reflect on your responses to the above prompts, we invite you to remain anchored in your motivations and best hopes to inform the choices you make on how you engage with, make meaning of, and operationalize what you encounter in this book!

# Chapter 1: About & Introduction

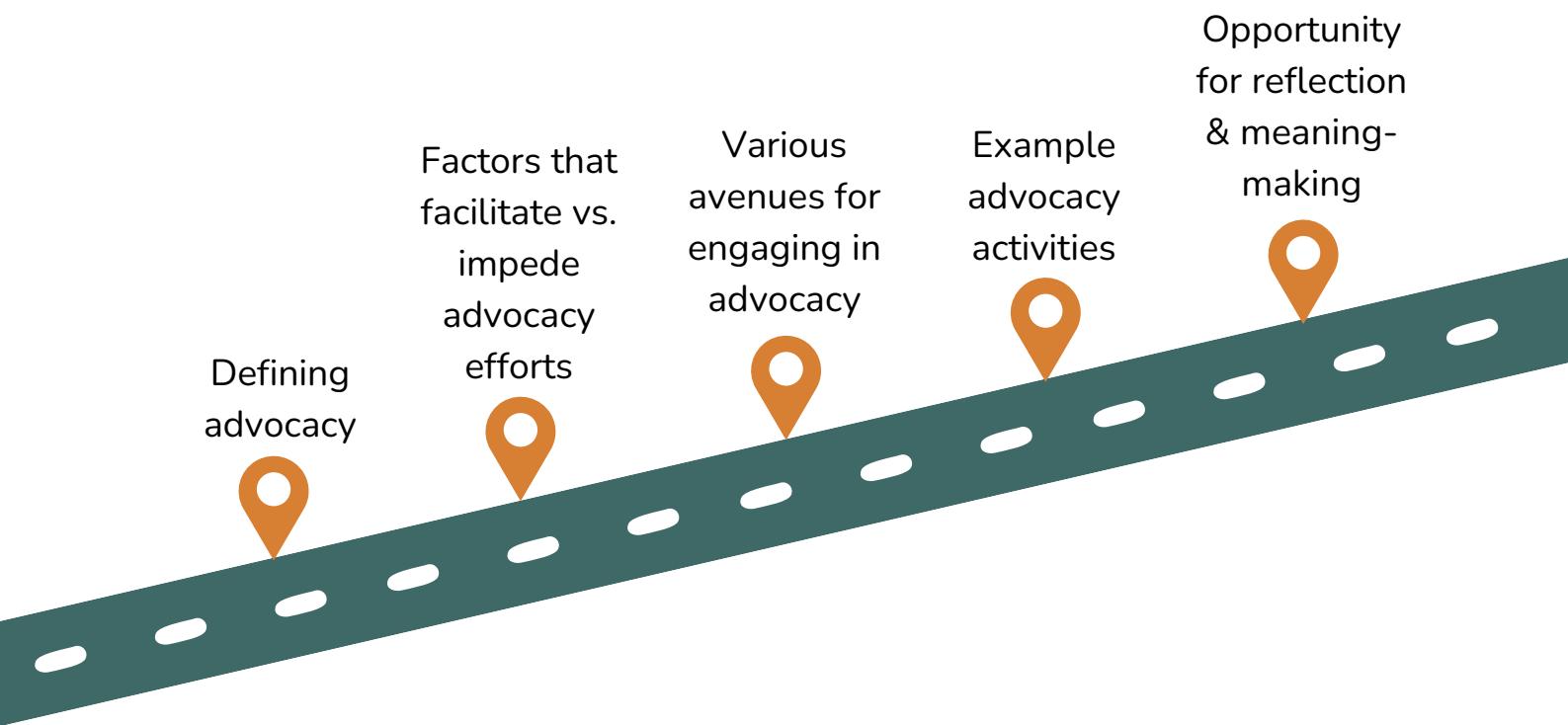
Resources, PowerPoint, Video, Reflection Questions, and More!



*“None of us alone can save the nation or the world. But each of us can make a positive difference if we commit ourselves to do so.”*

- Dr. Cornel West

# What You Can Expect in This Chapter



## WHAT IS ADVOCACY?

Advocacy, both as a concept and in definition, has evolved over time. Accordingly, to ensure all are on the same page before engaging more deeply with the concepts explored in this book, it is important to conceptualize advocacy upfront.

For the purposes of this book, advocacy is broadly defined as any endeavor undertaken to secure, safeguard, or champion rights, support the fulfillment of needs, rectify injustices, or otherwise promote the well-being of individuals, families, groups, or communities.

Whether through direct action, empowerment strategies, or other approaches, the goal of advocacy remains the same: to advance meaningful change.

At its core, advocacy is about using one's voice or standing alongside others with a megaphone to amplify their voices, in service of sparking change across policies, positions, programs, systems, and institutions.

Advocacy may take place for a variety of reasons, including (but not limited to):

- Achieving equity and addressing disparities
- Securing universal rights, protections, and opportunities
- Raising awareness concerning a particular issue or solution
- Furthering social, political, economic, or environmental justice
- Strengthening solidarity, collective voice, or coordination for a particular change

## POLICY PRIMER: KEY DEFINITIONS

Having a general understanding of what “policies” are fortifies the foundation for any advocacy effort. Below you will find definitions describing central policy-related concepts that reappear throughout this book.

**Policies**, at their core, are rules and principles that tell us which actions--among a multitude of possible actions--we may and may not take. Policies guide the activities and conduct of individuals, businesses, institutions, and governments. The essential function of a policy is to provide a coherent, consistent response to a particular phenomenon.

Policy can originate from many different places, including (but not limited to):

- Enacted legislation and executive orders
- Judiciary interpretations
- Administrative decisions and actions
- Procedures
- Incentives
- International treaties and agreements
- Advocacy and lobbying efforts

**Public policy** describes institutionalized proposals concerning a given topic endorsed and disseminated by a governmental entity or its representatives. Public policy plays a critical role in affecting the lives of individuals and collectives by shaping the environments in which we live, work, play, and connect.

Public policy is changed in a few principal ways, including through:

- Legislation
- Regulatory measures
- Administrative rulemaking
- Executive orders
- Litigation

**Social policy** is a form of public policy related to what, how, and to whom opportunities and resources are made available and distributed so that people may flourish and lead fruitful, fulfilling lives.

Social policies seek to support well-being across the life course while reducing inequities and disproportionate hardship across numerous dimensions, ranging from how taxes are levied, to how the educational system is structured, to which social programs exist (as well as who does and does not qualify for a given program).

**Policy advocacy** describes a range of activities aimed at informing, advising, and influencing policy- and decision-makers to modify the conditions of society that seriously threaten well-being or prevent people from achieving their full potential.

Policy advocacy often serves as a bridge between the collective identifying a need for change and those in power actually taking the necessary actions to make that change happen.

A **policy measure**, generally a bill or resolution, serves as a vehicle through which legislative changes are proposed and enacted. These policy measures are the building blocks of policy change, offering a formal pathway to alter existing laws or introduce new regulations.

A **policy tool**—sometimes interchangeably referred to as a policy instrument—is a method or technique through which governing authorities seek to achieve a policy goal. This is the linkage between *policy formulation* and *policy implementation*.

Some common and routinely used policy tools/instruments include:

- Providing grants, guarantees, and/or other means of funding sources
- Taxes
- Regulations
- Subsidies
- Incentives
- Public disclosure

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- Incentives
- Public disclosure

## (SOME) WAYS TO ADVOCATE

At its broadest, advocacy includes activities such as (but not limited to):

- Lobbying
- Litigation
- Regulatory work
- Public education
- Public demonstrations
- Engaging with (social) media
- Voter registration and education
- Work before administrative bodies
- Community organization and mobilization
- Forging strategic partnerships and coalition-building

While most of these and other advocacy activities take place outside of the meetings that happen in legislators' offices, they each play an essential role in shifting policies and practices.

After all, enacting new laws is just the first step in transformative change – there is work to do related to implementation fidelity, accountability, administration, and other key activities as what was made law is put into practice in the “real world.”



## Some Ways to Advocate

The enclosed list demonstrates the multifaceted nature of advocacy looking through a broad lens.

While the list of activities captured is not exhaustive, it provides many examples of some important activities essential to CTIPP's advocacy network that may not always be thought of as advocating to help generate some thinking around the broad scope that advocacy activities can span.



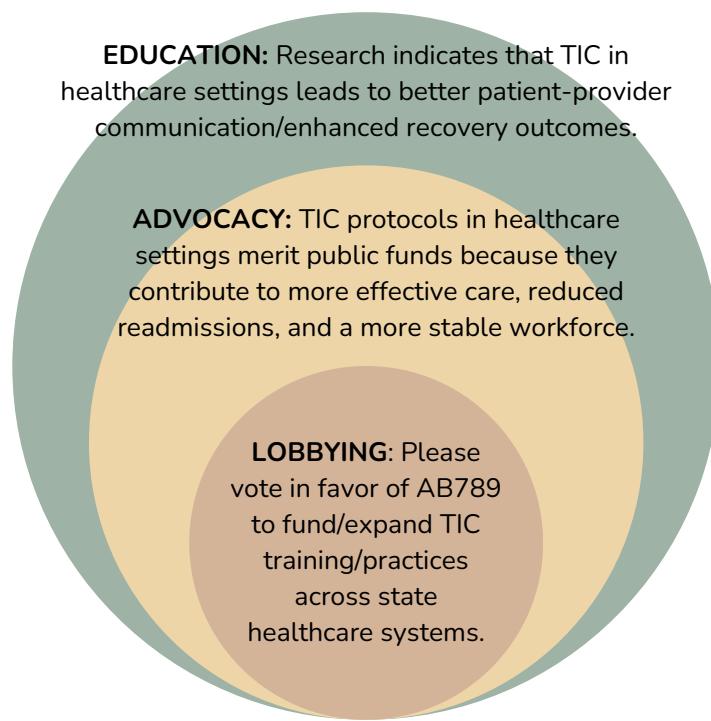
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• submit an op-ed for publication to a media outlet</li><li>• contact elected officials by email, phone, and/or meeting</li><li>• prepare/distribute a policy brief to legislators' staff</li><li>• use social media to inform network and gain support</li><li>• champion changes in policies</li><li>• attend/make public comments during a town meeting</li><li>• devise talking points for legislative alert networks</li><li>• hold/attend rallies, town halls, and community events</li><li>• media outreach/engagement (digital and traditional)</li><li>• give expert testimony before an elected body</li><li>• provide expertise/technical assistance</li><li>• organize/mobilize in your community</li><li>• construct language for model legislation</li><li>• write a white page report for an issue</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• educate/inform policymakers</li><li>• voter education efforts</li><li>• support public dialogue</li><li>• circulate a sign-on letter</li><li>• build public/political will</li><li>• build/support a coalition</li><li>• create model programs</li><li>• participate in a hill day</li><li>• convene stakeholders</li><li>• build capacity</li><li>• share stories</li><li>• vote</li></ul>
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# Advocacy v/s Lobbying: an Important Distinction

One important distinction—particularly for those who work within 501(c)(3) settings which may only legally conduct a limited amount of lobbying—concerns advocacy and lobbying. It is not uncommon for misconceptions and generalizations about lobbying to thwart engagement among potential advocacy participants.

Clarifying what constitutes allowable advocacy activities is often an important step in ensuring that fear or uncertainty regarding regulatory limitations does not lead to silencing or disengagement among potential partners in change.

*All lobbying is advocacy, but not all advocacy is lobbying.*



In short, as demonstrated by this diagram: all lobbying is advocacy, but not all advocacy is lobbying.

**Direct lobbying** refers to communications with legislators that express a particular viewpoint about how they ought to vote on a specific piece of legislation.

**Grassroots or indirect lobbying** involves communicating with the public and urging them to take action and contact their lawmakers with the intent to sway legislative outcomes.

Importantly, lobbying is distinct from actions taken by individuals in their personal capacities as private citizens. In other words, certain activities that are legally restricted for individuals or groups representing a 501(c)(3) organization fall under different regulations than what a person or group requests or advocates for when they are not serving as a representative of a 501(c)(3).

The ways in which organizations and entities may lobby are diverse: they can use meetings, speeches, emails, letters, and social media platforms like X (formerly Twitter), among other mediums, to directly convey a request for one's national and state representatives, city or town council members, tribal government representatives, and other policy-makers in power to vote a certain way on legislation under consideration.

An essential component in lobbying is including a “call to action.” Direct lobbying is more straightforward – you are asking a policy-maker to vote a specific way on a particular legislative measure. Calls to action in indirect/grassroots lobbying are broader and may include the following:

- Asking your audience to contact their legislators to vote a certain way on a pending bill or resolution
  - e.g., “Call Senator X and tell them to vote ‘yes’ on AB 678!”
- Identifying your audience’s legislative representative and asking them to make direct contact concerning a particular initiative
- Providing contact information to specific legislator(s) who will vote on a specific measure
- Identifying a legislator as neutral on or opposed to a particular legislative measure
- Providing a vehicle for directly contacting a legislator
  - e.g., a form email, a petition, a sign-on letter, etc. for constituents to send regarding voting on a bill that aligns with the organization’s mission
- Launching a social media campaign tagging and “@”-ing legislators, asking followers to push these officials toward voting a particular way on legislation
- Creating and distributing a toolkit for community members that includes talking points, contact information for legislators, and a script for telephone calls advocating for or against a piece of legislation

While total lobbying of any kind cannot constitute “a substantial portion of activities” conducted by a 501(c)(3) organization, the IRS looks at a variety of factors to determine what is an allowable level of participation in lobbying activities.

While, generally, less than 20% of an organization’s funding or time-based resources going toward lobbying is considered acceptable, there can be variations related to an organization’s size, scope, and general operations, so it is important to verify what rules apply with a lawyer who has expertise in this practice area.

For more in-depth information, a webinar entitled [Strategic Advocacy: Winning Policy Change Without Crossing the Lobbying Line](#) with legal experts who can speak to this information is available to view.

As a key takeaway regarding lobbying: it is important that fears that are not based in the legal context that applies to a particular organization’s composition don’t paralyze participation. It is very possible – and not uncommon – that 501(c)(3) entities may do quite a bit to fulfill their mission and advance their causes through advocacy without “crossing the lobbying line” so much as to risk tax-exempt status.

A significant part of the advocacy work CTIPP does is to advance the conversation around trauma, resilience, and holistic well-being by elevating “the trauma question,” or, essentially: what role do trauma, resilience, and NEAR science play in understanding, responding to, and preventing pressing problems that exist in our communities and throughout the larger world, and also in unlocking positive experiences and outcomes for all?

The below chart provides some additional examples to illustrate activities falling under the umbrellas of education, advocacy, and lobbying.



## EDUCATION

Meeting with an elected official to education them about the principles of NEAR science and how trauma-informed approaches can help.



## ADVOCACY

Meeting with an elected official to advocate for the importance of incorporating a trauma-informed lens into all policymaking efforts and actions.



## LOBBYING

Meeting with an elected official to urge them to vote for a bill to provide trauma-informed emergency assistance to address the impacts of and support recovery from the syndemic.

Preparing infographics and other educational materials connecting the social determinants of health to Adverse Childhood Experiences, Atrocious Cultural Experiences, Adverse Climate Events, and Adverse Community Environments

Preparing materials that tell success stories related to implementing an approach that centers resilience and is trauma-informed to improve individual/family/community outcomes following exposure to trauma/adversity.

Preparing and emailing a "call to action" including information on the merits of a trauma-informed approach and containing messaging urging consideration for or against a specific mental health-related bill.

Tweeting statistics about the impacts of PACEs/trauma and outlining evidence demonstrating how trauma-informed, healing-centered programs can build resilience and create positive outcomes.

Tweeting to urge support for additional funding to be directed toward programs that address trauma and build resilience with descriptions of how additional resources can assist local governments to address ACEs.

Tweeting a message @ an elected official urging them to vote against budget cuts for specific public programs that reduce trauma exposure and prevent re-traumatization.

While many activities CTIPP participates in that do constitute lobbying, the vast majority of operations supporting advocates, activists, and partners in change in taking action that advances CTIPP's mission, vision, and values are not considered lobbying. So much is possible even within the regulations and rules!

*To reiterate: we are not attorneys, and none of the above ought to be construed as definitive or legal advice. We recommend that you consult a lawyer about any considerations related to lobbying before taking action if related rules and regulations are relevant to you.*

## Reflection Point

Reflect on your own advocacy journey. Have you found yourself advocating for change in any setting – from casual conversations, to social media, to participating in community events?

Identify resonant activities. Among the diverse advocacy initiatives mentioned in the book so far, did any resonate with you or otherwise spark your interest? What do you notice about how this connects with the forms of advocacy you are drawn to and the advocacy roles you could see yourself in?

Evaluate your drive for advocacy. Think about your motivations and all that has brought you to this work. What drives your interest in policy advocacy (and, particularly, trauma-informed policy advocacy?)

Assess reasons for engagement or hesitation. Take a moment to reflect on what you find most compelling about engaging in advocacy, along with any reservations you notice coming up for you. How can you lean into these signals and insights to inform your pathway forward in advocacy?

# Behind the Advocacy: Common Reasons for Engagement

It is not uncommon for people to become involved with advocacy based on both individual convictions as well as shared collective hopes and visions for the future.

There are thus a multitude of reasons that someone may feel compelled to join in advocacy work, driven by values, lived experiences, the desire for systemic change, and the sincere belief that our institutions can do better to support all people in flourishing and thriving.

*Advocacy acts as a critical tool to bolster resilience and keep progress moving forward, particularly given how policy and the policymaking process permeate and shape our daily lives in countless ways. Engaging in policy advocacy in particular provides a potent vehicle for the betterment of our society.*

In the years CTIPP has been active, we have learned from our network of advocates, activists, and partners in change what draws people into advocacy work in the first place. Based on our experience, common reasons people choose to advocate include (but are not limited to):

- **Building connections and community.** Many people are drawn advocacy as a means to find common ground and unity with others who share similar goals, values, and visions for the future.
- **There is power and safety in numbers.** A sincere belief in the potential of building power to effect change through collective action is a core motivator for many advocates. No doubt, advocates often report feeling they can effectuate more significant sweeping changes in partnership and collaboration with others working toward a common goal than they believe they would be capable of on their own. It turns out that the proverb “If you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far, go together often holds true in the advocacy space, too!
- **Connecting with personal meaning and self-actualization.** Many report that delving into advocacy work provides opportunities for changemakers to align their actions with their values, facilitating a meaning-making and purposeful process in which to participate. This can be an especially potent motivator when a person has lived experience related to the cause they have taken on.

- **Shaping dialogue and practice.** The desire to impact the way issues and solutions are discussed and addressed draws many people to the work of advocacy.
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- **Empowering leadership, lived expertise, and diverse voices.** It is not uncommon to begin advocating because they see an opportunity to share their unique knowledge, perspective, and experiences to the conversation. For instance, a doctor in a community behavioral health setting might see opportunities to leverage their privilege, authority, and expertise to inform policy conversations regarding funding for preventive healthcare. Another example is those from historically excluded and marginalized communities feeling called to make their voices heard in decision-making processes.
- **Spurring systemic change.** Some individuals are driven by a desire to contribute to making a lasting difference by encouraging policymakers to address the root causes of seemingly intractable issues rather than feeling satisfied by compromises focusing on alleviating the symptoms.

These are a small sampling of more common reasons folks describe being drawn to working alongside CTIPP. While the reasons one might arrive at advocacy work are broad and varied, one conclusion to draw is that advocacy acts as a critical tool to bolster resilience and keep progress moving forward, particularly given how policy and the policymaking process permeate and shape our daily lives in countless ways.

Engaging in policy advocacy, in particular, provides a potent vehicle for the betterment of our society.



# Why People Stay Involved

Advocacy is hard work!

For those looking to build a coalition, group, or other type of local advocacy network or community, it is important to not only consider and remain responsive to the many reasons people become involved in advocacy, but also to have a sense of what keeps people involved in advocacy work, despite the many challenging dynamics and processes involved.

Some of the more common factors we know help sustain advocacy engagement include (but are not limited to): keeps people involved in advocacy activities include advocates:

- Being listened to, and feeling as if their ideas are supported/respected
- Actively seeing their impact on making a difference
- Perceiving their participation is appreciated and acknowledged
  - For example, being recognized at a group meeting for a recent achievement that helped move the policy agenda forward
- Experiencing that their unique strengths are noticed and tapped into, while difference and diversity are both respected and embraced
- Receiving compensation for their time, expertise, and expenses incurred to participate in advocacy initiatives
  - While many advocacy organizations maintain a modest budget and thus this might not universally be possible, it is worthwhile to consider how fair pay might be able to happen, particularly given how advocates stress this as a priority and motivator for sustained participation
- Expectations are transparently communicated and describe how each person's input is considered in informing directions for the work

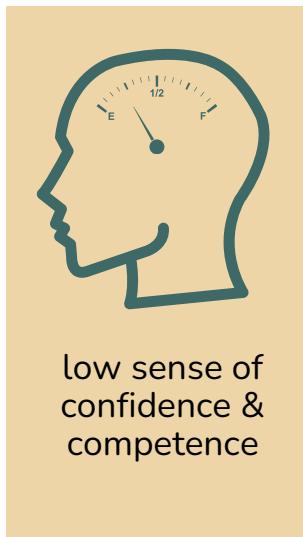
# Reasons for not Advocating

It is also important to recognize the understandable reasons that may underlie someone's lack of participation in organized advocacy efforts despite deep caring and commitment when it comes to change. In fact, in you chose to engage with the prompts of the most recent reflection point activity, you may have come up with several barriers to participating in advocacy efforts for yourself! Some common barriers to participation based on our experience in CTIPP include:

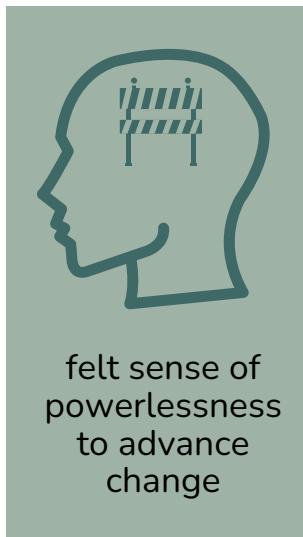
- A felt lack of competence or confidence in their abilities, knowledge, strengths, or skills (with a particular emphasis on speaking skills and policy process familiarity)
- Fear that they will not know as much about their issue as their elected official would expect or themselves know
- An understanding of the policy process rooted in misinformation, discouraging participation
- Struggles to find a starting point for those who are beginning to explore entry into advocacy work
- Natural inclination toward ambivalence around social, environmental, economic, and other policy issues
- Dislike of what might be perceived as divisive or animosity-filled political climate, or that partisanship makes constituent participation null and void
  - A survey conducted in 2016 identified that 79% of participants believed members of Congress listen to their party leaders instead of constituent concerns
- Worry that they may not know how to answer questions asked of them
- Feelings that they lack the power to influence anyone, that they will not be heard, or that it is a waste of time to participate/advocate
- Time-related or energetic constraints, particularly those juggling multiple jobs, childcare, unreliable public transportation, and other factors that may make participation challenging
- Note that time is a luxury for many, and that people with lived experience of trauma and adversity are more likely to be excluded from the conversation based on this factor
- Distrust or disillusionment with systems and institutions
- Safety-related, professional, social risks, or other vulnerabilities associated with taking a stand on a particular issue

- Perceived lack of solidarity, isolation, or lack of support/community
  - Institutional and structural change is too great a task for any single person to take on, so people who do not feel connected to a network of like-minded advocates who share values and vision related to a mutually hoped-for preferred future may get deterred from engaging robustly in advocacy despite being deeply passionate, capable, and motivated to co-create change

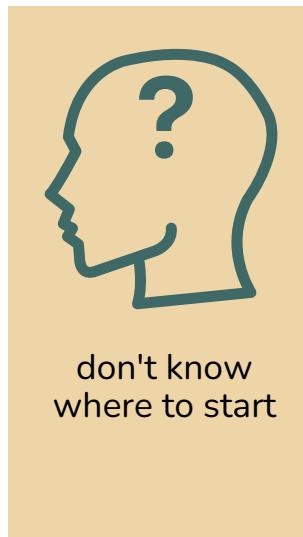
## COMMON REASONS FOR NOT ADVOCATING



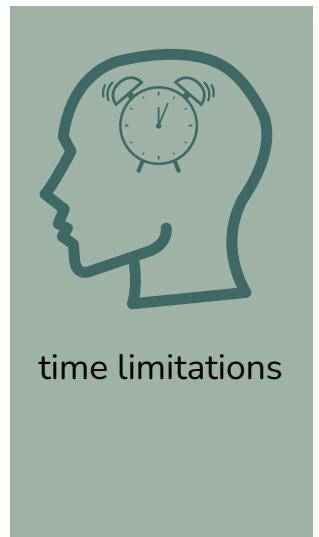
low sense of confidence & competence



felt sense of powerlessness to advance change



don't know where to start



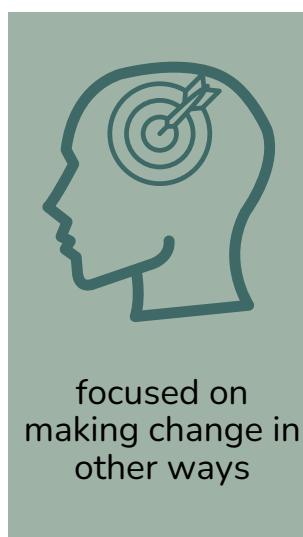
time limitations



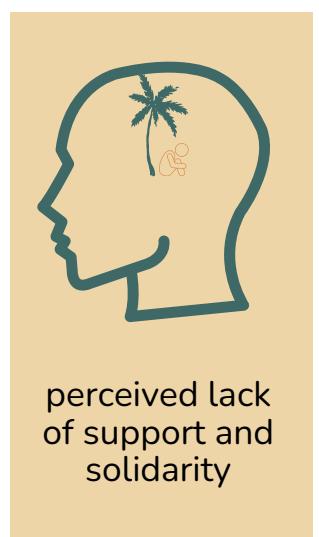
dislike of or disinterest in politics



lack of trust in/prior harm from system and institutions



focused on making change in other ways



perceived lack of support and solidarity

It is important to note that all of the factors mentioned above absolutely make sense and are understandable perspectives to hold!

It is CTIPP's best hope that this series addresses some of the perceived and actual barriers to participation displayed above by demystifying various aspects of advocacy work and the policy process, as well as by providing ideas, support, strategies, and community connections to support advocates, activists, and partners in trauma-informed change in using that information in advocacy activities.

We firmly believe that, with a united network of incredible information and communities doing the real work, together we can all spur action toward meaningful, sustainable, trauma-informed change. Thank you for joining us up through this point and coming along as we continue the journey ahead!



# Chapter 2: Processes of Policymaking & Legislative Action

[Resources](#), [PowerPoint](#), [Video](#), [Reflection Questions](#), and More!



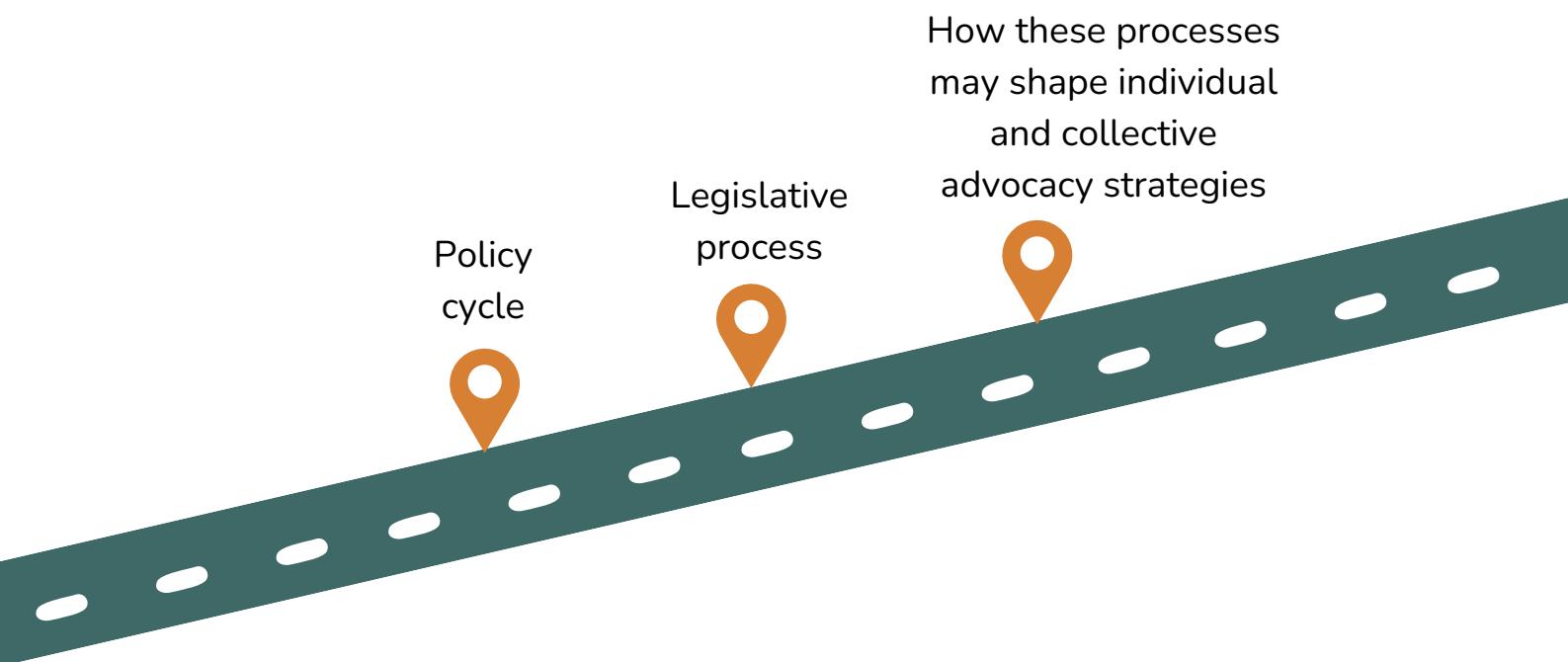
*legislate, legislating, <sup>to give, pass,</sup>  
fero, latum, to give, pass,  
LEGAL.] To make or enact  
laws.—**legislation** lej'is-lā-shən  
The act of legislating  
laws; laws when enacted  
into law or authorized by law.*



*Someone is sitting in the shade today because someone planted a tree a long time ago.*

– Warren Buffett

# What You Can Expect in This Chapter



## THE POLICY CYCLE

Understanding the policy cycle is an important anchor in advocacy work that seeks to shift systemic and institutional contexts and conditions. It is through this process that policies are developed, debated, implemented, and evaluated.

The framework presented in this book serves as one of many possible blueprints for the policy formulation and enactment – there are many equally valid ways to conceptualize and operationalize advocacy to inform policy-making activities!

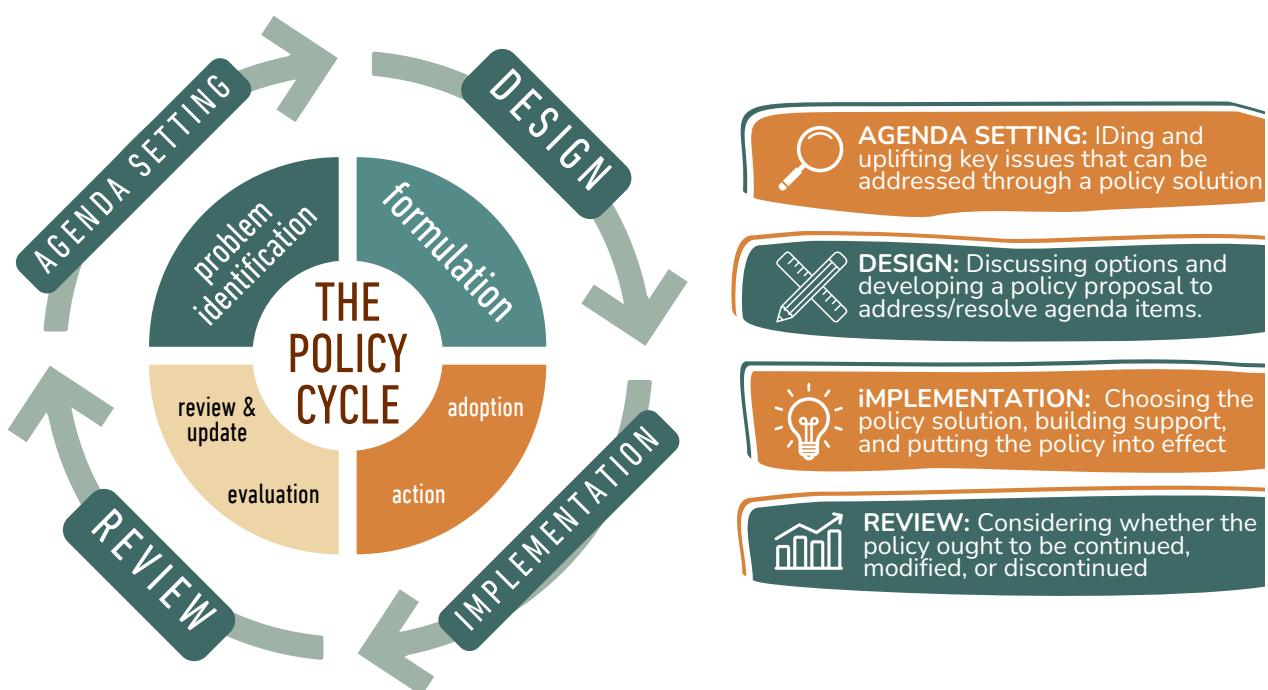
The approach we introduce below is presented in ways that are comprehensive enough to provide a solid groundwork for advocates, activists, and partners in change without delving into overly complex specifics that may diverge or distract from the core tasks of the majority of changemakers.

It is important to note that, regardless of which framework capturing the progression of the policy cycle is used to inform advocacy steps and strategies, real-world decision-making and action in the policy arena does not necessarily follow any idealized or rigid sequence of stages each and every time.

While it is useful to consider the information we present as a framework to inform your own plans for action, the specific pathways captured in this exploration may look different for each individual, group, or community coming together to do this work as they are tailored to the ever-changing dynamics of society.

The general progression of the policy cycle for the purposes of creating a common foundational understanding in this book is as follows:

- Policymakers begin to think about problems and consider potential solutions, which can be shaped by a variety of sources of information (e.g., personal interests or connections, constituent communications, nonpartisan Congressional Research Service reports, news media, social media, etc.)
- Those involved in the process work to identify policies that are most likely to achieve their established aims
- The policy solution that is identified by stakeholders and decision-makers as the best option is approved and implemented
- Assigned entities monitor implementation and evaluate whether the actions taken are accomplishing what they were intended to based on the intent and goal of the policy established earlier in the process
- Changes are made as needed based upon what has worked and what is determined to be less effective in addressing the issue and bringing forth the intended positive outcomes
- The cycle repeats



Note: this entire process is shaped mightily based on who is (and is *not*) at the table. Strategies to promote policy solutions that actively include, engage, and integrate the wisdom of people with lived experience of trauma and/or those most impacted by changes proposed are explored throughout this series.

# Agenda Setting

The **agenda setting** phase of the policy cycle is about identifying and uplifting a key issue that is able to be addressed through a specified policy solution.

A policy is generally created in response to a particular problem being called to the attention of someone within the government. **Problem identification** is therefore a critical first step in this phase of the policy cycle as it serves as the foundation upon which advocacy strategies and solutions are built.

This aspect of advocacy involves **recognizing and articulating the specific issues that require policy change and institutional intervention**, which sets the stage for developing a compelling policy agenda that resonates with both the public and decision-makers.

Additionally, in order for a policy agenda to be meaningfully considered by legislators, it is essential that the agenda stands out amid a large range of competing ideas and initiatives that policy-makers could choose to dedicate their energy to implementing instead.

As is explored in greater depth later in this book, one way to bring a policy agenda to the forefront of attention for legislators as well as the broader public is to forge partnerships and join forces. Collaborative advocacy efforts have access to increased power and influence, and uplifting a situation as problematic, proposing solutions, raising awareness, and placing pressure on policymakers to intervene all gain further reach through collective action than when attempted alone.



Relevant external circumstances such as current events, news media, social media, as well as other social, cultural, economic, environmental, political factors also influence what policy agendas are prioritized at any given time.

For instance, the ongoing syndemic – a term used to describe the complex interplay of multiple societal challenges that exacerbate vulnerabilities and adversities – of the last several years and related recovery efforts have shone a spotlight on longstanding issues of trauma and resilience demanding policy responses.

While these concepts have been underrecognized as important root causes of significant societal challenges that policy seeks to address in policy circles, the tide has clearly turned as trauma, adversity, and resiliency are all receiving increased attention.

CTIPP's policy analysis efforts continue to confirm a growing commitment among policy-makers to embedding trauma-informed, prevention-oriented, community-led, healing-centered, and resilience-building frameworks into legislation. Maintaining the momentum moving these proposals forward is an important area to direct advocacy efforts to continue to work toward bringing CTIPP's policy agenda and vision to life.

The significance of being intentional about the agenda setting phase of the policy cycle cannot be emphasized enough. If legislators are not paying attention to the problem, are not actively being made aware of the importance of the problem, or are prioritizing other factors or issues that are “easier” to attend to than addressing the root of the problem, then it is unlikely to see public policy shift around the problem you have identified.

It is helpful to pay attention to what is featured and “trending” in the policy space. This not only reflects the dominant social perspectives and values that inform the broader conversation concerning your identified issue and related topics, it also helps advocates, activists, and partners in change more clearly identify gaps to bring legislators’ attention to.

Factors that might block certain policy priorities from getting on the broader agenda range from financial strain, to administrative burden, to a lack of knowledge, to differing interpretations of existing law, to competing interests and alliances, and so forth.

It is important to consider the “why” behind your advocacy and policy agendas not already being discussed as this helps you get a sense of the nature and depth of understanding policy-makers are likely to have about the issue and solution you are championing. Later chapters of this book address utilizing this important information to strategize around advocacy efforts.

While it takes dedication and collective action to overcome many of the challenges that emerge in the policy cycle, getting a sense of what is already happening in relation to the issue is significant to consider when identifying the problems you notice and establishing your agenda.

# Policy Design

The next phase of the policy cycle is **design**, which encompasses developing specific policy strategies and solutions to address issues and needs highlighted when setting an agenda.

There is much that is encompassed in this phase, including the conceptualization of policy goals, the exploration of various approaches to achieve these goals, the establishment of a causal relationship between the problem and potential policy solutions, and the preliminary selection of policy instruments that might be useful to employ. This phase typically begins with outlining the broad contours and objectives of potential policies before diving more deeply into actually drafting policy.

A subsequent component of the policy design process, **policy formulation**, narrows the focus to the actual creation of policy proposals that articulate policy objectives and define the mechanisms through which policy goals will be achieved. This aspect of the policy cycle is where the conceptual ideas are transformed into a concrete, actionable plan.

Activities to support this often include rigorous analysis of policy alternatives, consultation with those who are connected to or impacted by the central issue identified, and the refinement of policy options as they are considered to ensure that the final product is viable, effective, and aligned with broader goals.

Notably, the full policy design phase has a tangible outcome, such as a regulatory agency drafting proposed rules, or a fully drafted bill going before Congress to be voted on and passed to the President to sign into law.

Also of note during this phase is that, as you gather information about the problem you have identified, it is not uncommon to encounter duplicative and even contradictory policy proposals that have been introduced, particularly in the case of complex and interconnecting issues such as those rooted in adversity and trauma.

To illustrate this with an example, consider the challenge of the involvement of younger people in the legal system:

- Some may notice and target the economic disparities, lack of equitable educational opportunities, and other systemic or structural drivers that underlie system involvement, and thus propose policies that specifically seek to increase opportunities and access to reduce adverse holistic health outcomes that are connected in the research to becoming system-involved.
- Some may introduce legislation to improve resources, programming, services, and supports for parents re-entering their communities after incarceration so that their recovery pathways are more stable, creating more supportive environments and establishing more positive parenting practices to disrupt the cycles of intergenerational system involvement, ultimately reducing the number of younger people who become involved with the legal system over time.

- Some may propose implementing policies supporting restorative approaches, trauma-informed de-escalation practices, and other methods to support student and school staff resiliency, thus disrupting the increased vulnerability of younger people becoming involved in courts and carceral institutions related to the “school to prison pipeline.”
- Some may contend that the most effective pathway would be to allocate fewer resources and reduce government intervention by focusing on economic policies that stimulate job creation, indirectly addressing the involvement of younger people in the legal system.
- Some may propose legislation that would increase police presence in communities with the intent to increase positive police-community engagement, believing that this would deter younger people from engaging in activities that may contribute to becoming systems-involved.
- Others yet may take entirely different routes based on their own priorities, values, constituency, knowledge base, and other factors at play — the above only begin to scratch the surface for demonstrative purposes of how one “issue” on the policy agenda could result in a varied range of policy formulation from different people!

## Policy Implementation

The policy cycle next brings about the ***implementation phase***, marking the transition from policy adoption to real-world application.

The first aspect of implementation entails ***adoption***, or the selection of which policy proposal will be enacted into law by relevant policymakers.

Essentially, in the national landscape, a policy measure is considered adopted when both bodies of Congress (the House of Representatives and the Senate) pass legislation, after which the President signs the policy into law if they choose (though they also can veto the bill, which catalyzes a different set of processes that determine whether a bill will die or become law through a vote).

Similar processes between the legislative and executive branches occur at the state and local policy levels. Another example of adoption of a particular law at the national level transpires when the Supreme Court renders a decision in a case.

As you may imagine, there are many possible events that can happen in between design and implementation as advocates and decision-makers build support through bargaining, competition, persuasion, and compromise while a policy winds its way through hearing, voting, and signing processes.

One such opportunity that advocates may choose to seize would be to participate during public engagements such as open committee hearings and comment periods.

These forums allow for the refinement of implementation strategies to meet the unique constellations of needs of constituents' communities, ensuring that policymakers—who are generally not experts in all of the areas in which they are helping to create or chill policy—are advancing solutions that fit the needs, priorities, and other preferences expressed by those who will be directly impacted.

Following adoption within the policy implementation phase is **action**, which involves carrying out the adopted policy decisions as planned. This is most often accomplished by a mix of administrators, institutions, and entities comprised of both public and private actors, distinct from those who originally formulated or ratified the policy.

For instance, while Congress may legislate improvements to water quality standards, it falls to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to specify the details on what those standards entail, establish compliance measures, and manage the intricacies essential implementing the legislative mandate.

The implementation phase necessitates cooperation and coordination among various parties involved in the policy's execution, presenting meaningful opportunities for advocacy groups to influence the process, such as through holding all involved accountable and ensuring policies are enacted faithfully to their original spirit, intent, and stated actions of the enacted policies themselves.

Effective implementation is influenced by several factors, including the policy's inherent complexity, the synergy among implementing partners, and adherence to the policy directives. An ideal scenario includes a comprehensive plan of action encompassed concretely in a measure itself that is both observable and evaluable, facilitating a continuous commitment to monitoring and assessing policy outcomes.

Considering these factors and assigning advocates with interest in supporting evaluating policy implementation processes and outcomes are important pieces of the advocacy puzzle.

Data related to policy implementation plays a significant role in determining whether specifically included initiatives will continue to receive funding as well as whether potential allied initiatives proposed in the future are supported.

Given that the total transformation that CTIPP strives to support inevitably has a long arc, sustaining engagement and highlighting both triumphs and areas for continued consideration as policy solutions are implemented is important.

Conveying this information to policy-makers can play a key role in ensuring that funding is not abruptly rescinded from communities that are moving in the direction of sustainable, systemic change, which itself can be re-traumatizing and only deepen the complexity of addressing interconnected, wicked problems.

# Policy Review

The final phase of the policy cycle involves conducting a **policy review** to assess the extent to which a policy has accomplished what it initially set forth to accomplish, if the policy decision implemented is adequate to address the targeted problem in practice, and whether the policy is implemented faithfully and in alignment with what the legislative text states.

This phase sets the stage for informed decision-making about a policy's continuation as-is, modification to meet emerging and evolving needs, or discontinuation altogether. This phase also helps with sustainability, ensuring that resource availability/allocation and system capacity are aligned with what will truly target the central issue identified based on the specific solution enacted.

Within this phase are two integral components: "evaluation" and "review and update." **Evaluation** focuses on conducting a comprehensive review of the policy's outcomes as implemented thus far.

A critical evaluation activity includes gathering quantitative and qualitative feedback, including hearing from those most impacted to get a sense of whether they are experiencing the change predicted in the policy along with data that speaks to the indicators of success and other key data points based on what leading-edge research and evidence suggest.

Based on evaluation findings, a **policy review and update** process may take place thereafter. This may involve adjustments to the initial legislative language to enhance the policy solution's effectiveness, reaffirm the policy's current course based on its success, or discontinuing the policy if it is deemed ineffective in creating the hoped-for outcomes stated in the initial text.

This is also the point at which considerations for resource allocation and infrastructural support are revisited to ensure that it is possible for the policy to be successfully carried forward.

In addition to reviewing the outcomes based on what communities voice and what the evidence says, it is also important to remain attuned to what policy-makers often prioritize when considering a policy's success. Efficiency, for example, matters, and can be examined through a cost-benefit analysis.

Of course, this process also can bring about various interpretations of what "successful" implementation looks like along with different ideological frameworks for assessing whether any benefits derived from implementing a policy sufficiently outweigh whatever negative outcomes are associated with the policy.

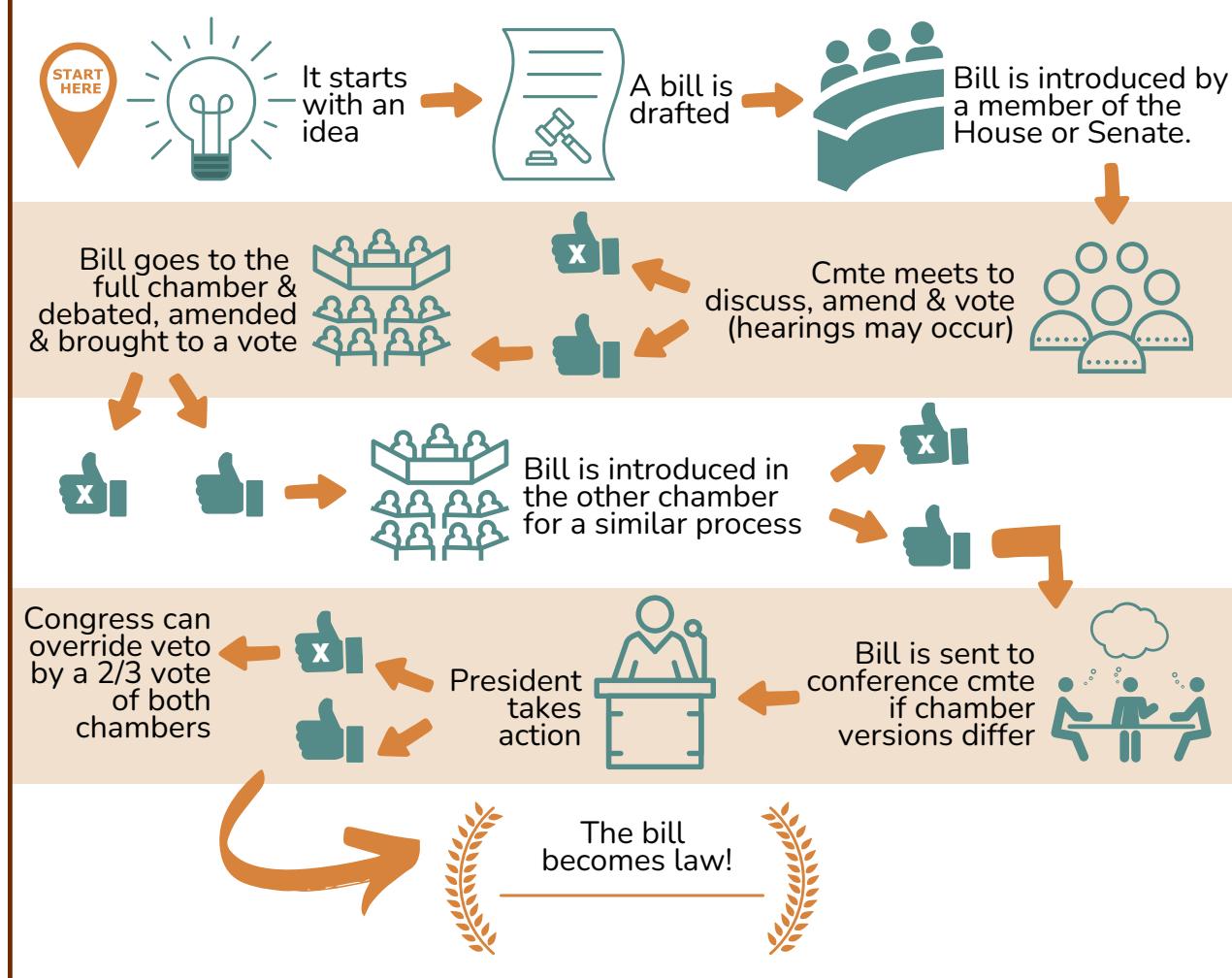
Advocates, activists, and partners in change play an integral role in sustaining public interest and attention throughout the entire policy cycle by generating ongoing awareness and support for the implementation of policies and practices that prevent trauma and advance holistic well-being.

This role is vast and varied, potentially involving actions ranging from partnering with other allied groups to join you in your advocacy efforts, to working to reach and educate new policy-makers to bring them on board for your agenda.

While the policy cycle may at first glance appear to be a simple, smooth, linear, and predictable process, a closer examination reveals complexity, nuance, and many considerations to attend to in order to advance meaningful, sweeping, sustained change.

## FEDERAL LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

*This schematic invites you to follow the arrows from the top left to right, down to the next row from right to left, down to the third row from left to right, before moving to the bottom row from right to left and ending on the image in the center.*



## LEGISLATIVE BODIES: STRUCTURES, FUNCTIONS & PROCESSES

The **legislative branch** of government is responsible for creating, editing, and passing pieces of legislation. At the federal level, you will often hear this branch of our government referred to as “Congress.” The Congress has two chambers (“bicameral”), including the Senate, as well as the *House of Representatives*.

Senators (two per state, regardless of population) represent entire states while Members of the House of Representatives (also referred to as congresspeople) serve specific districts within a state or territory, with the number of Members being determined by state/territory population. Senators serve six-year terms, allowing for more stability and a longer perspective on legislation.

Members of the House of Representatives serve two-year terms, which keeps them more directly accountable to their constituents, which can present both challenges and strengths, some of which are discussed in this book.

In the federal government, while both chambers must approve a bill for it to become a law, there are often special circumstances and abilities to consider. For example, all revenue-raising bills must originate in the House, while the Senate has the exclusive power to confirm presidential appointments and ratify treaties.

The vast majority of state legislatures also have two chambers, though the terms used to refer to them vary from venue to venue. Almost all states with a bicameral system have a Senate as one chamber. Some states refer to their other chamber as the *House of Representatives*, while others may call this chamber the *Assembly* or the *House of Delegates*.

Nebraska is an outlier in that it is the only state with only one legislative chamber (“unicameral”), meaning that tasks typically divided between two chambers are handled within a single legislative body. All five inhabited U.S. territories – Puerto Rico, Guam, the U.S. Virgin Islands, American Samoa, and the Northern Mariana Islands – have unicameral legislatures that perform the functions of a state legislature.

Legislation within tribal nations interact with federal and state governments under the framework of U.S. law, yet predominantly operate under a system of sovereignty and self-governance, meaning that each tribe can establish its own form of government, most typically through an elected tribal council or similar governing body.

While specifics can vary based on local context and conditions, the general structures and functions of local government legislative bodies, like city councils and county boards, also have many commonalities that can be useful to remain aware of in advocacy work.

While local legislative bodies are often overlooked as venues ripe for action to facilitate large-scale transformation, it is critical to recognize how much of an impact what happens in these halls has on the local community members' everyday lives, and how meaningful change that ripples through society often stems from advocacy in smaller local venues.

These elected entities typically create, consider, and pass local laws or ordinances that impact everyday life, from parting regulations to local taxes to regional public health ordinances.

## **TYPES OF LEGISLATION**

Legislation may be formed as either a bill or a resolution depending on its intended purpose.

A **resolution** is a formal statement or decision used to express the collective opinion, intent, or will of the legislative body producing the resolution. Resolutions can cover a wide range of topics, including (but not limited to) expressing support for a cause, recognizing the achievements or contributions of an organization or individual, or establishing internal legislative rules, standards, or administrative tasks.

Unlike bills, resolutions are not binding and do not have the power to become enforceable laws, outside of a special type called a joint resolution, explored at a high level below. Resolutions are vital tools within the legislative arena as they allow legislators to formally voice their opinions, manage their internal operations, and communicate with both the public and other branches of government on issues of concern. While resolutions may not change the law directly, they can significantly influence public policy by shaping opinions and guiding further legislative action, meaning that they can be important to pay attention to for advocates, activists, and partners in change.

*Simple resolutions* generally concern matters affecting just one chamber, like adopting new rules or procedures, and are only required to be passed by the chamber impacted to be considered adopted. These types of resolutions often address the rules of the relevant chamber or express the body's sentiments on non-legislative matters. For example, a simple resolution may be used to formally recognize the contributions of an individual to honor their innovative work in developing and implementing training programs that enhance trauma-informed practices in state systems of care.

*Concurrent resolutions* must be passed by both chambers, yet do not require the signature of an executive authority (e.g., president, governor, mayor) to be adopted. These typically are used for matters affecting both chambers, such as setting the budget, scheduling recesses for the session, or expressing a unified position on important issues. For example, the chambers of a state legislature may introduce and pass a concurrent resolution to establish a "Trauma-Informed Care Awareness Awareness Month" to formally acknowledge the importance of trauma-informed practices and encouraging other governmental agencies to consider trauma-informed principles in their own policies and operations.

**Joint resolutions** are typically used for more serious measures, such as to propose amendments to governing texts like the U.S. Constitution or to grant temporary powers in emergency scenarios. These resolutions need approval from all chambers of the legislature and also must be signed by an executive authority to be adopted.

For example, a joint resolution may be used to establish a task force or committee charged with integrating trauma-informed principles into all government-funded healthcare or social service programs, thus creating and empowering a body with ongoing legal responsibilities and oversight concerning trauma-informed practices.

**Bills** are the other type of legislation that can be proposed, and are what most advocates, activists, and partners in change will be focusing efforts on when working in the legislative space. Bills are designed to create laws as well as to amend or repeal existing laws. Bills are the principal vehicle for making substantive changes to the legal landscape since, unlike resolutions, they have the power to become enforceable laws once passed and signed by the appropriate executive authority.

## DRAFTING, INTRODUCTION & FIRST READING

As previously mentioned, the journey of a bill begins with an idea, which is then drafted into detailed legislative language. This often happens with the help of legal experts such as those from the nonpartisan Legislative Counsel's Office ([House/Senate](#)). There is a great deal of complexity in this process, particularly with consideration for language precision as well as compatibility with existing laws, hence many lawmakers relying on specialized support to draft legislative language.

After the bill language is drafted, the next step is for the author(s) to submit the bill for introduction. In the federal government, the Clerk of the House or Senate receive the bill as introduced and then assign the measure a unique bill a number and a title.

Bills can be drafted and introduced in either chamber, but must ultimately pass in both and be signed by the entity with executive authority in order to become law.

Following a bill's introduction, it undergoes its first reading in that chamber. The Clerk performing this reading formally introduces the bill to the policymakers and signals its entry into the legislative process.

## COMMITTEE REFERRAL & REVIEW

After a bill has been read in the chamber in which it was introduced, the bill is then referred to a relevant committee for further evaluation and discussion based on its subject matter.

Committees are comprised of legislators within a specific chamber who are tasked with focusing on specific areas of governance, such as finance, education, or health.

Subcommittees are smaller units that focus on more specialized and specific areas within committees' broader jurisdictions. For instance, a Health Committee may have subcommittees dedicated to public health, insurance, and pharmaceuticals.

Committees and subcommittees play a critical role in determining the fate and direction of a bill as they provide the first substantial review of the bill's text and content.

Most bills fall under the jurisdiction of one committee, though some bills may be referred to more than one committee if provisions in the bill span the jurisdiction of multiple committees.

If multiple committees/subcommittees are involved and receive the bill, each committee/subcommittee may work only on the portion of the bill under its jurisdiction. One of those committees will generally be designated the primary committee of jurisdiction and will likely take the lead on any action that may occur.

For instance, consider a bill designed to integrate trauma-informed principles into public schools. The legislation proposes that schools serve not only as educational institutions but also as hubs for providing wraparound community-based services to support the well-being of students and their families.

Given the multifaceted nature of this bill, if it were proposed in the U.S. Senate, it may ultimately be considered in both the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee, the Committee on Appropriations, as well as the Finance Committee.

In this example, it is likely that each committee would be tasked with looking only at portions of the bill relevant to them. For example the HELP Committee may direct their attention to evaluating the educational and health aspects of the bill, such as the integration of trauma-informed care into school curriculums and teacher training programs; the Committee on Appropriations might examine the financial requirements for implementing these services within schools, such as the cost of staff training and any necessary modifications within school facilities to accommodate these programs; and the Finance Committee would likely focus on reviewing the broader economic impact of the bill, such as by exploring potential sustainable funding streams or potential tax implications or incentives for schools that successfully implement trauma-informed care.

Throughout the legislative process, the bill's original sponsor(s) might ask others within the committee, chamber, or full legislature (depending on the circumstances) to co-sponsor the bill, which is a prominent and meaningful way to show support and grow momentum for a bill. Legislators will often drum up support for more co-sponsors by tapping into their support networks and bipartisan alliances, as well as through using different formal tools.

Thinking about how to grow support in committees that play a role in determining a bill's fate is important to consider. One example of this that you may have heard about if you have engaged with the policy process in the past is *Dear Colleague Letters*.

These correspondences outline a bill's essence, speak to the "why" of the bill's urgency and importance, and invite others to join in action to commit to working toward getting the bill passed and made law. Gaining co-sponsors is a clear, concrete demonstration of broader collective support among policymakers can significantly enhance a bill's chances of progressing through committees and through each chamber.

## COMMITTEE & SUBCOMMITTEE ACTIONS

Many important actions for advocates, activists, and partners in change to remain attuned to happen within committees and subcommittees.

Sometimes, after a referral to a committee, bills will become stagnant and will not progress at all before the end of the legislative session. This is often referred to as a bill “dying in committee.”

If a bill garners significant support or is deemed important by the committee leaders or other key influencers within the committee, it is likely to advance to the **hearing** stage. During hearings, the committee calls witnesses to testify, providing valuable insights that either support or oppose what is stated in the legislation.

Providing spoken or written testimony to be considered in a hearing presents a powerful advocacy opportunity to shape decision-makers’ understanding and subsequent actions regarding a bill. Hearings often arise with little notice, which reinforces how important maintaining proactive, trust-based relationships with legislators is.

If you are known to your representatives and have already been in touch to articulate your policy interests and best hopes for your community’s future, you are more likely to be invited to testify or otherwise contribute to progress when these opportunities arise.

While your comfort level concerning speaking on public record about your experience related to what the bill addresses is important to consider, this advocacy avenue positions you to influence the legislative process directly. Another way to provide testimony is to tap into and mobilize your advocacy network to collectively submit substantial written testimony.

Even if providing testimony is not feasible, there are other ways to meaningfully impact the hearing process. Holding meetings with policymakers presents an opportunity to highlight certain considerations you would like for them to raise in the hearing as well as to suggest specific questions you believe it is important for them to pose in the hearing.

This strategy is most effective when the committee members you are approaching are people with whom you already have established a strong existing relationship, as that increases the likelihood that the legislative dialogue will reflect topics of significance to you and others you are representing who are impacted by the bill being considered.

If a bill moves beyond hearings, it enters the **markup** stage, where the language and text of the bill is scrutinized line-by-line and may be modified. During markup, committee members also propose and vote on amendments to the bill. This process refines the bill to increase the likelihood that intent and implementation will align, and also helps ensure clarity, legal accuracy, and consistency with established legal precedents.

As an advocate, being informed about whether the policymakers you are connected to through your advocacy work serve on committees and subcommittees relevant to issues you care about is advantageous.

If they do, suggesting specific amendments or changes for them to propose in the markup process is a powerful advocacy activity that can help guide modifications to the bill toward reflecting the needs and concerns of you and your advocacy network.

The time that a bill spends in committees and subcommittees present some of the ripest opportunities for advocates, activists, and partners in change to directly shape policy. Further details and strategies related to building the essential legislative relationships that can help strengthen your influence in these parts of the process are found later in this book.



## SECOND READING, FLOOR DEBATE & VOTING

Once all testimony has been heard and the bill has been marked up, a vote to accept or reject the bill and its changes is held in any involved committees and subcommittees before sending the bill back to the full chamber.

If the head of the chamber (in the federal government, this would be the Speaker of the House or the Majority Leader in the Senate) decides that the bill will move forward, the Clerk reads the bill in its entirety, sentence by sentence. This is known as the *second reading*.

This part of the process offers policymakers who are not a part of the committee in which the bill was marked up to the opportunity to engage in a floor debate concerning the bill as well as to propose changes of their own before the vote. This is another critical place where constituent advocacy and influence have the power to shape the enactment or rejection of a bill.

Following debate, the bill is put to a vote. If passed, the bill moves to the other chamber, where the entire process of reading, committees, hearings, debate, and voting repeats itself. This part of the process begins with the final bill text passed by the originating chamber.

If both chambers vote yes on the bill in identical form, it proceeds to the executive authority for signing.

If there are inconsistencies between the final bills voted on by the two chambers, these differences are reconciled through a conference committee made up of members of both chambers. This committee harmonizes both chambers' versions of the bill into a final unified form to be voted on once more by each chamber.

This process looks similar yet different in the cases of **companion legislation** being considered. Companion legislation refers to related bills introduced simultaneously in both chambers of a legislature that are highly similar in their intent and content, though not necessarily identical down the the letter.

Each companion bill must pass in its originating chamber before it can move to the other. Companion bills are designed to expedite the legislative process by simultaneously moving through procedures that otherwise would be engaged consecutively rather than concurrently in each chamber. The parallel processing that takes place helps streamline discussions and negotiations when the bills need to be reconciled.

In an ideal scenario, then, companion bills pass through their respective committees and then each chamber in forms that remain as similar to one another as possible.

Because the bills are processed separately, though, while these bills often start from very similar texts, it is not uncommon for the content or language to diverge in the process due to amendments and modifications made during committee markups.

When companion bills are not identical when passed, a conference committee typically including chairs and members from the committees that reviewed the bills is formed. Their task is to reconcile any differences between the two versions of the legislation and send the reconciled version – often called the “conference report” – to both chambers for a final vote.

## EXECUTIVE REVIEW & ENACTMENT

Once a bill has passed through both chambers, it is presented to and reviewed by the relevant chief executive authority for the venue (e.g., the president, governor, mayor, city manager, county executive, town supervisor, borough president).

There are several different pathways the executive authority may go in at this point:

- Sign the bill into law, thereby officially enacting the legislation
- Veto the bill, which is then sent back to the legislature with the explanation of the objections to the bill the executive has that caused them to reject the bill
  - A **veto** is a formal executive decision to reject a bill
  - The legislature may attempt to *override* a veto by gaining a sufficient majority (often but not always  $\frac{2}{3}$  in both chambers voting for enactment), meaning that the bill would become law despite the veto
- Take no action
  - *Passive enactment*: in Congress, states, and potentially some local venues, if the executive authority does not take action on a bill within a certain predetermined period of time while the legislature remains in session, a bill becomes a law without their signature
  - *Pocket veto*: if the legislature adjourns during the predetermined review period the executive has to sign the bill, it does not become law, which effectively kills the bill without a formal veto process taking place

It is important for advocates, activists, and partners in change to remain aware of these potential pathways for a bill to follow as each of the above possibilities would demand a different advocacy approach. For example, if a veto is likely, advocacy networks may prepare to mobilize a robust response to persuade their representatives to override the veto.

If it is anticipated that a bill will be enacted smoothly, advocacy networks may be better served shifting their focus toward ensuring effective implementation. In such a scenario, advocates, activists, and partners in change may prepare to engage with relevant government and administrative agencies to discuss practical aspects of new laws and offer insights or recommendations on how to best apply the law to benefit their local communities.

# Legislative Process & Policy Cycle: Complexities to Consider

While on paper and in diagram, the path from bill introduction to law may seem direct and relatively easy to follow, yet, in practice, it is often a multifaceted and dynamic process that is influenced by and interconnected with many other actors and factors that advocacy efforts often find useful to remain attuned to.

It is important to acknowledge these complexities as this sets expectations and goals anchored in a realistic sense of hope, and also facilitates building resilience and informing strategy to navigate potential barriers ahead. Examples of some (but not all) of the challenges it may be useful to remain attuned to, anticipate, and plan for include:



**There are many actors involved.** Resources are finite and many competing interests and priorities among legislators, the general public, interest groups, regulatory agencies, and others may conflict in significant ways. It can be difficult to build consensus among these diverse actors.

- To target efforts effectively, many advocates find it useful to map out all potential parties involved in or affected by a bill, from legislators, to business groups, to community organizations, to advocacy organizations, to people with lived experience of trauma and adversity, to other relevant influencers.



**Partisan power and dynamics can impact action.** Partisanship can be wielded in ways that significantly impact the legislative process. Party affiliations often dictate the legislative agenda, with the majority party maintaining considerable power over what bills are (and are not) brought to the floor for a vote. This can lead to bills that do not align with the majority party's interests stalling. Political differences (or any other notable vested interests) can undermine even very well-thought-out, seemingly uncontroversial, and fundamentally “good” or “sound” policy.

- Compromise across partisan divides is a cornerstone of the policy process. While partisanship can undoubtedly create challenges, change is possible. Strategies to find common ground and move progress forward is found later in this book.



**External events dictate urgent advocacy responses.** What makes it to the top of the policy agenda and 24-hour news cycle today may look different from what is at the top next year, next month, or even next week.

- As legislative priorities shift, finding the optimal window of opportunity – when public attention is focused on the issue, solutions are at hand, and policymakers are motivated to act based on the context of the present moment can strengthen advocacy efforts.



**Much is uncertain/ambiguous.** Recalling the unfolding of the present period of time where we continue to navigate and collectively recover from the many challenges that came to a head simultaneously in 2020 and beyond stands as an extraordinary example of how the urgency of certain situations may force legislators to make choices quickly, before their preferences are clear and before there is evidence about what will be the most restorative action.

Larger world events and often uncertain or unpredictable external factors, like recessions, public health crises, or natural disasters, can be influential in what legislation is introduced, supported, and enacted.

- It is important that changemakers are prepared to respond to these shifts by adapting strategies and finding ways to shape rapid legislative responses that are aligned with what they know about the issue and potential policy solutions at hand.



**The legislative calendar shifts in ways that impact a bill's potential progress.** It is often true that introducing a bill earlier in a legislative session offers promise since it gives a bill more time to gain momentum and support before the legislative session ends. The session length also matters. Many states have a single-year legislative session that only meet part-time, which further complicates getting a particular bill prioritized within this relatively short time.

Additionally, especially in state legislatures, “budget season” is a time during which much else other than budget is simply not considered. For example, introducing a mental health bill during budget season is not likely to be a successful strategy. One other factor that influences how legislators vote based on timing is whether or not it is an election year.

Getting elected and re-elected stand among the most important priorities for policymakers, which means that the optics of supporting a bill may matter to them even more than usual.

- Becoming familiar with key venues’ operations and keeping current with election cycles can be an important aspect of advocacy strategies. The periods where less related to your advocacy agenda is likely to get done present a wonderful opportunity to strategize around refining your strategies and hitting the ground running when the moment is right.



**Getting policymakers to play the long game can be a challenge.** Political leaders are frequently focused on delivering short-term, highly visible results, which can be at odds with the needs of long-term initiatives that require significant upstream investment and sustained commitment to support gradual large-scale transformation (such as trauma-informed change).

When policymakers feel this pressure, it can be difficult to have arguments for greater allocation of public resources for long-term initiatives which lack immediate, tangible outcomes to be received well. Additionally, there are often numerous ways to conceptualize issues and to construct pathways to address them, some of which may feel “safer” to legislators.

It can take years to turn intent within laws that are enacted into concrete outcomes, which may run counter to how certain legislators maintain their own sense of safety and stability in their role.

- It is important for advocates to consider how to help policymakers recognize the value of upfront investment in the types of complex issues that are currently being responded to after harm has already happened rather than disrupting intergenerational cycles of pain, preventing future harm from happening, and providing the context and conditions for building resilience and positive experiences for all.



**A broader system sets the parameters for action.** It is important to note that all decisions made in the policy cycle also take place within a larger system shaped by existing sociopolitical norms. As a general rule, shifting individual and collective core beliefs and values can take considerable time and effort.

With a trauma-informed paradigm shift, we are essentially seeking to rewire our collective consciousness around much of what has been operating at status quo for a significant period of time, which is no easy feat!

More broadly, policymaking is grounded in deciding which values will prevail. This plays a significant role in what bills are given hearings and meaningful consideration.

- Continuing to refine your understanding of issues and challenges through a systems lens can help you prepare talking points to help policymakers grasp how their leadership can further support to shifting broader dynamics and creating cascading positive impacts, such as catalyzing more conversations about addressing the issues at hand through similar policy solutions.



**Money matters.** The real and anticipated fiscal consequences of a policy change shapes action. Generally speaking, bills that require spending less money are more likely to pass, especially in times of austerity.

Based on CTIPP's ongoing policy monitoring and analysis, many recent bills aligned with a trauma-informed approach that passed in both chambers of state legislatures yet were vetoed rather than signed into law can be traced to governors' official statements about the cost of implementation based on available resources, priorities, and actions already funded and underway to address some parts of the grander challenges the vetoed bills more directly targeted through a trauma-informed manner.

- It is important that advocates enter into such discussions understanding the ways that financial aspects influence all steps of the policy process. Advocates can be effective at countering worries about high upfront investments with research about potential cost savings connected to improved outcomes. This, of course, can feel activating and counter to why we are doing the work advocates are doing. It can be useful to consider this a first step in engaging deeper curiosity with your audience, with you meeting them where they are at based on what they care about creates more opportunities for you to then share more information that is aligned with your values and priorities than if your audience was immediately closed off because of their priorities not matching up with your messaging.



**Few bills that are introduced actually become law.** It can be easy to feel discouraged when a bill that you have worked hard as an advocate for does not pass. It is important to understand upfront, though, that an average of around 10,000 - 15,000 bills are introduced in a session of Congress, and typically between only 4% - 7% actually become law.

State figures differ, yet are similar to the national trends in that the vast majority of bills introduced in a particular legislative session do not become law. It is also less common for bills to be made law the very first time they are introduced, which is why it is not uncommon to notice similar or identical bills being considered across several legislative sessions. This work often takes years of patience and dedication!

- It is crucial to maintain perspective to buffer significant discouragement that can lead to advocate disengagement. It is normal to face setbacks based on the statistics above! As is explored elsewhere in this book, it is important to practice self- and collective care, to celebrate small victories along the way as meaningful progress, and to continue to learn from the process along the way.

Ultimately, policy change does not happen overnight; it takes time... sometimes, a lot of time!

Having an impact in the public policy arena requires a long-term effort that is unlikely to produce quick, dramatic accomplishments. Each step forward builds on the ones before it. Together, we are making progress toward the full integration of trauma-informed principles into the policies and practices our world, and each individual and collective step in the direction of our vision is one that we embrace with open arms.

Staying connected to the work becomes more accessible and safe to us when we feel equipped with knowledge such as that explored in this chapter. As we continue to advocate for these essential changes, it is important that we pace ourselves, remain patient with and supportive of one another, and keep our eyes on our shared best hopes for the future.

Keeping connected to ourselves, one another, and the meaning of this work helps us notice and be motivated by all of the ways we are gradually seeing trauma-informed principles institutionalized and reflected in our society.





## Reflection Point

What else do you still need to know in order to feel like you are equipped to navigate the policy cycle and legislative process?

Now that you have familiarized yourself with some elements of the policy cycle and legislative process, what is one thing you might do differently than you would have based on something new you learned or are thinking about differently explored in this chapter?

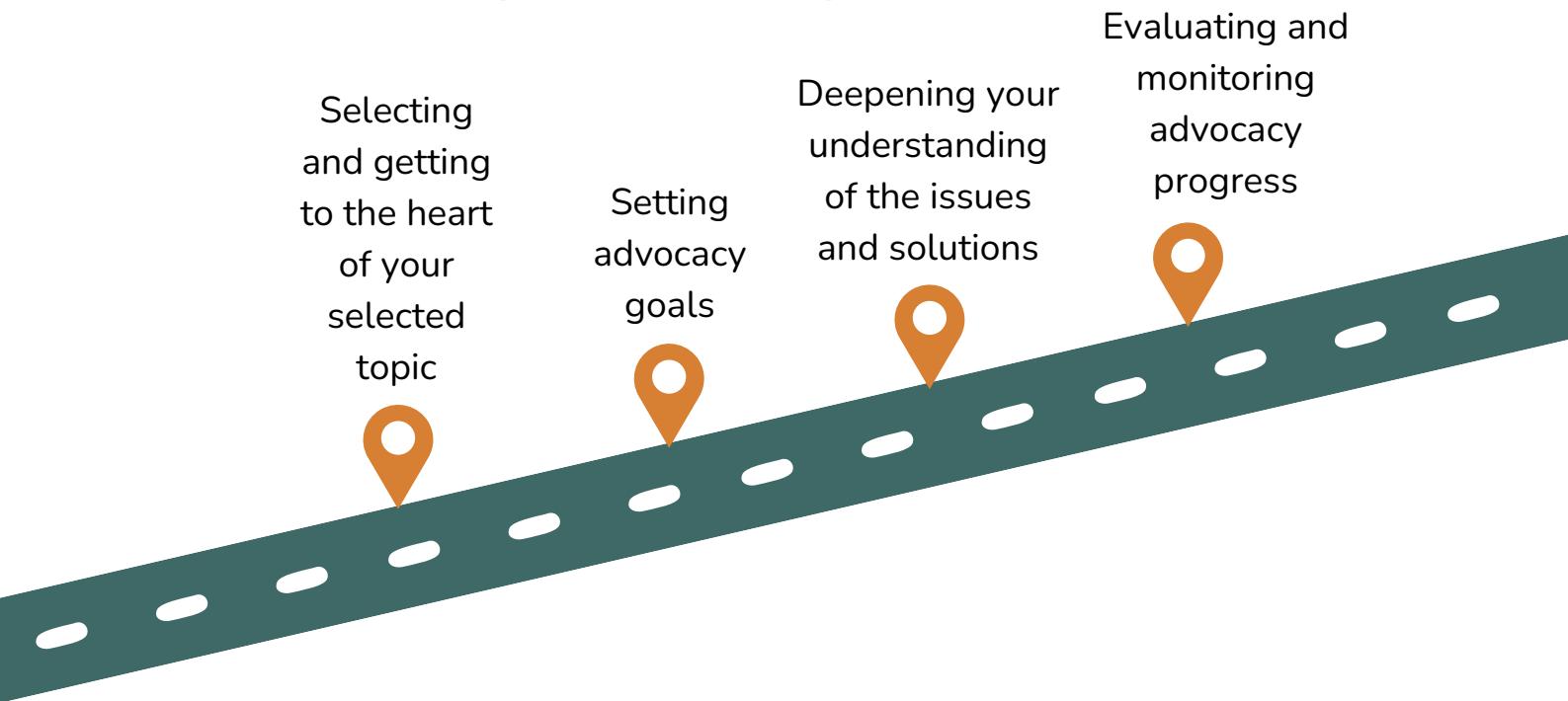
# Chapter 3: Developing an Advocacy Agenda

Resources, PowerPoint, Video, Reflection Questions, and More!



*People start to heal, the moment they feel heard.*  
- Cheryl Richardson

# What You Can Expect in This Chapter



## INITIAL CONSIDERATIONS WHEN SELECTING AN ADVOCACY AREA

Advocacy is a deeply personal journey, often sparked by individual lived experiences or significant connections to the issues at hand.

Where you find your place in the advocacy world invites consideration around how a variety of factors intertwine, such as your personal connection to an area either firsthand or through a cared-for one's experience, professional relevance, broader societal needs, and beyond. Some common frameworks for action include

- Personal/family/work/volunteer/community experiences
- Professional organization or workplace priorities
- Previous legislation/existing policies
- Political ideology-related priorities
- Public sentiment and support
- Previous judicial decisions
- Professional values/ethics
- Personal values/beliefs
- Proximity to the issue

Ultimately, there are many details and opportunities that could pull anyone who is invested in trauma-informed change in a variety of directions. In our experience at CTIPP, at the core of effective, sustainable advocacy is passion.



**Key takeaway:**  
Choose something you care about!

Passion is the driving force that sustains energy and commitment throughout the many twists and turns of advocacy work.

Choosing to focus on advocating for causes that resonate deeply with you not only fuels your drive to contribute, but also helps you connect more authentically with others, mobilizing support for your cause and inspiring others to act.

## Reflection Point

What brings you to the work of advocacy?

Identify three “themes,” causes, values, specific issues, solutions, and/or outcomes that you feel called to advocate around in this moment.

Reflect and share the reasons that these particular topics stir passion within you.

# Conceptualizing Your Policy Solution

Once you have identified your advocacy focus, it is worthwhile to consider the unique advantages of policy solutions compared to other types of interventions. **Policy solutions** are designed to create systemic and institutional change through the modification of laws and regulations. This approach targets the foundational structures that govern societal operations, aiming for widespread and lasting impact.

To identify the reasons a policy solution is the most appropriate approach to address the issue at hand, changemakers benefit from having a clear understanding of how policy changes can shift relationships, conditions, and dynamics within a society. Said another way: consider how adjusting a policy could improve the interactions between environments we engage with and our collective well-being.

Take, for example, CTIPP's approach: we advocate for policies that strengthen holistic well-being, disrupt collective and intergenerational cycles of harm, prevent and heal trauma, and build resiliency across all levels of society.

We work to create the context and conditions for thriving and flourishing through policy solutions, which ensures that trauma-informed frameworks are not just temporarily considered but instead are embedded into the fabric of how our systems and institutions operate, ultimately leading to more comprehensive and sustained transformation.

When considering the policy solutions that align with your advocacy goals, it is also worthwhile to think about the policy levers that can be utilized. Policy levers are tools or mechanisms through which public policy can be influenced or changed. These levers can vary widely depending on the issue, the level of government involved, and the specific outcomes desired.

Remember, legislation is only one of many ways to advocate and contribute to large-scale change! Examples of some (but not all) other policy levers you may consider include

- **Regulatory changes:** influencing the rules set by government agencies that dictate how laws are implemented
- **Funding adjustments:** pushing for increased funding or arguing against cuts to critical services
- **Public awareness:** shifting the collective consciousness and conversation around your advocacy agenda creates public pressure on policymakers to act
- **Judicial actions:** using the court system to change policy through rulings that interpret the legality and constitutionality of existing laws and policies
- **Executive orders:** engaging directly with executive officials to influence their decisions

Identifying policy levers that make sense to engage with often depends on who holds the power to implement the changes your advocacy agenda calls for. This means identifying key decision-makers who influence each lever you feel is relevant – whether they are elected officials, government agency heads, or influential community leaders. Knowing these individuals and their roles helps you strategically target your advocacy efforts.

By linking your choice of policy lever directly to those who have the power to enact change, you can ensure that your advocacy strategy is not only passionate but also precisely targeted. This alignment is essential to maximize the impacts of your efforts and achieving the desired outcomes in your advocacy work.

## Reflection Point

Reflect on what you have identified thus far as your advocacy target, and consider why a policy-based solution is the most effective route for addressing this issue as opposed to other forms of advocacy, activism, or direct action.

# Beginning to Dig into Your Issue & Solution

As you embark on formulating your advocacy agenda, it is vital to deepen your knowledge of key issues and concepts that influence the implementation of your solution.

Especially when it comes to trauma and resilience, beginning to explore the breadth and depth of the research to build on existing knowledge can be quite overwhelming. In the case of complex and interconnected issues, an initial brainstorming session to first identify what kinds of evidence might illuminate your understanding of the topic.

While it is important to ensure accuracy and quality of sources, technology makes accessible to us a variety of different ways of learning and knowledge-building in areas crucial to strengthen one's advocacy work. Knowing your learning style and what will help you organize findings that resonate with you and that you might want to refer back to as you continue to strategize around and mobilize your advocacy agenda.

Many issues present with more complexity than what initially meets the eye. The adjacent iceberg image symbolizes this concept, where the visible tip does not fully represent the vast structure beneath the surface.

For example, consider how increases in minor legal infractions and substance use may occur during a time of national socioeconomic challenge. A “surface level” examination of this issue may prompt a swift move toward policy solutions that impose heavier sentences on these behaviors to decrease crime statistics for a community.



A deeper dive may reveal more systemic issues contributing to the increases in these behaviors, such as young adults between 18 and 30 struggling at record numbers to secure jobs that provide a living wage.

Looking even deeper, we might find compelling statistics revealing that BIPOC folx are disproportionately impacted. This reveals that behaviors that criminalized at the surface level reflect injustice and inequity embedded in the design and implementation of labor laws, insufficient investment in primary education in marginalized communities, a lack of affordable, safe housing in areas that are less economically advantaged, and other structural issues.

As the above example illustrates, each layer of discovery adds complexity to the issues examined, which ultimately helps pinpoint the root causes that your advocacy agenda will be stronger and more effective for considering.

It can also be useful to consider the consequences of inaction. What worsens if nothing changes? Illuminating the urgency of action by presenting evidence that issues of concern to policymakers are likely to become worse if changes are not made has the power to propel them out of complacency.

Another factors to consider when diving into the deeper details of your target issue include the broader implications of policy changes. For instance, is it possible that some individuals, communities, populations, groups, or systems may face adverse or disproportionate impacts as a result of implementing your solution?

With all change comes some level of loss, be it in power, material resources, safety, status, normalcy, or any other number of potential losses. Exploring this prepares advocates, activists, and partners in change to conduct more research on these consequences and prepare how they will frame addressing concerns and objections.

As you explore each layer under the surface of your own target issue, the policy solution you formulate becomes more refined, which strengthens the likelihood that your advocacy will make an impact.

Ultimately, if the core issue you are seeking to address hinges on resolving another underlying issue, it may be necessary to recalibrate your focus slightly. Being principled yet flexible allows you to set actionable, achievable goals that can meaningfully impact the issue at the heart of your advocacy agenda.

By establishing a solid foundation with the initial considerations presented in this chapter, you pave the way for more substantial and sustained advocacy efforts, setting a trajectory of further expansions, deeper impacts, and broader transformation.





## Reflection Point

The following questions prompt reflection around the long-term impact of current policies relevant to your advocacy agenda, what would happen if things stayed the same, and the importance of the change you are proposing:

Immediate impact: what might the immediate consequences be if the status quo remains unchanged in the next year? How will this affect individuals and communities directly involved?

Medium-term outlook: looking ahead five years, how could continued inaction shape the broader landscape of this issue? Consider potential shifts in political leadership, economic impacts, changes in public opinion, etc.

Long-term scenario: projecting 50 years into the future, what are the possible enduring effects if no policy changes are made to address the issue at the heart of your advocacy agenda? How might this alter environmental conditions, intergenerational equity, societal structures, and everyday living?

# ESTABLISHING POLICY PRIORITIES

As you begin to develop your advocacy agenda, you may discover opportunities to advance change. This table seeks to help prioritize possible avenues for action. For scaled questions, circle the number that best fits (1 = not at all and 5 = very).

EVALUATION	Possible priority #1			Possible priority #2						
What makes this priority particularly important / interesting?										
How long do you predict this solution would take to implement?										
Does this issue make sense to address through a policy solution?	Yes	No	Not sure	Yes	No	Not sure				
Strength of evidence that addressing this priority would have the positive impact needed.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
How many people will it affect? What groups are impacted most?										

# ESTABLISHING POLICY PRIORITIES (continued)

EVALUATION	Possible priority #1	Possible priority #2
What resources (human, political & financial) are needed to achieve?		
Who is involved in implementation decisions (e.g., legislators, admin agencies, etc.)		
What support (or opposition) from key stakeholders, policymakers, and influencers already exists?		
Who makes sense to collaborate and/or partner with?		
Do you have the capacity and expertise to reasonably advocate for this priority to be implemented?		
What are the paths of influence related to this issue? Where do you / organization / group fit in?		

# ESTABLISHING POLICY PRIORITIES (continued)

EVALUATION	Possible priority #1	Possible priority #2
What opportunities to involve and engage those with lived experience / those impacted exist?		
<b>RANKING PRIORITIES:</b> Which of the explored items are of greatest significance to you based on your advocacy agenda?		
Time needed to implement		
Reach / number of people impacted		
Capacity to follow through		
<b>PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER:</b>		
Based on the above, which priority do you think it makes sense to pursue first?		

## Setting Goals

Goals are ultimately what help transform good intentions into impactful action. Constructing and clarifying well-formed goals ensures that every effort is purposeful and directly contributes to the desired change, helping advocates stay focused amid the numerous demands, dynamics, and complexities inherent in the work.

### FIND A NORTH STAR

Identifying and remaining steadfastly guided by your North Star – a compass composed of your mission, vision, values, purpose, perspective, and other critical priorities you care about – helps you maintain focus on what really matters and remain anchored in principled action toward transformation.



## Reflection Point

What is your North Star? How does your North Star integrate your mission, vision, values, perspective, purpose, and priorities?

Consider a personal or professional project that felt particularly successful or meaningful for you to complete. What aspects of your North Star were most evidently reflected in this work?

# Structuring Success Through Creating Cascading Goals

In advocacy, it is not uncommon for well-intentioned, energized folx navigating a complex advocacy landscape to focus primarily on broad, aspirational end goals and inadvertently overlook the value of incremental gains. Smaller yet significant achievements often represent critical stepping stones toward larger successes.

To lessen the likelihood of this happening, it can be useful to break overarching goals into a structured sequence of short-, intermediate-, and long-term goals that cascade and connect with one another and align with your North Star. This helps ensure that each step is connected and contributing meaningfully to the next step.

- **Short-term goals** might focus on immediate needs or actions that are necessary to engage in broader and bigger action, like rallying initial support, gathering critical data, or engaging community leaders. These goals are more quickly achieved, providing early and ongoing “wins” that boost morale, build momentum, and leave advocates, activists, and partners in change well-positioned to act.
- **Intermediate goals** might involve more complex tasks that build on the outcomes of shorter-term goals. Examples include developing strategic partnerships, securing funding, or initiating pilot projects that test the efficacy of longer-term solutions.
- **Long-term goals** tend to aim for major systemic impacts that scaffold and integrate learning and action that takes place over time. This may include achievements that leverage the groundwork laid by meeting short- and intermediate-term goals, such as institutionalizing structural through policy passage and enactment, changing public perceptions around issues and solutions related to your advocacy agenda, or the broad implementation of new standards or practices across various sectors and systems.

This tiered goal-setting approach is particularly crucial in advocacy work addressing complex challenges given the slow nature of systemic and structural transformation. By strategically setting and achieving incremental goals, advocates, activists, and partners in change remain more clearly and intentionally connected to their North Star.

Each goal and objective achieved serves not only as a milestone to celebrate but also as a motivator, keeping folx engaged and focused on making meaningful progress toward change.

If you are a part of a structured group or formal network of advocates, consider establishing overarching goals that unite the entire team’s efforts while also delineating specific, area-focused goals for different work streams, committees, or other sub-groups that focus on particular areas of action and achievement.

This cohesive strategy helps ensure everyone stays connected to a unified vision informed by the true collectively-defined North Star while also attending to the unique aspects of focused work handled by various segments of the group.

Maintaining this structure not only facilitates monitoring progress toward larger goals (which is discussed in greater detail later in this chapter) but also reinforces the common values and vision all are working towards bringing to life.

By emphasizing the importance of both specific, incremental goals as well as the longer-term goals that all advocacy work is connected to, you can ensure that your advocacy work is comprehensive, coherent, and cumulative, effectively driving you and your advocacy network forward toward achieving the transformative change symbolized by your North Star.

While legislative victories are often a pivotal aspect of advocacy work, truly transformative change requires a broader scope of action that supports, amplifies, and makes legislative change more attainable.

Given the unpredictability of the political environment and the myriad factors that affect public policy, it also can be helpful to consider what goals you have in addition to “just” getting aligned legislation passed and blocking legislation that runs counter to your advocacy agenda.

Rather than only stating, “Our goal is to get this bill passed and have it enshrined in law. Only then will we consider our efforts successful,” you might also consider the following broader goals and objectives (which is not an exhaustive list of possibilities):

- **Public awareness campaigns:** elevate the visibility of your cause through comprehensive media campaigns, community outreach, as well as producing and sharing educational resources. For example, you might set a goal to conduct a series of town hall meetings across five key communities or launch a digital campaign that receives 10,000 impressions, likes, or shares on social media.
- **Mobilizing public action:** encourage direct public participation as a way to raise the profile of an issue or put pressure on legislators to act. This may include 500 people in your advocate network responding to your call to action for them to email, call, or meet with their representatives by a certain date or organizing a petition or sign-on letter with a target of 5,000 signatures.
- **Media engagement:** aim to get coverage of your issue in local and/or national media. You might consider goals like having your message uplifted in at least three publications over a time-bound period.
- **Building coalitions:** form or fortify coalitions by connecting aligned individuals and groups to create a united front and turn up the volume on your advocacy agenda’s collective voice. A goal you might consider here could be, for example, aligning with five new partner organizations by the end of the year or hosting one joint advocacy event per quarter to broaden the network of support for your issue and solution.

- **Educational outreach:** inform the public – especially people with relevant lived experience, those who are most impacted by your issue and solution, as well as those who hold decision-making power or are otherwise influential – about the intricacies of your target issues and the necessity of implementing your proposed solutions. This may involve hosting workshops, town hall events, community lunch and learns, and other events with goals such as reaching 10,000 individuals through education efforts by the end of the year.

Paying attention to these and other types of arenas to consider for scaffolded goal-setting purposes helps to create a multifaceted approach to advocacy that not only aims to enshrine elements of your advocacy agenda into law but also works to create more informed and engaged partners in change.

Setting goals around activities like shifting public opinion, co-constructing new ways of knowing and thinking about an issue with various groups and communities, mobilizing grassroots support, and other relevant activities also enhances the effectiveness of more legislation-focused efforts over time.

It is important to remember that this work does not distract from broader, longer-term goals, but instead help keep an advocacy network agile, resilient, and capable of adapting to challenges and seizing opportunities as they emerge while doing the work.





## Reflection Point

Imagine yourself arriving at the final destination that your North Star calls you toward. What will be the first few things you notice are different that will let you know that you have arrived there?

Reflect on the gap between what you just visualized and where you are currently at in your advocacy journey. What are three different short- and intermediate-term goals and objectives that will help you make progress while staying on the path that leads you to the final destination you visualized?

What is your next small step that would bring you closer to each of the goals you set above based on where you are currently positioned?

# Trauma-Informed Considerations to Set & Strengthen Advocacy Goals

Determining desired outcomes and setting effective advocacy goals requires a foundation of strong collaborative relationships and adequate individual, collective, and systemic capacity for advocacy.

## HARNESS COLLECTIVE WISDOM TO INFORM THE PATHWAY FORWARD

The more brains, the better! Collaboration lies at the heart of impactful advocacy. By directly and meaningfully involving community members, those most impacted by the issues and solutions relevant to your advocacy agenda, and other key contributors in the goal-setting process, we ensure that our efforts are informed by a more holistic array of important information.

Broader diversity of thought also allows for more meaningful, contextualized goals. An advocacy agenda is strengthened significantly by tapping into the wisdom of what those who stand to gain or lose the most in response to a policy shift truly need and want to see happen versus making assumptions that are inevitably influenced by our own biases and perspectives, guessing to fill in gaps, or leaning solely on empirical evidence. You will find more about cultivating authentic collaboration aligned with the principles of a trauma-informed approach in later chapters of this book.

## INVENTORY & EXPAND ACCESS TO CRITICAL RESOURCES FOR COMPREHENSIVE CHANGE

It is also crucial to assess the resources that you and your advocacy network possess as well as those that are still needed based on your advocacy agenda. In a trauma-informed advocacy context, the term “**resources**” extends beyond simply financial or monetary assets to also include a broad spectrum of other critical elements essential for sustained action and progress towards transformation. We consider resources to refer to a comprehensive array of supports, capacities, strengths, gifts, wisdom, and other elements that both facilitate you realizing your advocacy goals and also are accessible for you (and/or your partners in change) to tap into and mobilize.

Resources that are often useful in advocacy work include human, psychological, emotional, cultural, financial, physical, informational, community/environmental resources, among others that are relevant to the setting and achievement of goals. It is also worthwhile to consider what capacity-building needs to take place to increase access to the resources needed to accomplish goals. By continuously enhancing and building these capacity, we strengthen our foundation to support the realization of both short-term and long-term goals.

## CENTER STRENGTHS & SOLUTIONS WHEN SETTING GOALS

We at CTIPP have found that remaining action-, strength-, and solution-oriented in setting goals can similarly keep advocates, activists, and partners in change invested, motivated, and anchored to a trauma-informed frame.

A well-crafted advocacy agenda does more than just highlight the urgency and severity of the problems being addressed through the work; it also illuminates what is working well, what is strong, and where successes that can be built upon exist.

A trauma-informed approach emphasizes capabilities over focusing on perceived or actual deficits. This approach cultivates realistic hope, a critical element to sustain motivation and support continued vision-building to inform work toward a resilient, flourishing future for all. This also invites consideration around utilizing a ***salutary lens*** when setting goals, meaning using language that speaks to the value of the presence of something desirable that your solution will bring rather than simply speaking to the eradication or absence of the core issue.

Some factors that are protective, strengths-based, resilience-fostering, and positive experience-supporting at the community and systems levels include (but are not limited to):

- **Strong social cohesion.** Communities and systems benefit from robust support networks anchored in mutual aid and the spirit of collaboration, fostering resilience and supporting a sense of belonging for all. This creates capacity for sustainable change implementation as familiarity with involved parties' strengths, gifts, wisdom, skills, and other contributions helps clarify the "how" of goal and attainment.
- **Cultural richness and diversity.** Representation and meaningful inclusion across a broad array of identities and lived experiences strengthens community and system identity, culture, pride, and resilience. This also ensures a variety of perspectives inform the direction for the work.
- **Environmental stewardship.** Sustainable practices ensure the long-term health of both natural and built environments.
- **Effective leadership and governance.** Transparent, accountable leadership at all levels creates a strong foundation to support change. Leaders – formal and informal alike – who can mobilize resources and navigate networks through challenges are assets to support goal attainment in any advocacy agenda.
- **Access to services and supports for thriving.** Communities and systems that move beyond crisis management and merely striving to meet everyone's basic needs and instead toward promoting thriving at all levels foster environments that can support significant transformation to further bolster holistic human well-being. Supporting a fuller spectrum of the experience of humanity enriches the implementation of trauma-informed change initiatives.

- **Intersectoral interconnection and cooperation.** Attaining your advocacy goals often hinges on effective collaboration across an array of sectors and systems. An existing network of partnerships provides a strong foundation on which change efforts may be built, moving away from scarcity mindsets that induce competition and instead toward an abundance mindset, thus facilitating the integration and alignment of various resources and strategies to make more impactful, sustainable change.
- **High civic engagement.** Robust participation among members of a community or system ensures that decisions for implementing change are made inclusively, reflecting the needs and wants of as many parties who are directly impacted by any changes proposed as possible. This strengthens systemic/community responsiveness to change initiatives.
- **Economic stability and opportunities.** Equitable access to diverse economic opportunities and stable economic environments support sustainability in change implementation and help ensure that economic shocks can be absorbed so that long-term growth can happen even in times of hardship.
- **Demonstrated adaptive capacities.** A history of demonstrating a capacity to adapt to stress, challenge, and change is a great strength in communities and systems. Adaptive capacities enable responsiveness and resiliency to economic, environmental, social, political, and other shifts, ensuring sustainable transformation toward what your advocacy goals seek to achieve.

## ENGAGE IN ONGOING REFLECTION ON YOUR GOALS

You will continue to revisit and reflect upon the goals you set throughout your advocacy journey, sometimes making revisions to meet the present moment as contexts and conditions shift over time.

It is important to remain open to emergent opportunities and to consider shifting priorities to goals that will boost collective power toward change when the time strikes, remaining agile to pivot toward current context rather than being inflexible in an ever-evolving space.

While having several goals and related objectives is helpful when engaging in change work as it creates different opportunities for engagement and mobilization among your advocacy network, it is also important to avoid becoming unfocused by attempting to prioritize too many goals at once.

Like so many other aspects of advocacy, balance is key when it comes to goal-setting!



## Reflection Point

Revisit the short-, intermediate-, and long-term goals you set earlier. Then, reflect upon the following prompts.

Make revisions to your goals where you notice opportunities to reframe what you are proposing through a strengths-based, action-oriented, and solution-focused lens.

Consider the existing networks and partnerships within your network and spheres of influence. How can these relationships be strengthened, expanded, or otherwise mobilized to support achieving these goals?

What resources are already in place that you can build off of to move toward achieving your goals? What resources might you still need to gain access to in order to attain these goals?

# SMARTIE Goals

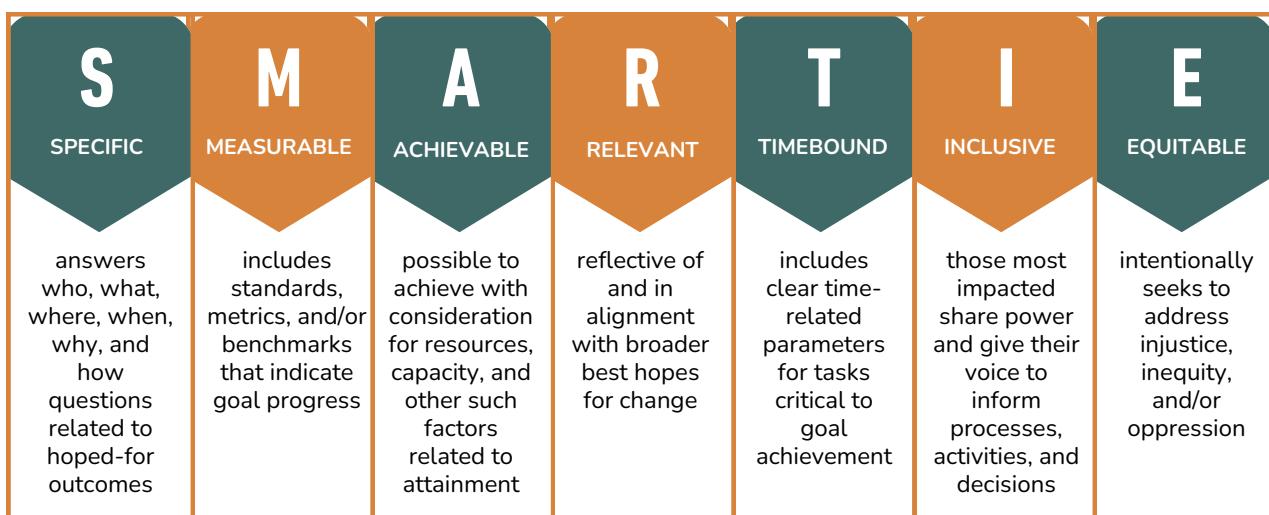
While there are many equally-valid ways to formulate goals, it can be useful to utilize an existing structured framework for goal-setting to provide clear guidance and eliminate ambiguity concerning what needs to be achieved and how that will happen. The clarity that this process offers is helpful in aligning efforts of all within your advocacy network, ensuring that everyone understands the expected outcomes and their roles in achieving them.

In the realm of goal setting, the SMART framework has long stood as a go-to structure for creating clear, achievable goals. While this framework establishes a solid foundation for setting well-formed advocacy goals, it does not include components for addressing inclusivity and equity.

Without an intentional focus on these aspects, goals are less likely to address disparities, cultivate a sense of belonging, and support better experiences and outcomes for trauma-impacted communities.

By incorporating inclusion and equity into SMART goals – thereby transforming them into SMARTIE goals – you ensure your advocacy work is not only comprehensive but also deeply committed to fostering inclusion and equity.

This expanded approach promises to deliver tangible and actionable steps that are more likely to produce outcomes which attend to the needs, values, and preferences of those most impacted by the changes proposed in your advocacy agenda.



## S: **SPECIFIC**

Specificity reduces ambiguity and helps focus efforts among those contributing to the attainment of the goal. Well-formed goals clearly capture the answers to the essential questions of “who,” “what,” “where,” “when,” “why,” and “how.” That is: who will be involved, what will be different once the goal is achieved, why are those hoped-for outcomes targeted, how will the objectives be reached, and where and when will the activities to make that happen occur.

*If the broader goal is to increase trauma-informed mental health support in a community impacted by a recent series of traumatic events, you may specify that you will train 15 mental health counselors to become certified trauma specialists by the end of next month to provide support in specific zip codes that were most impacted by the traumatic events to reduce the impacts of PTSD symptomology among residents.*

- **Who:** 15 mental health counselors and local trauma survivors
- **What:** achieving a reduction in PTSD symptoms by increasing trauma-responsive practitioners through a certification training program
- **Where:** Zip codes shown to be most impacted, ensuring that those most impacted by the traumatic events are equitably considered
- **When:** by the end of the following month
- **Why:** to provide needed support to trauma survivors and improve experiences and outcomes through specialized and supportive recovery pathways
- **How:** by providing specialized training meeting local context and needs

## M: **MEASURABLE**

This component of the SMARTIE framework defines clear criteria for what “success” looks like and means at each stage of your goals. This involves setting specific standards, metrics, or benchmarks that can be assessed. Choosing the right measurement tools is critical for getting accurate data to track progress, objectively evaluate success, and shape changes as needed.

*If the broader goal is to improve mental health outcomes in high schools through co-creating trauma-informed educational programming with a student advisory panel convened to ensure representation for specific cultural and community needs, making it measurable may entail increasing student self-reported resilience scores by 30% within one school year after implementing the trauma-informed curriculum by administering an standardized, evidence-informed assessment tool on a monthly basis.*

This goal sets clear criteria for success: 30% within one school year after implementing the curriculum. The specific measurement allows for tracking progress and objectively evaluating the success of the program through utilizing a well-established assessment tool where students self-report on topics connected to resilience. Measuring this will help reveal areas of strength as well as places where change may need to happen to adapt to results of the assessment in order to achieve desired outcomes.

## A: ACHIEVABLE

This element of the SMARTIE framework can be a bit of a balancing act. Well-formed goals are challenging enough to drive meaningful change yet also realistically attainable when taking into account the available resources, existing capacities, and other contextual factors that influence goal attainment. Ideally, advocacy goals inspire and motivate toward change while remaining feasible enough to avoid setting the stage for likely demoralization and disappointment.

*If the broader goal is to enhance mandated reporter training within child- and family-strengthening systems to include trauma-informed practices, a focused, achievable goal might include developing and integrating a new module into existing training aimed at addressing and reducing systemic biases within the reporting process through operationalizing the principles of a trauma-informed approach by the end of the year, ensuring that the training module is co-designed by those with lived experience of becoming systems-involved through entities such as child protective services and adoptive/foster settings.*

Achievability is evident in the above example in that there is a specific and realistic timeline set – “by the end of the year” – and also in that existing resources and expertise are leveraged. That is, rather than taking the time to create an entirely new training, this goal builds on what is already in place, reducing the labor and energy expenditure needed to attain this goal.

## R: RELEVANT

In the SMARTIE framework, relevance helps ensure that your advocacy goals stay grounded in what truly matters. With the complexity of issues and solutions under the trauma-informed umbrella, it is easy to get distracted or lost in the weeds. Through this part of the framework, you align your aspirations with the pulse of the community and the heartbeat of those most impacted, ensuring each step you take toward comprehensive transformation is an intentional one that brings you closer to your vision of the future.

*If the broader goal is to fund expanding access to trauma-informed community-based integrated behavioral health supports for people living in poverty across the state, anchoring relevance in goal-setting may involve partnering with local grassroots organizations in relevant communities to develop trauma-informed programming to address holistic health disparities and disproportionalities in poor outcomes across the life course.*

By aiming to fund expanding access to supports that directly address the pressing needs of the community and those most impacted, the goal effectively tackles a significant issue impacting communities that have been made vulnerable due to their socioeconomic standing. Partnering with local grassroots organizations to develop trauma-informed programming tailored to meet the unique constellations of needs with which these communities present. Staying connected to this ensures that each step is purposeful and aligned with the broader vision for trauma-informed change.

## T: TIME-BOUND

Providing concrete timelines for advocacy goals provides a clear roadmap for change implementation. Time-bound goals set specific timelines and milestones to keep advocates, activists, and partners in change accountable and on track toward transformation.

*If the broader goal is to improve mental health outcomes for younger people in historically marginalized neighborhoods, making it time-bound might involve stating that by the end of the current calendar year, the aim is to implement a culturally-responsive, trauma-informed mental health curriculum in five public school systems situated in communities impacted by collective and historical trauma, with quarterly progress assessments to track implementation.*

This goal establishes a concrete timeframe for action. This timeline provides a sense of urgency and accountability, ensuring that progress toward the goal is regularly tracked through quarterly progress assessments. By incorporating time-bound elements into the goal, advocates, activists, and partners in change are equipped with a clear roadmap for implementation, which helps maintain momentum and focus toward transformation in the desired area of change: mental health outcomes for younger people in these communities.

## I: INCLUSIVE

In the SMARTIE framework, the concept of inclusivity goes beyond mere representation and “box checking.” Inclusion is about actively creating space for and intentionally amplifying voices that have historically been excluded from the conversation. This aspect of the SMARTIE framework invites a shift away from performative and tokenistic inclusion practices and instead toward equitable partnerships, ensuring that everyone’s experiences and perspectives shape the pathway forward. This entails sharing power, co-constructing agreements shaping how change processes are implemented, and engaging in consensus-building processes to ensure voice, choice, and empowerment for all.

*If the broader goal is to promote holistic health and well-being among LGBTQIA2S+ older adults in assisted living facilities, fostering inclusivity might entail establishing monthly community forums by the end of the quarter to provide an avenue where residents can deliver feedback on culturally-responsive and -affirming policies and programming, and also participate in co-creating new programming to meet emerging and evolving needs.*

By creating a platform for LGBTQIA2S+ residents in these facilities to voice their opinions, communicate their preferences and needs, and guide decision-making processes that directly impact their lives, their lived experiences are honored. Shared decision-making processes foster a sense of belonging and agency during a critical time and in a setting in which otherwise might restrict their autonomy or represent a challenging decline in their holistic health.

## E: EQUITABLE

In trauma-informed advocacy, it is crucial to ensure that our goals strive for fairness and justice. The equitable component of the SMARTIE framework invites us to examine our goals through a lens of systemic injustice, recognizing and addressing disparities that may exist along lines of power and identity. An equity lens helps identify unintentionally embedded exclusion or disproportionate impacts that may be brought on some groups over others, helping you identify areas to further refine your goals.

*If the broader goal is to address food insecurity in communities impacted by a recent hurricane where many lost their homes, embracing equity as a guiding principle may involve establishing a community-led coalition to develop and implement a culturally-responsive food distribution program within six months, with at least 50% of leadership positions filled by representatives from historically marginalized racial, ethnic, cultural, and other identity groups reflecting the diversity of the local community.*

Fostering equitable outcomes compels us to critically reflect upon our goals with an eye toward identifying and redressing harms as well as rectifying inequities. This helps us create meaningful change that benefits all members of our world.

## THE POWER & PURPOSE OF INCLUSIVE & EQUITABLE ADVOCACY GOALS

Together, we have an opportunity to shape a healthier, more resilient world that reflects the best of who we are as humans, and SMARTIE goals are a useful tool to help us bring that vision to life.

As mentioned previously and as will be discussed throughout the book, authentic engagement, inclusion, and collaboration with people and communities impacted by your advocacy efforts conducted in a way that shares power is critical in trauma-informed advocacy, and the intentionality of the process of setting goals through the SMARTIE framework in and of itself can help you remain anchored in cultural humility and increase your effectiveness in setting goals and realizing outcomes that are inclusive and equitable.



## SMARTIE GOALS: EXAMPLES

Below are a few examples that demonstrate the transition from a SMART goal into a SMARTIE goal.



Write and distribute to our action alert network one sign-on letter per month.



Write and distribute to our action alert network one sign-on letter in partnership with people with lived experiences per month.

Expand outreach volunteer based with 35 new members in six months.



Expand outreach volunteer based with 35 new members reflecting the demographic diversity of the community in six months.

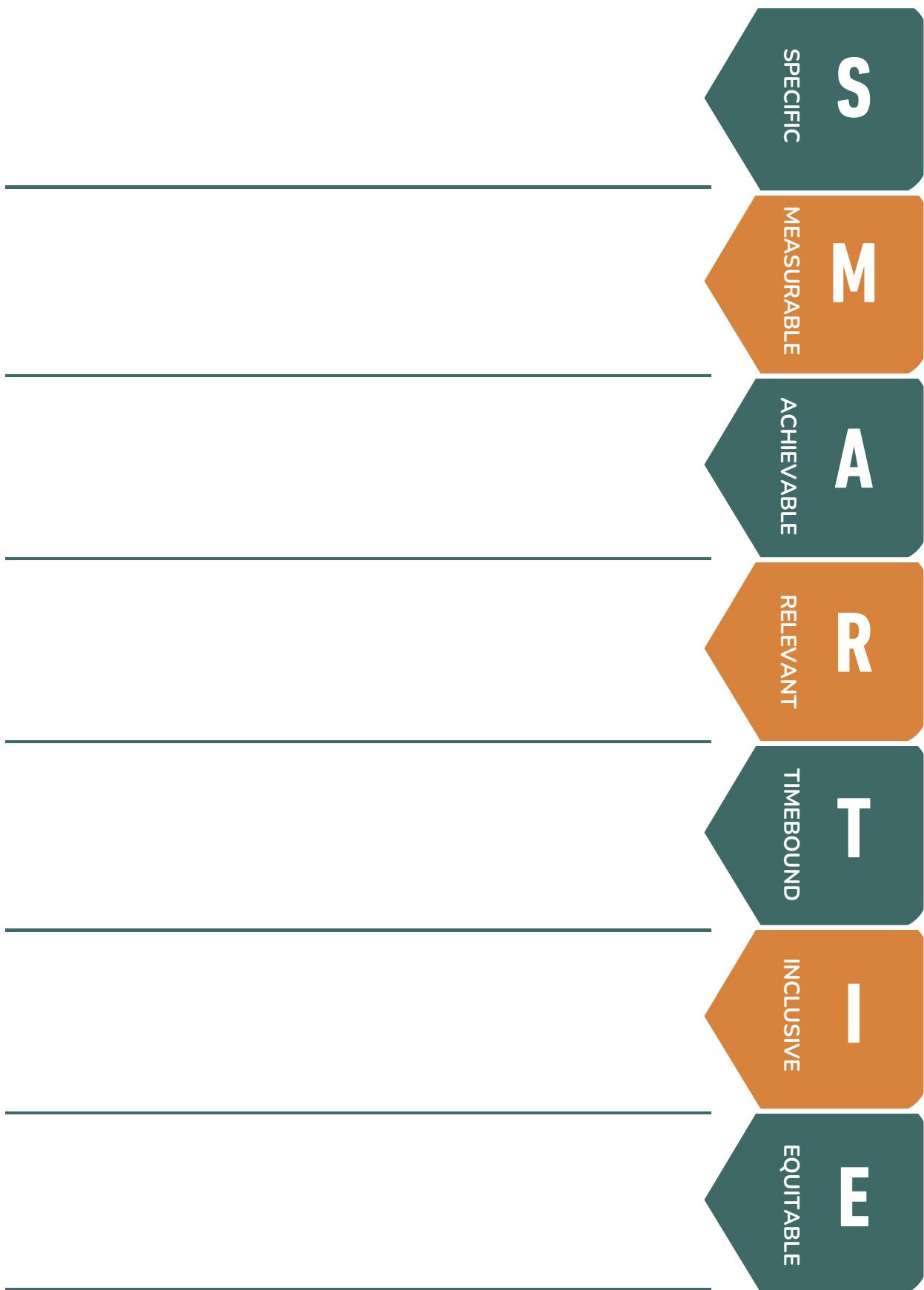
Recruit three local organizations to join our coalition in six months.



Recruit three local organizations who are equipped to work with trauma-informed communities not currently represented to join our coalition in six months.

By infusing your advocacy goals with intentional consideration for inclusion and equity, you ensure your goals address essential elements of trauma-informed advocacy such as social justice, fairness, dismantling oppressive systems, and addressing public health challenges.

# GOAL #1



Using each of the elements you included in the SMARTIE framework sections above, construct a single goal statement:

- Objective
  - Rationale
- Objective
  - Rationale
- Objective
  - Rationale
- Objective
  - Rationale

Indicators of Success:

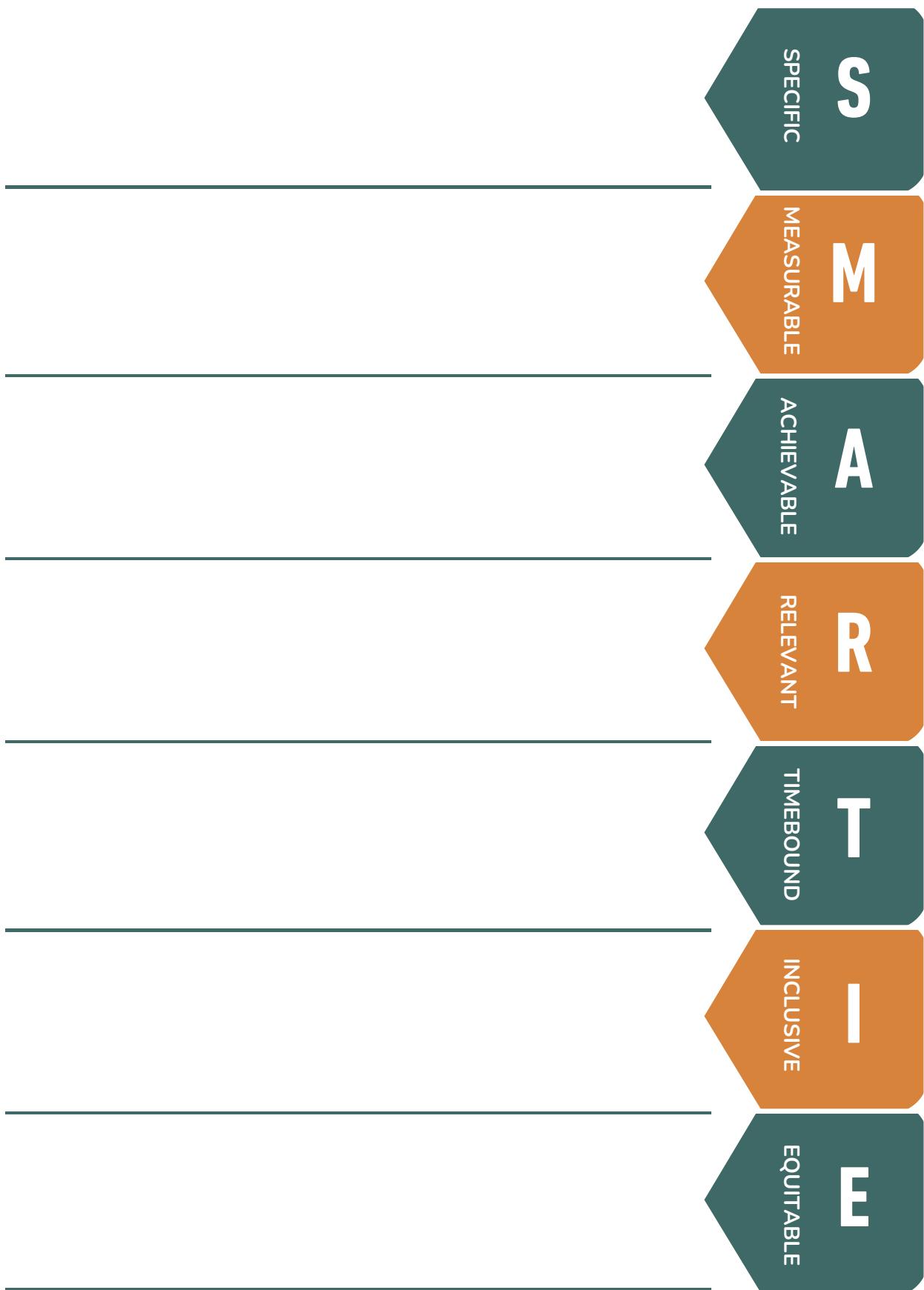
Evidence Needed to Measure Policy

Areas for Collaboration to Help with Achievement:

Potential Partners to Help with Achievement:

Additional Notes:

## GOAL #2



Using each of the elements you included in the SMARTIE framework sections above, construct a single goal statement:

- Objective
  - Rationale
- Objective
  - Rationale
- Objective
  - Rationale
- Objective
  - Rationale

Indicators of Success:

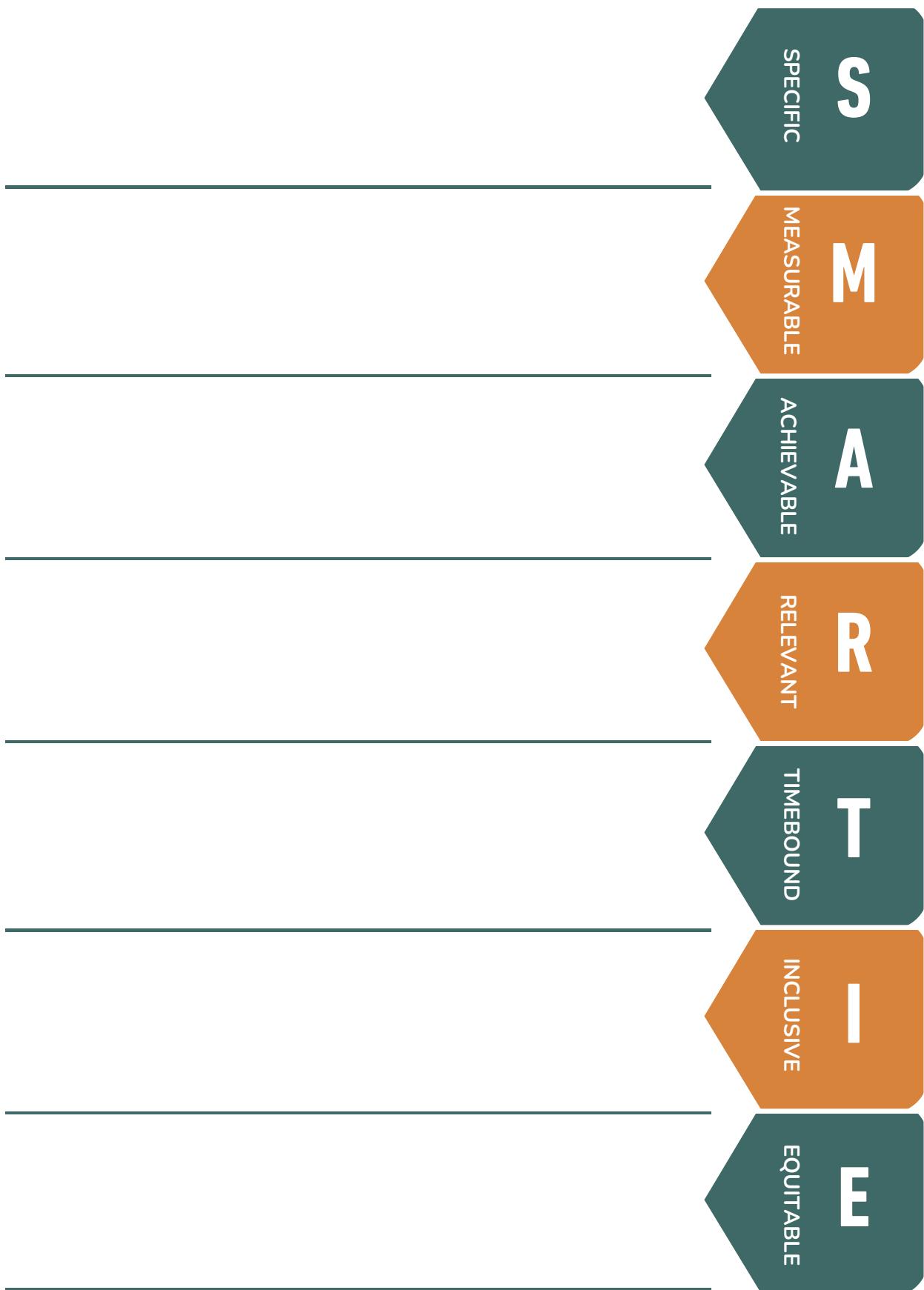
Evidence Needed to Measure Policy

Areas for Collaboration to Help with Achievement:

Potential Partners to Help with Achievement:

Additional Notes:

## GOAL #3



Using each of the elements you included in the SMARTIE framework sections above, construct a single goal statement:

- Objective
  - Rationale
- Objective
  - Rationale
- Objective
  - Rationale
- Objective
  - Rationale

Indicators of Success:

Evidence Needed to Measure Policy

Areas for Collaboration to Help with Achievement:

Potential Partners to Help with Achievement:

Additional Notes:



# Reflection Point

It is time to distill your chosen issue and solution to its core and craft a SMARTIE goal that aligns with your advocacy aspirations! Reflect on the following prompts as you navigate this process:

- **Specific:** clearly define what you want to achieve. Ask yourself...
  - Who is involved? What do I want to accomplish? Where will it take place? When will it happen? Why is it important? How will I accomplish it?
- **Measurable:** determine how you will monitor progress and determine success.
  - What standards, metrics, and/or benchmarks make sense for you to consider measuring? How will you know when the goal has been achieved based on monitoring those factors? What tools or methods will you use to collect data?
- **Achievable:** ensure your goal is realistic and attainable.
  - Is the goal challenging enough to make meaningful progress yet feasible within the constraints you face?
- **Relevant:** align your goal with broader objectives and desired outcomes.
  - How does your goal address the root issues and factors underlying the central issue you are targeting in your advocacy agenda? How do you notice your goal contributing to positive change that aligns with your broader values and vision?
- **Time-Bound:** set a clear timeline to achieve your goal.
  - What milestones will you look to achieve and celebrate in order to keep yourself accountable and on track? When do you aim to accomplish each step or phase of the goal? What are the critical time-related parameters regarding your advocacy agenda?
- **Inclusive:** ensure your goal intentionally and meaningfully involves those traditionally excluded and disenfranchised.
  - How can you bring diverse perspectives and voices together in relation to achieving the goal? Who needs to be involved and/or consulted to make the goal more inclusive and impactful?
- **Equitable:** examine how your goal addresses (or currently does not address) systemic injustice, inequity, or oppression.
  - What might you need to consider when it comes to exploring any unintended disparities or exclusionary impacts of the change you propose? How can you promote fairness, justice, and equity in both the outcomes and advocacy process through setting and achieving this goal?
- **Now, using all of the above prompts, assemble your SMARTIE goal.**
- **What do you notice about the SMARTIE goal versus the short-, intermediate-, and long-term goals you set earlier in this book?**
- **What was this process of refining existing aspirations through a concrete and guided framework like for you?**

# Keeping Current With What is Already Happening

Conducting a policy analysis by examining what is already happening stands to strengthen any advocacy agenda. The questions posed in the “What’s Already Happening?” graphic below invite advocates, activists, and partners in change to consider various dimensions of existing efforts aligned with (or running counter to) the solutions that they seek to implement.

This analysis helps avoid redundant efforts by examining existing movements and ongoing initiatives. Through this process, you may identify allies and uncover opportunities to join forces, thereby strengthening collective commitment and voice toward allied solutions and change efforts. Another benefit of this collaboration is that resources are shared and thus maximized, achieving a greater impact than either single entity could achieve on their own while utilizing energy more constructively than potentially replicating one another’s efforts by acting in silos.

As a note: this process is depicted as infinitely interconnected and circular, in the sense that there is no one place to begin the analysis process that is more “correct” than others. How you engage with this process in practice, like so many other things, will be contingent upon your own context, lived experiences, existing knowledge, proximity to the issue, and a wide variety of other factors that shape what you know and how you are thinking about the current status quo pertaining to your advocacy agenda.

## WHAT'S ALREADY HAPPENING?

### What is the status quo?

- *Existing related policies*
  - \* Are they actively causing harm?
  - \* Do they not go far enough?
- *Policy gaps* - if no policy yet exists re: this issue yet, why might that be?

### What issues are shaping the debate?

- *Trends* - what are local, state, national, and international policymakers noticing?
- *Public opinion* - what does the general public know/say?

### What are those impacted saying?

- *Issue identification* - what is their view/definition of the issue itself?
- *Proposed solutions*
  - \* What changes do they want to see happen?
  - \* What difference will these changes will make in their lives/communities?



### How are other advocates helping?

- *Successes thus far* - what contributed?
- *Current initiatives*
  - \* What are they working on right now?
  - \* Are there opportunities to collaborate/coordinate efforts?

### What have others attempted?

- *Successes* - how did they happen?
- *Shortfalls* - what contributed?
  - \* What is different/possible now?
  - \* What still needs to happen?
- *In progress* - what is working?

### Which decision-makers are vocal?

- *Who are your allies?*
- *Who has expressed opposition?* (whether active or passive)
- *Who is neutral/uncommitted?*

### Where can you draw inspiration?

- *Looking at all policy levels* - are there ideas/language to draw from that you can translate to the level you are looking at?

### Where do you notice alignment?

- *What “hot topics” overlap?* Are there additional opportunities you notice where you can embed your issue/solution?

## WHAT IS THE STATUS QUO?

Understanding the current landscape is the first step in identifying where advocates can either fill a gap or build upon existing aligned groundwork. It is useful to examine current policies that are already in place which attempt to eliminate the issue you are targeting, as well as those that seek to alleviate the issue or keep it from getting worse. Knowing whether existing policies are actively harmful, passive, or falling short in other ways helps strengthen your argument for the necessity and urgency of your unique solution.

## WHAT ISSUES ARE SHAPING THE DEBATE?

Zooming out to examine social history more broadly informs advocacy as well. By examining the current context and considering trending local, state, regional, national, and world issues that are shaping the public debate around your advocacy agenda helps you identify whether your cause aligns with the zeitgeist. If not yet, you might notice areas where there are shared concerns or values you may leverage to bring awareness to your own solutions and ideas for change.

## WHAT HAVE POLICYMAKERS ATTEMPTED?

Looking back at the legislative history of issues related to your advocacy agenda can offer important insights into your advocacy efforts. In cases where previous policy proposals did not progress, understanding what got in the way of success helps identify existing barriers you can strategize around overcoming. You also may find places where solutions aligned with your advocacy agenda have already been implemented, to which you can point as evidence where your proposals seek to produce similar results.

Policymakers tend to be cautious about unproven policies, and demonstrating that a new proposal you are asking them to consider has solid grounding in practice rather than just in theory can make your policy proposal more palatable and persuasive.

## WHICH DECISION-MAKERS ARE VOCAL?

Recognizing which policymakers are your allies, whether actively, vocally, and directly supporting your advocacy agenda or more passively favorable, helps in building a groundswell of support for your advocacy agenda.

It also is useful to know who is actively positioning themselves in ways that oppose your advocacy agenda. This knowledge will help you tailor your strategies and approaches to provide those who are seemingly overtly or covertly standing in opposition to your advocacy agenda with education on the issues and your solutions, highlight shared values and goals, and extend an invitation to consider your advocacy agenda.

Understanding the positions of those who are neutral or otherwise uncommitted is also valuable as these may be potential influencers who, with the right engagement, could become a more active ally or even a champion for your advocacy agenda.

## WHERE DO YOU NOTICE ALIGNMENT?

Looking at current “hot topics” that overlap with your advocacy agenda may also indicate a direction for your advocacy work. You may notice that, even if mainstream discussions do not label certain proposals as “trauma-informed” or explicitly address trauma, there can be significant opportunities to introduce this language and framework where shared values and visions already exist. This strategic integration of trauma-informed principles into the discourse helps lead to more comprehensive and effective solutions, and strengthens the volume of the voices advocating for a trauma-informed approach.

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## WHERE CAN YOU DRAW INSPIRATION?

Exploring and examining policies at all levels – from local to state to national to international – can provide a wealth of inspiration. Reviewing how similar issues are addressed in various contexts may reveal adaptable strategies and language that, with appropriate attribution, could be translated to your specific advocacy needs. Sometimes, there is no need to reinvent the wheel!

## HOW ARE OTHER ADVOCATES HELPING?

Exploring others’ work in the arena of your advocacy agenda also often reveals opportunities for collaboration and coordination of efforts, potentially leading to more significant outcomes and a stronger voice toward transformation. This also allows for the sharing of lessons learned and celebrating collective success toward common goals.

## WHAT ARE THOSE MOST IMPACTED SAYING?

At the heart of trauma-informed advocacy is a deep commitment to deeply hearing and listening to the voices of those most impacted by changes related to your advocacy agenda. Creating trauma-informed spaces where people feel safe and valued as they share their experiences and express their needs and desires without fear of judgment or retribution is crucial.

Building on these dialogues can take shape in many ways, ranging from community meetings and focus groups to more intimate personal conversations to more digital forums that offer accessibility to a broader group of impacted people. To avoid re-traumatization, it is important to maintain transparency throughout and to be consistent, staying committed to the promise of ongoing involvement.

Engagement ought not end with the initial consultation; instead, this means meaningful opportunities for participation where those most impacted by change proposals actively influence every phase of policy development and implementation. Respecting, honoring, and lifting up the expressed preferences, values, and priorities of people with lived experience that interfaces with aspects of your advocacy agenda ensures that advocacy work is anchored in compassion and in the principles of a trauma-informed approach.

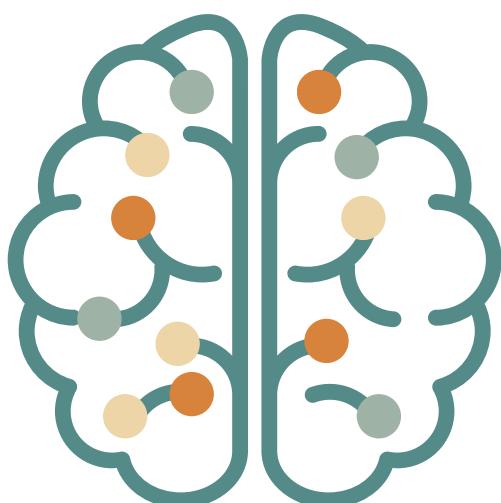
# Going Deeper

Well-researched policy agendas add credibility and bolster trust in your advocacy efforts. Once you have a solid understanding of the current landscape, delving into additional information-gathering helps you deepen your understanding of key concepts surrounding your advocacy agenda, demonstrating a commitment to evidence-informed change. Knowledge is power, especially when it is tailored to resonate with the values and perspectives of your advocacy targets.

It is a key part of trauma-informed advocacy work to align data, science, practice, personal narratives, and policy to paint a full picture of the issue and solution at hand. This means paying attention to emerging and evolving evidence and research regarding burden, frequency, severity, scope, and other key information about issues related to your advocacy agenda.

In gathering more information, it is critical to equally value stories of diverse lived experiences and the findings of academic and empirical research to bring a well-rounded, informed perspective to the table. Supporting statistics and studies with stories bridges the empirical with the emotional. This makes what you propose less abstract, connecting the dots for your advocacy targets as the advocacy agenda you propose becomes more vivid and humanized.

## GATHERING MORE INFORMATION



### Well-researched policy agendas add credibility

Looking at a variety of types of sources can be helpful as you develop your advocacy strategy:

- Qualitative and quantitative
- Academic and experiential

Some examples of possible sources:

- Professional and academic research
- Official statistics
- Committee reports
- News reports and other media coverage
- Voices of lived experiences and others on social media
- Primary source data (e.g., interviews with those impacted)
- Allies' policy proposals / briefs / action plans / toolkits, etc.
- Your own personal / professional experience and expertise!

# Considerations for Information-Gathering

Providing strong support that your advocacy agenda is effective in accomplishing what you say it will accomplish is essential to making your case for change.

It is understandable, however, to feel a bit swamped when wading through a wealth of research, data, statistics, acronyms, and other concepts that come with strengthening your advocacy agenda. Some considerations to minimize analysis paralysis are explored below.

## STAY ANCHORED IN YOUR GOALS.

Determining how you can effectively gather information to help you realize your advocacy goals is critical. Adopting a reverse-engineering approach and working backwards can enhance your strategy, especially if you feel stuck around where to begin. Start by envisioning the outcomes that would indicate the success of your advocacy efforts.

Ask yourself: what outcome will tell you that your advocacy efforts were successful? Visualize that! What tangible differences will let you know that your advocacy has made an impact? What is one small step you can take to move toward making that happen?

Engaging in reflections like these can help you sharpen the focus of your information-gathering as well as illuminate the path forward toward achieving your goals.



## COLLECT, ANALYZE & SHARE EVIDENCE FROM “ALL SIDES” OF THE ISSUE & SOLUTION

Trustworthiness and transparency are core principles of a trauma-informed approach, and it is important that we, as advocates and activists, model what this looks like.

That means sharing honestly and authentically with target audiences about potential gains *and* losses for all parties who may be impacted, openly sharing any gaps in the research and evidence base you are aware of, and avoiding guessing where you are not certain about a response to a question posed are all important behaviors to get comfortable with.

Further, being familiar with the many dimensions of the complex issues and solutions that are connected to trauma-informed transformation can be an asset to prepare advocates, activists, and partners in change to meet with policy- and decision-makers.

When we have already familiarized ourselves with all angles of our target issue and preferred solution, we are empowered with the multidimensional knowledge we need to be much more agile when oppositional arguments or counterpoints may be made.

Well-rounded knowledge and transparency around the implications of that knowledge can be powerful in opening hearts and minds toward taking trauma-informed action.

## TRACE THE HISTORY OF YOUR ISSUE & SOLUTION

Knowing how long the target issue has existed, what is broadly known, how conceptualization has changed over time, as well as where misunderstandings, myths, and knowledge gaps generally exist before your entry into the on-the-ground work helps pave the pathway to finding and devising a novel policy solution that makes sense.

Many times as you embark upon this exploration, you may find that others have already been working toward effecting change, especially if you intend to address a more long-standing issue. Diving more deeply than your initial surface analysis of what others involved in change work are already doing often helps save your precious time and energy by preventing the replication of work from different entities.

This part of the work also may reveal lessons learned from others who have been met with ambivalence or resistance in their own advocacy, which you then can integrate into your own pathway forward to increase the efficacy of your efforts.

## **USE FRAMEWORKS THAT PROMOTE ACCESSIBILITY, BELONGING, DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION, & JUSTICE (ABDEIJ), AND BE SURE YOU ARE CONSIDERING THE DOMAINS OF INTERSECTIONALITY AT PLAY**

Your advocacy agenda will be stronger for acknowledging how systemic and institutional forces influence the policy landscape as well as the administration of services and benefits that contribute to creating problems public policy seeks to address.

The majority of our world is not yet trauma-aware, let alone trauma-informed or trauma-responsive. That means that the dominant discourse tends to attribute that which is connected to trauma to individual inferiority, personal moral failings, making “bad choices,” and/or psychological pathology.

These norms, while misplaced given what we know about trauma’s indelible and intergenerational impacts, play a significant role in shaping policies and thus are likely to come into conversations about trauma-informed change.

It is important for advocates to anticipate that this will happen and to check in with themselves about what it will take to manage any activation that they are experiencing so they can continue to model the model of being trauma-informed in their advocacy efforts.

Additionally, checking for unintentional harm or disparate impact that may be connected to your proposed solution is a vital part of this work.

This invites advocates, activists, and partners in change to intentionally notice where an issue or possible solution addresses or upholds structures and/or values that may oppress, marginalize, alienate, enhance, or create privilege and power, or otherwise “other” folx, or allow policies to dehumanize and disenfranchise people impacted by the issue as well as by proposed changes.

In addition to taking note of potential adverse impacts through an intersectional lens, it is also important to notice how the evidence you have uncovered supports the value of creating and fighting for policy solutions that celebrate and venerate diverse identities, bolster resources, services, and spaces that allow for inclusive, meaningful participation in society, and affirm all people’s inherent dignity and worth as human beings.

Part of this work can be—and indeed ought to be—celebrating the resilience embedded in how folx have survived and thrived creatively in spite of oppression, while simultaneously aiming to dismantle it with trauma-informed policy solutions.



## Reflection Point

Envision that you are in a meeting with a legislator who does not yet have a grasp on a trauma-informed approach, and they make a generalizing derogatory comment about people with relevant lived experience in response to your well-constructed “ask” for them to support a trauma-informed bill.

1. What do you notice happening in your brain and body as you think about this scenario?
2. What might help you stay regulated and connected to yourself as well as the values/principles of a trauma-informed approach in this scenario?
3. How might you meet the comment this legislator has made with curiosity and compassion in the moment? What might be shaping their ways of thinking?
4. What types of resources may you look to in order to find data and research to help support remaining anchored in evidence?

# Devising Problem & Solution Statements

It can be helpful to assemble your evidence-gathering together to form a broad, foundational problem and solution statement. Having a general statement to remain connected to and guided by is a useful anchor, and also presents a starting point to continue to refine and customize certain aspects as needed to be as effective as possible for engaging and mobilizing varying specific target audiences.

In crafting these statements, specificity and precision in language choice is key. You will want to be sure to identify the specific issue you are attempting to address, as well as to articulate the solution you are proposing be implemented. Early in the analytical phase, by assessing a range of potential solutions and recognizing various pathways to addressing the issue that exist, you are able to determine a strategy that aligns with your overarching goals and resonates powerfully with diverse audiences.

Few public policy issues lend themselves to only a single solution. Gathering evidence will likely reveal multiple viable approaches that are valid and capable of addressing the issue you have identified. Comparing and contrasting these options, then merging the most promising features based on alignment with your mission, vision, and values, helps you craft a comprehensive, synthesized strategy to bring your advocacy agenda to life.

The art and practice of developing impactful, effective problem and solution statements also invites innovation and intentionality around framing. Using language that highlights your solution in a positive, strengths-based light helps illuminate the appropriateness and feasibility of your advocacy agenda, and also tends to lead to more compelling and persuasive statements.

Similarly to the goal-forming process itself, creating a problem and solution statement benefits from using a salutary lens that speaks to the value of the presence of something desirable that your solution will bring rather than merely speaking to the removal or absence of the core issue you seek to address.

For example, rather than creating an ambiguous solution statement such as “decreasing obesity to combat early death among BIPOC folx,”, a more specific, policy-driven solution like “providing access to safe spaces and public resources that support BIPOC people being more physically active, thus building on existing community, social, and cultural connections while promoting environmental justice and boosting overall health, well-being, and longevity among constituents” captures a more holistic, inclusive, and solution-focused approach.

Ultimately, your ability to illustrate the potential positive outcomes of policy changes can illuminate strengths and resources that are within reach and can be harnessed to address the issue. This strategy fosters a realistic sense of hope for the future and may galvanize others to join in support of implementing your advocacy agenda, enhancing your potential for meaningful, sustained positive change.



## Reflection Point

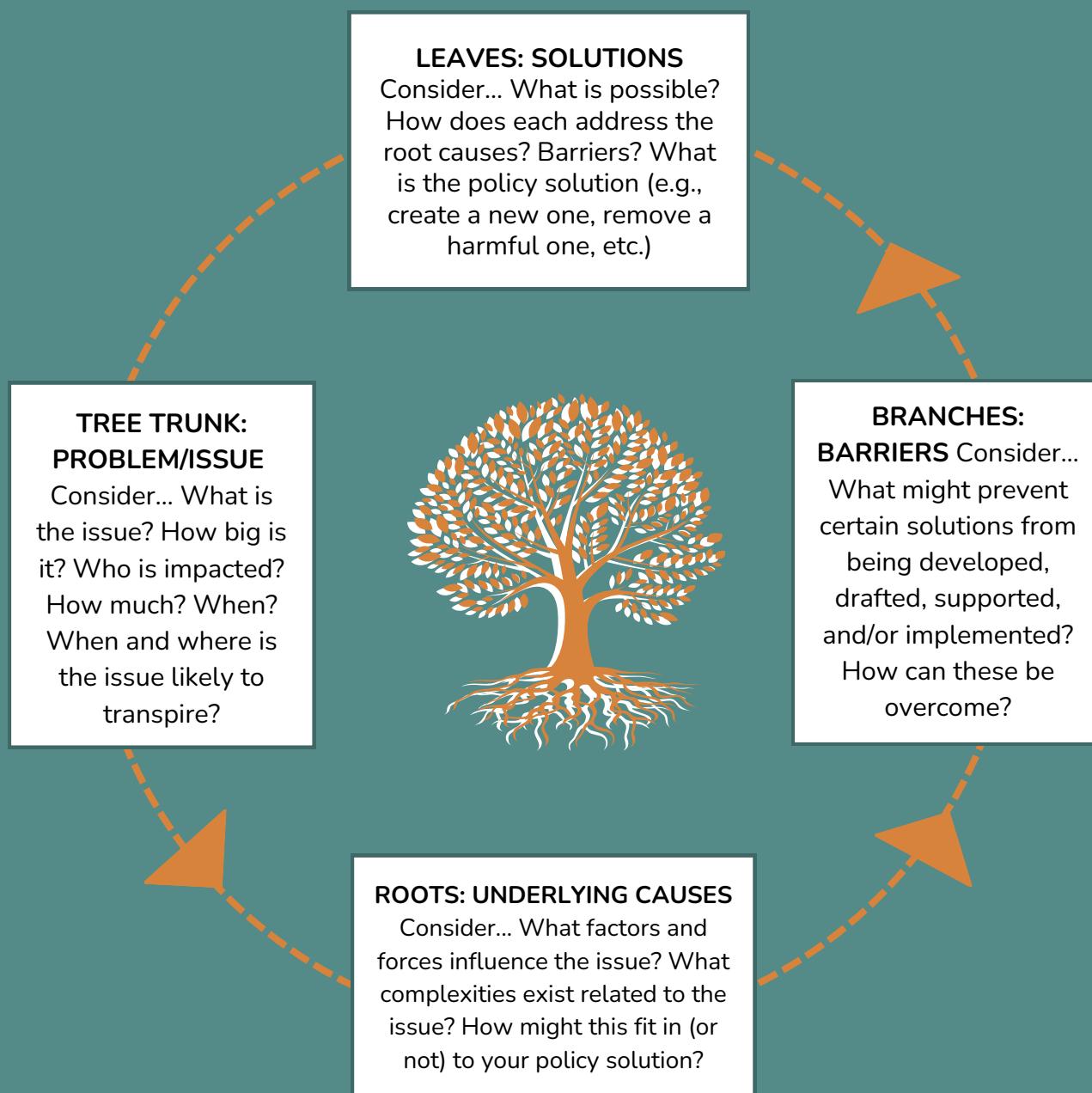
Sketch out a quick problem and solution statement based on what is explored in this chapter. Review how you have captured your issue and solution, bringing particular attention to the language and focus of your statement.

Where do you notice opportunities to lift up the presence of positive factors and outcomes that will come from implementing your solution versus emphasizing eliminating or getting rid of the issue?

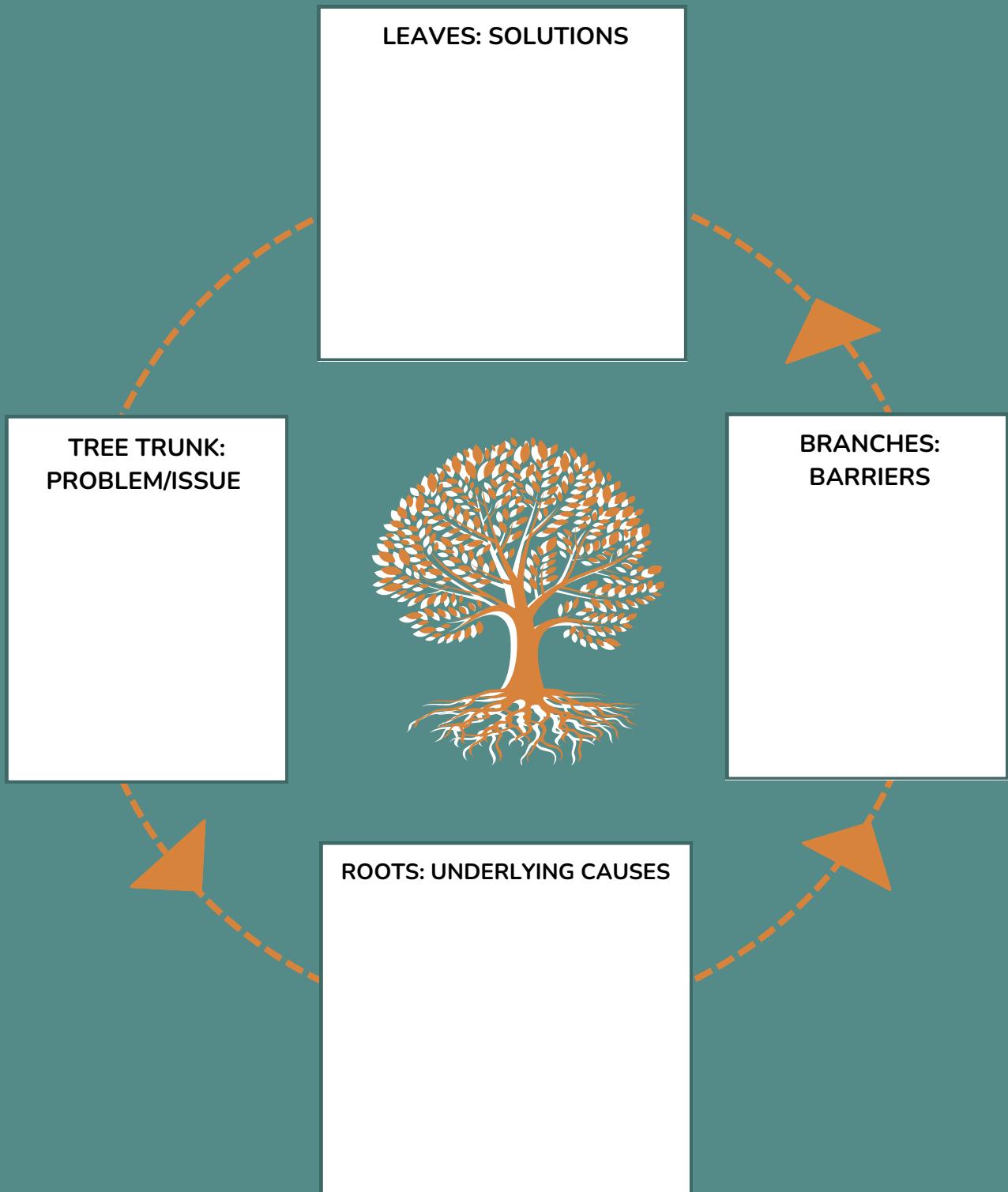
What do you notice about your tendency to focus on strengths and resources rather than deficits and shortcomings?

# TRACING YOUR ADVOCACY ISSUE

This worksheet is intended to help you prioritize policy solutions by inviting you to consider policy solutions that reduce or eliminate barriers and get to the true root of a particular policy issue. The first page has reflective prompts to support you in beginning to build your advocacy agenda and strategy. The second page has blank boxes for you to brainstorm and explore possible solutions to this issue. (Adopted from the UNAIDS advocacy toolkit.)



## TRACING YOUR ADVOCACY ISSUE (continued)



# Monitoring & Evaluating Process

*Monitoring and evaluation* are fundamental components of any advocacy agenda as these activities help ensure the realization of your best hopes when it comes to mobilizing your advocacy agenda.

**Monitoring** is a dynamic, ongoing process tracking the moment-to-moment operational aspects of the advocacy process. Monitoring is about keeping current with emerging and evolving developments and recording activities as they happen to ensure that your advocacy agenda is on track according to plan. Keeping an eye on day-to-day functions and how they are connecting to stated aspirations helps ensure that advocacy activities align with the strategic direction of the work. Monitoring includes a wide variety of activities, from regularly checking to see if a new policy is being implemented as intended by tracking relevant key figures, to tracking the growth of your advocacy network's supporter base through elements such as increases in attendance at events or more responses when you mobilize calls to action.

**Evaluation** is a systematic review of the efficacy and impact of activities you are monitoring that occurs periodically throughout the lifespan of your advocacy work. While monitoring is continuous and process-oriented, evaluation steps back to assess whether the actions taken and outcomes achieved align with the advocacy goals you have set. This also includes a broad range of activities, such as assessing whether a policy implemented has led to the desired changes in the community of implementation, analyzing resources spent versus benefits gained from advocacy activities, or looking at broader outcomes such as the shifting of public opinion.

Both processes are important to inform your advocacy work by highlighting what already is working well and where your growth edges lie, though they accomplish this in different ways.

Monitoring is like checking in on the health of your advocacy work in real-time, ensuring you are on track and helping you either maintain the course or adjust tactics swiftly when necessary. Evaluation ensures that your longer-term goals are being met, providing a more reflective, big-picture view of what has been accomplished and what impact your work has had.

## A CONTINUOUS COMMITMENT

As foundational elements of any advocacy agenda, monitoring and evaluation ought to be integrated into your work early and continuously. Institutionalizing a formalized process that ensures that both monitoring and evaluation happen in an ongoing fashion and that time-bound processes are in place for accountability is a much more useful and informative approach than merely checking in after hitting major milestones. High intentionality in implementing these processes helps advocates, activists, and partners in change incorporate lessons learned into their own decision-making processes.

## REVISITING THE UTILITY OF SMARTIE GOALS

To monitor progress and evaluate efficacy regarding your advocacy agenda involves staying connected to outcomes you hope for and expect. SMARTIE goals are particularly well-suited to support monitoring and evaluating progress in trauma-informed advocacy work due to their comprehensive focus that imbues clarity yet extends beyond conventional goal-setting to include consideration for inclusion and equity.

The Specific and Measurable aspects of SMARTIE goals provide a clear roadmap for what advocates, activists, and partners in change wish to achieve and how progress can be assessed.

This clarity helps with monitoring since ongoing activities are tracked against these benchmarks, making it more easy to observe discrepancies between planned and actual progress and adapt as needed along the way.

The Achievable and Relevant components of SMARTIE goals ensure that goals are anchored in a realistic sense of hope that aligns with the broader goals of your advocacy agenda. During evaluation, these aspects help determine whether the advocacy strategies you have employed up through that point are appropriate and effective in the context of intended outcomes you have stated.

Time-bound goals help in determining clear timelines and identifying milestones. The ability to both continuously monitor progress and also evaluate key processes within regular, predefined timeframes build in accountability and keep the work moving forward.

The Inclusive and Equitable dimensions are what set SMARTIE goals apart. By intentionally incorporating these aspects in your trauma-informed advocacy work, your goals are more likely to consider and positively impact a broader range of community members, including those who otherwise are often excluded or marginalized.

These criteria also inform monitoring, ensuring that all activities are conducted in a way that is accessible, fair, and just. They also come into play during evaluation, where they enable a more comprehensive and holistic analysis of how well the outcomes achieved have served the whole community, highlighting and disparities in impact that need to be addressed as the work progresses.

Setting strong, detailed SMARTIE goals upfront creates yardsticks against which to measure success both continuously to ensure day-to-day operations are on track as well as in looking into longer-term, more substantial outcomes.

## COLLABORATIVE PROCESSES & ARRIVING AT COMMON GOALS

The collaborative nature of monitoring and evaluation in trauma-informed advocacy highlights the importance of inclusivity and responsiveness to different perspectives, values, and hopes.

A trauma-informed approach to advocacy recognizes that voices of those most impacted by topics, concepts, and plans related to the advocacy agenda that is guiding the work, and actively integrates these perspectives into decision-making processes.

It can be a challenge to navigate the many different voices, values, and lived experiences that shape the way “success” is conceptualized and measured. When inviting a variety of people impacted by or otherwise invested in an advocacy agenda to the conversation to both define problems as well as co-develop solutions together, advocates, activists, and partners in change will benefit from honing their facilitation skills to support movement toward consensus.

Inviting open discussions and organizing specific events and venues through which diverse feedback is delivered ensures that all voices are heard, valued, and invited to co-create goals that will inform the advocacy work ahead.

Some initial prompts to consider to enhance collaboration include:

- What does “success” mean and look like, both in the short-term and long-term, to those impacted and involved?
  - Where are there differences? What is responsible for those differences?
  - Where is there overlap and common ground?
- What are ways to measure success? Is there a standardized tool or evidence-informed instrument that already exists that you will use?
  - What different versions exist that are culturally-responsive and reflective of the diversity of those impacted and involved? If not, what adaptations to existing practices/tools/instruments need to be considered?
- Where will the data you collect come from? Will it be quantitative or qualitative?
- How will you ensure ethical practices and obtain informed consent among those who may contribute to monitoring progress and evaluation?
- How and when will results be tracked and transparently shared?
  - How is accessibility and equity being considered to ensure that those most impacted are able to view and make comment to reported results?
- How is individual and collective accountability integrated into goals set?

## ACTIVE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

In trauma-informed evaluation and monitoring, active, meaningful engagement among those most impacted in all stages of the advocacy process is essential.

Engaging community members – whether belonging to a geographic community or a community of identity – as active contributors rather than merely passive recipients of information cultivates a richer dialogue that makes monitoring and evaluation a clearer and more refined process.

A potential area for advocacy networks striving to embody the principles of a trauma-informed approach to consider “modeling the model” is in monitoring how well your own advocacy network reflects the community/communities impacted by the agenda being actualized.

Continuing to remain on the pulse of your advocacy network’s composition, such as by noting who is involved, getting an understanding of what keeps them involved, and tracking who tends to participate (and not participate) in various advocacy activities, keeps your advocacy efforts grounded in and responsive to the community’s true needs.

This level of intentional involvement also strengthens the work by providing more opportunities for a diverse audience to give direct feedback and share ideas for corrective or restorative actions when they are impacted by a particular aspect of the advocacy process.

Co-creating solutions can strengthen ownership, restore hope in the policy process, and support a sense of meaning among those who participate in shaping the way forward. This also helps ensure that the advocacy process is truly beneficial and reflective of the needs of those most impacted by the central issue your advocacy work targets.

## MANAGING UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES

Unintended or unexpected consequences often emerge when policies that are strong in theory are translated into operational practices. Sometimes these consequences are positive, while other times they may be harmful or otherwise deter vision-aligned progress. Such consequences can arise due to a myriad of complex and interconnected factors.

Regularly examining whether any unexpected/unintended consequences take place – and understanding the variables that contribute to any deviations from expected outcomes – enables advocates, activists, and partners in change to adjust strategies as needed to maintain the integrity and relevance of advocacy efforts.

## CELEBRATING SUCCESSES & BUILDING ON THE GOOD WORK ACCOMPLISHED

Integrating lessons learned from monitoring and evaluation into advocacy strategies invites continuous improvements that strengthen your overall advocacy agenda. Celebrating successes along the way is vital for maintaining momentum and motivation. Setting and monitoring/evaluating progress toward achieving short-, intermediate-, and long-term goals allows for a more structured progression through advocacy objectives and a more consistent connection to meaning, impact, and a sense of achievement.

Capturing a range of hoped-for outcomes helps us gauge whether we are on track without unfairly concluding that we totally have failed if we did not reach our overall goals, which thwarts advocate burnout.

For example, you may have helped motivate a legislator to introduce a bill only to have it die in committee, yet by looking at the intermittent evaluations of getting to this point will be reminded that there are many activities that you would count as successful and a marker of forward-moving progress toward your best hopes for the future. Getting a bill introduced is no small or easy feat!

While the indicators of success will differ based on a variety of factors and context, some examples of possible success indicators may include monitoring or evaluating factors including (but not limited to):

- Engagement with materials among the target audience
- Usage of special event hashtags or links
- Quantity of outputs (e.g., policy briefs distributed, emails sent, etc.)
- Number of advocacy network members trained
- Attitudinal shifts among target audience or broader population

## THE POWER OF REFLECTIVE PRACTICE IN ADVOCACY

Effective monitoring and evaluation are integral to fostering a reflective practice that informs all aspects of advocacy work. By engaging in ongoing reflection and continuously revisiting these processes, advocacy efforts are more likely to remain relevant, effective, and aligned with their intent.

The continuous commitment to remaining reflective and responsive to learnings that emerge in these processes helps keep advocates, activists, and partners in change motivated and connected to the work, building a resilient foundation for sustained advocacy to drive meaningful change.

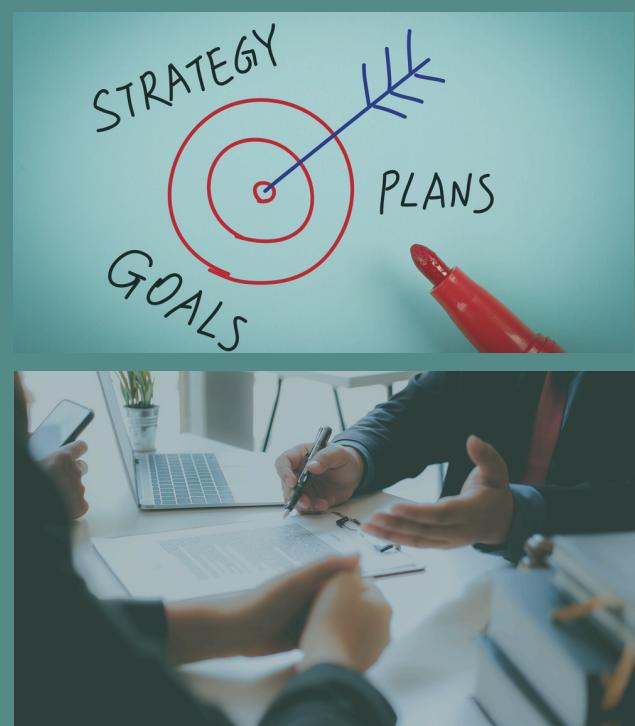


## Reflection Point

- How might you ensure that your short-term monitoring efforts align with your long-term advocacy goals?
- Consider the engagement strategies you have employed in building support for and momentum toward the change you want to see happen.
  - How have you monitored or evaluated the effectiveness of your engagement (even if informal)?
  - What changes were made based on your progress monitoring/evaluation?
- How do you conceptualize “success” in general?
  - What influences, internal and external, shape this conceptualization?
  - How has your personal conceptualization of “success” evolved or shifted over the years?
- What ways of thinking about “success” might still need shifting as you consider the principles and approaches to trauma-informed advocacy you have read about so far?

# Chapter 4: Identifying & Preparing to Engage with Advocacy Targets

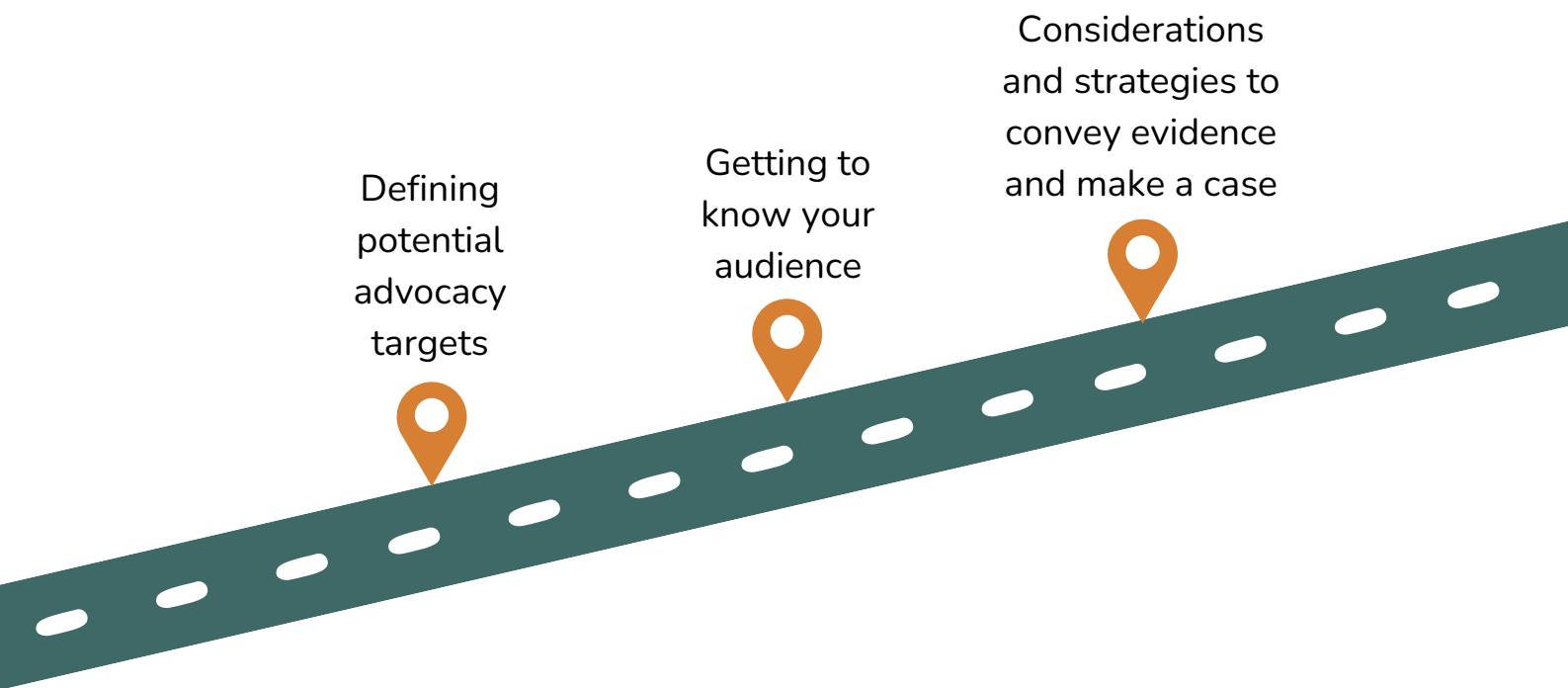
[Resources](#), [PowerPoint](#), [Video](#), [Reflection Questions](#), and More!



*One day you will tell your story of how you overcame what you went through, and it will be someone else's survival guide.*

- Brene Brown

# What You Can Expect in This Chapter



## SETTING YOUR ADVOCACY SIGHTS



Advocacy is an inherently nuanced process, and there is no one-size-fits-all advocacy agenda to effect trauma-informed transformation across diverse communities and contexts.

When selecting advocacy targets, i.e., choosing the audience members for your advocacy efforts, it is important to consider the dynamics at play that will influence how various advocacy targets receive your calls to action.

## WHO IS SITTING AT THE TABLE? WHO STILL NEEDS TO BE INVITED? WHO HAS NOT YET ACCEPTED YOUR INVITATION?

When defining advocacy targets, it is important to think deeply about who actually sets a policy. A clear answer to this will clarify the potential avenues and strategies for the advocacy work ahead.

Once you have a clear vision of what you wish to achieve and what partners are positioned to help you bring your vision to life, you also will get a sense of who else needs to be a part of your movement in order to grow your collective voice and bring in key influencers to act as champions in their spheres of influence.

For example, say you noticed that the free health clinic you work in has eligibility criteria that is set at 130% of the poverty level to receive services, yet you are seeing higher need among those who are “falling through the cracks” following the implementation of a new law limiting access to the extra food and housing supports provided to those in need during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic that families have since relied on to make ends meet.

Knowing who set the policy is important for anyone seeking to advocate for expanding access to care in the clinic. For instance, the board of the clinic may be the entity that formally set the policy, and thus this would be the target audience.

It is also possible that the clinic is a part of a network of community-based clinics statewide that all receive funding through legislation that standardizes eligibility requirements based on a law passed and signed by the governor two legislative sessions ago.

On the other hand, it is possible that there are federal funds that the clinic receives, and thus the federal government is the entity that determines eligibility criteria for recipients, meaning that your congressperson and senators will be targets for your advocacy efforts.

As you might imagine, building support for and pursuing change concerning the policy setting eligibility requirements at 130% of the poverty level would look very different based on which entity sets the policy. This is a part of why it is so important to learn about the issue and who is responsible before you begin designing and mobilizing the specific steps of your advocacy strategy.

## MAPPING OUT YOUR STRATEGY

Once you have a sense of key decision-makers and other important entities involved, consider who needs to hear your message and how you can support them in understanding and being responsive to the complex issues you are seeking to address.

This step involves plotting out the specific steps needed to engage the people who are impacted, who are influential, and who make key decisions to grow efforts toward change.

If the issue or solution you are advocating for is not yet on the ballot or within the legislative discussion, think strategically about how to bring it to the forefront of the conversation. Whether through direct lobbying efforts, public campaigns, coalition-building, or other advocacy strategies, it is important to tailor your actions to what will garner the awareness and engagement of each group you are targeting with your efforts and messaging.

## ENGAGING WITH COMMITTEES & KEY INFLUENCERS

If policy change is a part of your advocacy agenda, knowing which committees will hear your proposals, and who sits on those committees, allows you to tailor your messages and engage directly with those who have direct sway over the success of your legislative initiative. As you begin to build your network of supporters, consider focusing your efforts on policymakers who are likely to support your cause, or on those who you believe could be moved to support you with the right information and approach.

## CULTIVATING & MOBILIZING ALLIANCES

Building community through engaging with existing people, coalitions, organizations, legislative networks, and other groups that are actively involved in achieving goals in alignment with, in allyship with, or adjacent to your own advocacy agenda is one important strategy to build collective voice and power to bring your vision to life. In addition to building up a network of support to tap into and draw inspiration from, there may be direct opportunities for collaboration.

For instance, some groups may have access to space to hold convenings or events. Other potential partners in change may be willing to lobby around issues of common concern where you have restrictions on how much lobbying you are able to do. There may be other groups who already have strong relationships with legislators surrounding similar approaches that you may be able to garner more direct support from.

These are only a few examples of a number of potential benefits to engaging in outreach or coordination with groups doing aligned, allied, or adjacent work. These relationships can lead to vital resources and further relationships that build power for your own advocacy agenda.

You may also find people or groups that are generally supportive of your policy solution or similar, yet may initially be hesitant or seemingly unwilling to put forth effort or distribute resources to advance a specific aspect of your advocacy agenda without some additional conversation, education, or persuasion. This target audience often is willing to lend an ear with the potential to become supporters or even champions with impactful messaging that highlights common ground, credible information that speaks to both the head and the heart, and the right framing around the vision of what the future could look like.

## ANTICIPATING OPPOSITION

As much as it is advantageous to get a good sense of what those who already naturally are aligned with your advocacy agenda need to know and hear to become full-on champions, it is equally important to identify those who might actively oppose your efforts and understand the concerns with which they present.

Consider not ruling anyone out as a potential supporter! With the right approach, and with the initial conversation beginning at the right moment in time and the relationship continuing to stay connected over time, there certainly can be movement toward changing hearts and minds in ways that strengthen the reach and reputation of your advocacy agenda.

## FORTIFYING FOR THE FUTURE THROUGH NURTURING RELATIONSHIPS

While you cannot predict the future, you will want to be thinking about a variety of possible outcomes and bumps on the road to those outcomes to inform your strategy to surmount potential barriers. Another useful strategy is to anticipate and strategize around challenges that could adversely impact your advocacy, such as budget constraints, political shifts, or public opinion changes.

Tapping into your network of key influencers who can help sway public and political opinion in your favor during times of turmoil where other issues may otherwise pull attention away from your advocacy agenda. Relationship-building with a variety of people ranging from well-respected community messengers, to media or social media personalities, to social media platforms, to partner organizations, to policymakers, and beyond.

## Navigating Different Venues for Policy Change

When addressing a problem and framing your policy solution, it is critical to understand the operational context of the venue you are advocating within. Legislatures each operate under rules the bodies themselves determine, administrative agency procedures are shaped by statutes, and local government actions may hinge on charters or ordinances. Knowing the bodies that

Once you have determined what venue you will use to address your problem, you need to understand how that venue operates. As a high-level description: legislatures function under rules adopted by the bodies, administrative agency procedures are governed by statutes, and local government procedures may be based on charter or ordinance.

We work within complex and interconnecting systems of policy, programs, and communities that directly and indirectly impact experiences, outcomes, and lives. Advocacy work to advance your solution may be applicable at different levels, meaning you will want to consider setting healthy boundaries based on what venue(s) you feel called to advocate in.

Rather than trying to do everything in all venues at once, it might be useful to consider starting by focusing the majority of your energy toward building relationships and momentum to target the issue at one particular level, then continue to assess whether you want to expand into other venues from there. Consider factors such as your capacity, your resources, and your sense of motivation to advocate within each potential venue.

Influencing policy at the local level might involve participating in town hall meetings or local council hearings, whereas advocating at the federal level often requires a broader strategy that may include engaging with regulatory agencies or influencing public opinion to garner national support. There is a broad range of advocacy activities to consider, each playing a role in supporting change. Broadly speaking, advocacy targets may include (but are not limited to):

- Individuals
- Agencies or organizations
- Grassroots groups
- Elected or appointed officials
- Public and private entities
- Legislative bodies
- Companies or corporations
- Court systems
- Groups, task forces, or committees
- Governmental entities



This table offers some examples of those to whom you may advocate in various venues:

## POSSIBLE PUBLIC POLICY ADVOCACY TARGETS

Level of policymaking	Executive	Legislative	Judicial	Non-government
Local	Local housing authorities, city / county program offices, voter registration, community / family services, local human rights commissions, mayors, city managers	City / town councils, county legislatures, county commissioners, school boards	Circuit court, juvenile court, family court	Local agency boards, local grassroots organizations / groups, coalitions
State	Governors, state agencies (e.g., admins of SNAP, TANF, Medicaid, public housing, etc.), State Boards/Depts (e.g., health, corrections, education, etc.)	State legislatures (e.g., house, assembly, senate, etc.)	State appeals court, state supreme court	Statewide agencies / organizations / groups, task forces, coalitions
Federal	U.S. President, federal agencies (e.g., Dept of Health, Social Security Admin, Dept of Justice, etc.)	Congress (House of Reps and Senate)	Supreme Court, federal court system, inc appeals courts	National affiliate nonprofit agencies / organizations, coalitions

## THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH: IMPLEMENTATION & ENFORCEMENT

The **Executive Branch** of government is primarily responsible for implementing and enforcing laws created by the Legislative Branch. That means ensuring that the policies and laws passed are put into practice effectively.

This branch of government ranges from the President at the federal level, to governors at the state level, to local mayors, city managers, and other authoritative roles.

Advocates, activists, and partners in change might focus on influencing this branch when aiming to impact how policies are administered or to advocate for existing regulations to be enforced more in alignment with their advocacy agendas.

Developing relationships with key administrative officials who have the power to change how laws are implemented and using your collective advocacy voice to influence executive decisions, particularly regarding how resources are allocated and policies are enforced, are important avenues for advocacy.

## THE LEGISLATIVE BRANCH: LAWMAKING & POLICY FORMULATION

The **Legislative Branch** is tasked with creating laws. This branch operates through committees and subcommittees that debate, amend, and ultimately decide which legislative initiatives progress.

This branch encompasses bodies such as Congress, state legislatures, city councils, and town boards.

Advocates, activists, and partners in change can have a powerful influence in this venue through engaging with legislators, providing testimony, and participating in hearings to influence policy at its inception.

Considerations to develop greater agility for navigating the Legislative Branch include studying the legislative calendar and key moments where legislators are open to hearing new ideas, such as public comment periods or committee meetings. Building strong, trust- and mutual respect-based relationships with legislative aides and, as possible, legislators themselves can provide powerful opportunities to influence policy before it is considered more broadly in the legislature.

## THE JUDICIAL BRANCH: LEGAL OVERSIGHT

The **Judicial Branch** of government evaluates laws to ensure they are in accordance with the constitution and established legal precedents at the local, state, and federal levels. This branch handles challenges to existing laws and determines the legality of new legislation. This branch is responsible for interpreting the law, resolving disputes under the law, and ensuring justice is administered.

Advocates, activists, and partners in change might engage with this branch by coming together to support or initiate litigation to challenge unjust laws, or by filing amicus briefs to inform the courts about the broader impacts of how relevant laws are interpreted.

Keeping abreast of relevant legal cases and court decisions that might impact your advocacy agenda is one consideration to strengthen your strategy to advocate in this venue. You might also consider partnering with legal organizations to challenge unjust laws or support interpretations that align with your interests and values.

## GRASPING TIMELINES & IMPACT AT EACH LEVEL

Policy processes at local and state levels generally progress far faster, and while the impact may represent a smaller geographic area, impacts at local levels are quite significant in terms of impacting our everyday lives.

Often overlooked, local governments shape many facets of daily life, from access to local green spaces, to sidewalks and roads that can be used by community members, to public safety considerations like how the police engage with the local area, to many aspects of school operations, and many more are within local government purview.

Even when policies are enacted at a federal level, states and localities often have a significant say in what those policies look like on the ground based upon local community context.

There are also some notable arenas outside of governmental entities that can have enormous influence in the political landscape, such as enhancing the collective consciousness or swaying broader conversations happening among the general populace toward topics aligned with your advocacy agenda.

Ultimately, effective advocacy demands a deep understanding of the context and dynamics at play at whatever level you are operating at in your advocacy work. Knowing your audience – what motivates them, their decision-making processes and patterns, as well as their network composition and their influence – enables your advocacy network to tailor strategies effectively.



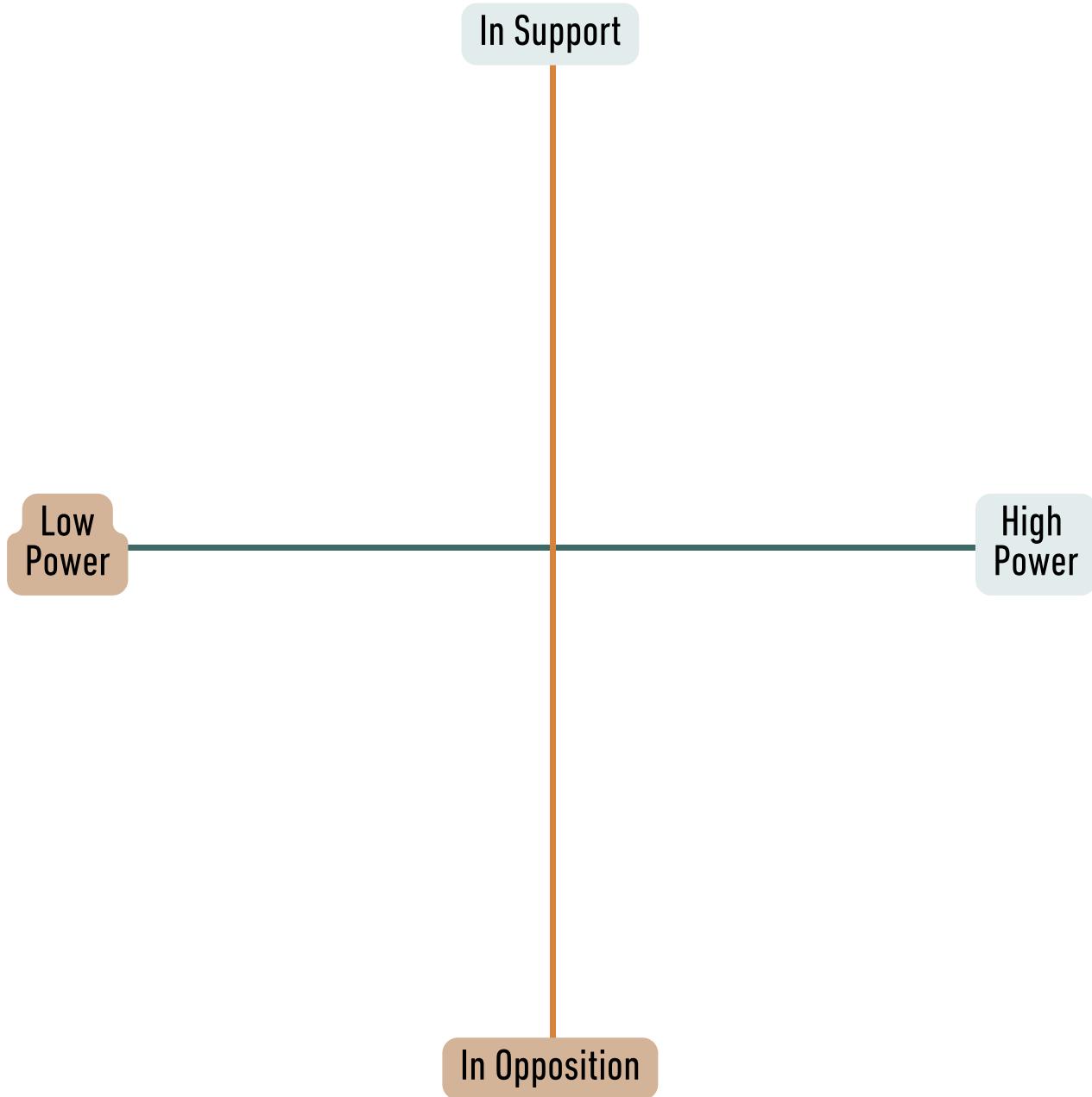
# IDENTIFYING POTENTIAL ADVOCACY TARGETS

Based on what has been discussed so far, what are you thinking makes sense for you in terms of identifying an advocacy target(s)? At a high level, what do you think is important to know related to that audience that might shape how you present your information to them? For further assistance thinking about this, an activity follows.

<b>Active Opponents</b>	<i>Those who agree with you and are committed to working alongside you toward the change.</i>	
<b>Passive Opponents</b>	<i>Those who show agreement, but haven't yet acted substantially in support of the change.</i>	
<b>Neutral</b>	<i>Those who are unengaged and demonstrate neither support nor opposition to the change.</i>	
<b>Passive Allies</b>	<i>Those who do not agree, but who do not actively try to stop the change.</i>	
<b>Active Allies</b>	<i>Those who are actively working in ways that undermine or oppose the desired change.</i>	

## IDENTIFYING POTENTIAL ADVOCACY TARGETS (continued)

Based on who was included in your analysis on the first page of the activity, plot possible advocacy targets on the matrix below.



# IDENTIFYING POTENTIAL ADVOCACY TARGETS (continued)

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This page invites you to complete reflective prompts as a way to land on a target audience using the information you identified on the last two pages of the activity. When responding, consider these factors: ALIGNMENT (support v/s opposition), POWER\*\* (low v/s high), and ENGAGEMENT (active v/s passive)

*Which factors are most important to your advocacy agenda? What are the reasons these factors matter most?*

*How will you make decisions on which audience(s) you target first? What will let you know this is the right decision?*

*What will be useful for you to pay attention to in engaging your target audience to identify Champions? (see module on Building and Sustaining Relationships with Policymakers for more information.)*

*In general, what is important to focus on when framing your message to reach your target audience?*

*What else do you think is important to consider?*

*\*\*See module on Building Power and Momentum to Advance Change for more info.*

# Know Your Audience

An all-encompassing question to consider once you have identified your target audience is: **what do they really need to hear to be moved to act?**

As you develop communication strategies and plans to engage others in advocacy work, it is important to familiarize yourself with who you are talking to. Some general considerations are below.

## DEEPENING RELATIONSHIPS WITH LEGISLATORS

Working closely with government officials (legislators, in particular) to develop a pathway to trauma-informed change can lead to better policy and more impactful outcomes. Their access to resources and policy levers is critical to effectively implement policy at scale.

Researching your target audience's interests and history often reveals trends and themes about what they prioritize and pay attention to that can be important to consider when seeking ways to deepen relationships to strengthen your advocacy work.

It is important to approach every elected official, ally, constituent, potential partner, and all others you interface with in this work by starting where they truly are at, not where you believe they ought to be or wish that they were. It is through accepting the full human in front of you and helping them build knowledge concerning the topics you most are hoping to get their support on.

Key considerations when moving toward building relationships with legislators:

- **Legislative History:** explore their voting history on issues similar (or opposite) to yours
- **Professional Background:** gain insights from their current and historical career and volunteer activities
- **Position on Issues:** understand their current stance on topics related to your advocacy agenda
- **Personal Motivations:** look beyond political survival mechanisms like money, power, and votes – what do they seem to care about?
- **Shared Goals:** find common ground and areas of alignment with their expressed legislative goals and public commitments

## TAILORING EVIDENCE TO AUDIENCE PREFERENCES

Different audience members will have different ideas about what counts as “good” evidence, which means it is important for advocates, activists, and partners in change to get a sense of what different audience members value, say, and do in order to better understand how to align messaging with their standards.

Learning and taking in new information is likely to be filtered through the lens of one’s deeply-held beliefs, and understanding your audience members’ values will help you shape your conversations around what matters most to them and craft more resonant messages.

## MOBILIZING PUBLIC VOICE & SUPPORT

In addition to the direct advocacy activities described above, engaging the general public can increase pressure on policymakers to take action.

Getting a sense of what the public believes and how your advocacy agenda is discussed may reveal areas to align your advocacy with prevailing trends or “hot topics” to grow support for your cause.

For instance, efforts to expand community-based positive parenting skill-building initiatives may not specifically mention that their policy agenda has the power to disrupt the intergenerational transmission of trauma, yet you can notice the alignment in common goals, building relationships around shared values while building on their understanding of the importance of infusing a trauma-informed perspective into the area they already care and are thinking about.

Some initial considerations for engaging the general public:

- **Dominant Discourse:** how is your advocacy agenda discussed publicly?
- **Shifts Needed:** what attitudes or behaviors need changing?
- **What is Trending:** which current trends in social media and our broader culture can you connect with to advance your advocacy agenda?
- **Those Most Impacted:** what do those who are most likely to be impacted by your advocacy agenda think about how you are conceptualizing the issue and presenting your solution?
- **Mind the Gaps:** what gaps in public knowledge can you bridge through education and awareness-raising to draw supporters to your cause?

By integrating these strategies and insights into your advocacy work, you are poised to navigate the complex advocacy and policy environments more effectively, ensuring that your efforts are aligned with your broader values and goals.

## SEEKING COMMON GROUND

Trauma-informed values and principles provide a framework for transformation that encourages a universal precaution for trauma, meaning that one aim is to ensure that everyone creating and administering policies is engaging in their work with a commitment to reducing re-traumatization based on an assumption that any person, group, community, or system may have experienced trauma.

This approach enhances the likelihood that advocacy efforts are received positively, setting a foundation for more inclusive and effective interactions.

Identifying common ground and points of potential allyship is particularly valuable in cases where you are seeking to sway key figures who are not already championing your advocacy agenda or similar initiatives.

Advocates, activists, and partners in change sometimes will choose not to engage with those who have expressed opposition, believing it might be a waste of time.

Yet, in addition to strengthening relationships with champions to advance to work forward, there is fertile ground to broaden and build upon the movement pushing your advocacy agenda forward by considering areas of alignment among those who might appear opposed along with those who may be more neutral and lacking of a strong expressed opinion on your target issue and solution.

It is important to avoid assuming the reasons for someone's disengagement or opposition. It may be that they are new to the concepts of trauma, resilience, and NEAR science and are not aware of the interconnectedness of trauma to some of our world's most seemingly intractable issues. They may not have a full understanding of what key concepts mean, or how they manifest in ways that are relevant to that person's convictions, values, and priorities.

A decision-maker may truly have a deep understanding of the issue and your solution and still stand diametrically opposed where you are coming from, yet you will not know whether someone is rigid in their thinking, committed to a different agenda, simply misinformed/under-informed, or hold other reasons that might be flexible until you actually ask them and have a conversation about it!

Opposition and ambivalence often wane once adversaries grasp the reasons behind addressing the issue.

Even if enthusiastic support does not emerge after significant efforts to highlight alignment and common goals embedded in your solution, you may still be able to assuage or accommodate key decision-makers in a way that will reduce their motivation or interest in actively opposing or blocking your advocacy agenda from progressing.

Even if you cannot generate consensus with advocacy targets who wish to remain neutral or who are totally opposed, at the very least, you will emerge from such conversations holding a clearer understanding of the basis of the opposition and can thus fashion a more robust rebuttal to arguments against your proposal and its implementation for future meetings with them or other advocacy targets.

We can make evidence-informed, persuasive arguments based on shared values, mutual goals, and other common ground to sway influential figures and entities that hold power so that they are willing to listen to and, ideally, respond positively to, our proposed solutions.

For this reason, it behooves advocates, activists, and partners in change to approach every conversation in good faith by maintaining a trauma-informed stance to understand how advocacy targets' lived experiences play a role in shaping their positions while holding the intention to find commonalities and windows for collaboration.

## SEEKING COMMON GROUND



### For those who express opposition:

- What are their reasons for opposing?
- What strategy might they adopt instead of yours?
- Where is the overlap/common ground?
  - How can you use this along with the evidence you gathered to present a compelling argument to adopt your solution?

### Talk to other advocates to inform your efforts:

- What do constituents want?
- How has this target responded to being challenged in the past? What worked?
- What else might they need to hear to be swayed?

### It is rare for a policy proposal to be adopted in to:

- Consider what concessions you are willing to make versus when you will hold firm

## BALANCING COMMITMENT TO VALUES & VISION WITH THE REALITIES OF THE POLICY PROCESS

Compromise is an inherent aspect of policy advocacy, with its many twists, turns, and competing interests and priorities. In truth, it is unlikely to see any policy solution or model legislation adopted *in toto*, or in its entirety as originally written without any amendments or concessions.

While it can feel disappointing to see many important provisions of a bill you support being stricken throughout the policy process such that a less robust version is enacted, it is important to celebrate any part of the victory, recognizing that this represents incremental progress toward change.

We also can work together in supportive, action-oriented ways to transform any disappointment we feel into fuel for motivation toward further action. After all, continuous opportunities to improve upon what has been enacted will surface given the ongoing nature of policy development as new needs emerge and evolve.

When thinking about compromise, particularly in a sociopolitical landscape where policies are stalled by infighting and partisanship in the halls of the places where key legislative decisions are made, as Wyoming Senator Mike Enzi once said, focusing on the 80% of issues and solutions where all parties agree, rather than rigid adherence to the 20% representing disagreement, can help facilitate progress.

In this vein, advocates, activists, and partners in change have the opportunity to join forces with key people who can broaden the impact of the work when they are willing to consider where compromise or concession makes sense in preparation for attending meetings and making their “asks.”

With all of the above in mind, it is important to acknowledge that there will be some bright lines that you will not cross for various reasons when it comes to compromise.

It is vital to recognize these areas, as over-compromising can lead to feelings of betrayal to one's deeply-held values, which can itself be traumatic and lead to moral injury or distress, experiences which are hazardous to the broader advocacy movement, as described later in this resource. It is up to each individual to determine where these lines lie and to set boundaries around any non-negotiables.

This approach both maximizes the potential to achieve meaningful outcomes and ensures that compromises made do not dilute your advocacy agenda too significantly. Approaching conversations considering that compromise will likely be a part of the conversation allows for navigating negotiations effectively, informing when you might make tactical retreats as well as where you may firmly hold your ground to ensure broader objectives are kept in sight.

Some ways that considering areas for compromise in the name of bigger-picture consensus-building to strengthen your overall advocacy agenda can be beneficial include:

- **Strategic negotiation:** being flexible enough to create space for others to join the movement yet steadfast in committing to holding hard lines as ethically and morally compelled to do so maximizes the effectiveness of your negotiations and allows opportunities to broaden your impact
- **Integrity and authenticity:** clear boundaries in compromise preserve the integrity of advocacy, ensuring alignment with core values while also conveying credibility and solidarity with those whose voices you represent in your advocacy efforts
- **Building transparent alliances:** clearly articulating boundaries upfront facilitates radically honest, respectful collaborations that are essential for maintaining productive, trust-based alliances – forming alliances based on a “trickle truth” or “bait and switch” approach where you fail to honestly represent your position upfront to get potential supporters in the door then shift the conversation is not a healthy foundation for relationships
- **Adaptability and resilience:** recognizing areas for compromise and already having a mindset of where flexibility is possible enables advocates, activists, and partners in change to more adeptly navigate changing political landscapes, retaining a connection to broader goals despite potential setbacks

It is also important for those leading advocacy networks to make space for the challenges of noticing how misaligned some people in power are, and for advocates, activists, and partners in change to feel safe expressing and discussing the difficulties of this work.

The “both/and” approach of naming feelings of disappointment or frustration with the realities of the policy process and recognizing that systemic and structural transformation are a long process where every small step in the right direction matters in shifting and solidifying a different status quo is often useful.

This also both allows advocates, activists, and partners in change to remain connected to their common humanity while also maintaining momentum anchored in realistic hope without veering into toxic positivity, which may re-traumatize folx through minimizing their lived experiences in the often-challenging work of advocacy.

## ANCHORING INFORMATION-SHARING IN WHAT MATTERS TO POLICYMAKERS

### **Knowledge is power!**

In advocacy, harnessing this power through sharing well-researched, thoughtfully synthesized information is vital to moving your work forward. How meaning of the research and information gathered is both made and conveyed will differ based on the advocacy targets' values and priorities.

Familiarity with what kind of evidence is most accepted and effective in different advocacy scenarios and with different audiences is important. Evidence that resonates most strongly will align with how a person, group, or entity defines problems and assesses the feasibility of solutions.

In terms of policy advocacy, this lens generally includes consideration for five key factors: equity, liberty, security, efficiency, and welfare/need. When engaging policymakers, it is important to find overlap between these interests and how you frame the issue and solution you are seeking to address with your advocacy agenda.

**Equity** seeks equality of outcomes. This means examining the status quo and noticing who is included and who is excluded, and comparing this with outcomes that your advocacy agenda seeks to bring to fruition.

When thinking through an equity lens, it is important to consider how key groups impacted by current policies and practices as well as by your advocacy solution are identified and categorized by your target audience. Economic need, historical and cultural identity factors, positionality, and many other dimensions may be worth considering in the interest of supporting equity, fairness, and justice.

For example, a proposed policy may aim to address disparities in educational outcomes among different socioeconomic groups. With equity in mind, that policy may involve targeted interventions like implementing and funding scholarship programs for BIPOC students or other students from marginalized or economically disadvantaged backgrounds, or in areas with historically-underfunded school districts.

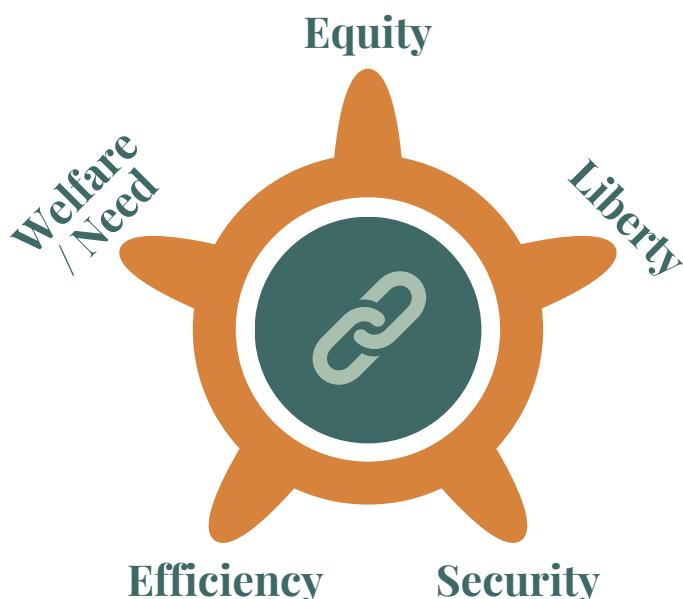
Another example may be a commitment to rectifying job market disparities by creating targeted employment programs that provide ongoing supports and services to veterans or to people with lived experience of trauma, ensuring equity concerning job opportunities.

**Liberty** examines a balancing of freedom from coercion and freedom from harm caused by others, along with conceptualizations of individual and public rights and responsibilities.

The concept of liberty often reflects a tension and push-pull between individual freedom and cultivating collective well-being through state-sanctioned supports and resources.

Examining concepts related to liberty also may involve confronting divergent perspectives on whose behavior we are seeking to change to reduce harm, and what populations are being harmed by prospective actions.

Examples of considerations regarding liberty include (but are not limited to) differing thoughts on mandating vaccinations, the role the state in safeguarding communities, freedom of speech versus regulations to prevent hate speech (with different conceptualizations of what constitutes hate speech), laws protecting data privacy for individuals while also considering national security or public health needs, and so forth, all of which reflect the complex interplay of liberty-related issues and concepts.



**Security** encompasses a holistic, comprehensive evaluation of risk that integrates both scientific measurements and experiential dimensions.

The dual approach of considering both quantitative and qualitative information aims to mitigate objective risks and also to address the root causes and underlying factors that contribute to a sense of insecurity among individuals, families, groups, communities, organizations, systems, and institutions.

Considering security involves a nuanced understanding of the factors contributing to real, tangible, and objective threats present in the environments in which we learn, play, connect, and grow, as well as where perceptions of threat lie. To the latter point: traumatic experiences can significantly shape views on safety, and being present to adaptive narratives that have helped people, groups, and communities survive may result in hypervigilance and hesitancy.

The debates within the framework of security extend beyond the tolerance of risk to encompass discussions on fostering environments that are conducive to healing, growth, holistic well-being, and the prevention of harm.

For example, consider a community initiative focused on addressing interpersonal violence. Policymakers may explore strategies to enhance the safety of community members, and thus may look at empirically-based risk factors associated with interpersonal violence, including social determinants of health and mental health, economic disparities, and historical patterns among various groups or communities.

Having said that, policymakers may also learn that trauma exposure can shape perceptions of threat and contribute to cycles of violence within communities, providing more recognition and consideration for people's lived experiences and perceptions of safety formed therethrough.

Debates around security within this context might be about investing in community-based mental health support, conflict resolution programs, restorative practices, and other opportunities that enhance the factors connected to interpersonal violence by data and research.

While some may propose these solutions that look outside of traditional justice system responses such as these, other policymakers and constituents might call for more stringent stances entailing harsher punishments like incarceration as they believe that this will better preserve public safety.

Another example through the security lens may include urban planning policies that prioritize safe public spaces with the intent to reduce violence and enhance community cohesion.

By designing parks, community centers, and other public spaces with security and safety in mind – considering aspects like visibility, access, opportunities for community participation in creation and maintenance, and so forth – policymakers can create spaces that encourage social interaction and community-building, thereby naturally reducing violence and crime rates while enhancing overall quality of life.

On the other hand, those with differing views of security may suggest higher investment in surveillance processes and enforcing punishment rather than in creating space for pride and participation in the community environment, believing that this is more likely to keep people safe and feeling more secure.

**Efficiency** involves using the least amount of resources to achieve the best possible outcomes.

Optimizing resource allocation helps maximize the impact of change processes, though it is important to realize that there are many different ways to define and distribute resources while balancing equity and efficiency.

For example, some might suggest that public sector jobs and social security payments represent a sunk cost to the state, while others would say it represents a social investment in our people. How the actual issue and efficiency are defined will differ from target audience to target audience.

When working with public funds, there will always be consideration for efficiency, and thus it is important for advocates, activists, and partners in change to explore and be attuned to the different perspectives on what “good” uses of resources entail across diverse groups of influencers, decision-makers, and people who are most impacted by what is being proposed.

As another example, consider how, when presented with a proposal for building a new transportation system to improve connectivity in a community, decision-makers may compare the efficiency of building a new subway system versus expanding existing bus services. This evaluation of efficiency may include considerations for concepts including money, time, labor, and the overall impact on the community.

Upon examination of these and other key factors, some might argue that the subway system represents a more efficient long-term investment in terms of capacity, access, and environmental impact, while others may contend that expanding bus services achieves the goal at a lower immediate cost, and thus ought to be prioritized.

**Welfare/Need** examines the intricate balance between providing immediate support and planning for sustainable, long-term solutions, all considered while remaining attuned to the potential impacts of short-term and long-term action on individual and collective well-being.

In practice, both immediate assistance as well as longer-term, preventative measures that shift systems and structures are interdependent components of comprehensive public policy. Factors to consider when looking toward this decision-maker motivator may include the material and symbolic value of goods, resources, and activities that contribute to community members' sense of value and belonging in society.

In the context of discussions on welfare and need, the dominant discourse often involves debates on "moral hazard," or the perceived effect of different entitlements or supports on individual motivation. It is important to note the many perspectives around this topic as they shape how policies are framed.

A real implication of this in the trauma-informed space is that understandable and adaptive responses to trauma are misconstrued as being personal deficits, attributed to psychological pathology, or labeled as personal moral failings and "poor choices."

Advocates, activists, and partners in change are wise to consider how they will anticipate and respond to narratives that might frame expansive support systems as potentially fostering dependency or perpetuating "bad behavior" that harms society-at-large. In communicating with policymakers, it is important to articulate how solutions being suggested are more than about the immediate alleviation of hardship, but instead are strategic, long-term investments in the health and stability of society.

One example is living wage policies, which can be presented as a means to enhance individual autonomy, dignity, and well-being. Ensuring that people earn enough to not just meet their basic needs, but to truly flourish and thrive actually reduces reliance on government assistance and promotes long-term economic self-sufficiency. By framing living wages not just as financial aid but as an investment in human capital, policymakers may shift rigidity around fair wages and social welfare costs.

Another example may examine food security programs, such as school meals for students from families that struggle with finances. Beyond fulfilling immediate nutritional needs, these programs have broader implications for students' academic performance, personal development, as well as their long-term health and well-being.

## CONVEYING CONVINCING INFORMATION

As you consider these five factors along other context-specific aspects of policymakers you seek to meet with, it is also important to recognize that they face a constant barrage of communication around a wide variety of issues.

Like any of us, policymakers may struggle to balance many competing demands associated with their jobs, and thus may have limited time and energy to review a great deal of empirical evidence or to interpret complicated issue analyses.

It is also important to remember that policymakers often do not have backgrounds that include much knowledge about the specialized and complex topics you may address in your advocacy efforts. Especially at the state and local levels of government, legislators may have full-time jobs outside of serving in their policy-making roles. This elevates the importance of ensuring your framing seeks to achieve shared language and understanding as well as conveys a sense of urgency.

To stay anchored in realistic expectations, it is vital advocates know upfront that, because of the massive quantity of issues with which policymakers are presented and expected to be responsive to without always having a lot of foundational knowledge in, they often use cognitive shortcuts many of us also use when presented with a lot of complex information at once.

Few people have the ability to process or memorize every bit of information presented to them, and so it is important to consider what it is you want your audience to take away from your interactions and to highlight that in ways that resonate and remain present in the minds of those you are targeting with your advocacy efforts.

To help support knowledge-building around your advocacy agenda, consider crafting your message with conciseness, relatability, and clarity in mind. Enhancing your message by including it alongside striking, accessible visual materials – especially ones that point to the legislator’s priorities – can support building a quick-yet-meaningful understanding of key issue points, your proposed solution, and hoped-for outcomes.

When meeting with policymakers, it is helpful to consider what leave-behinds you will bring. The term “leave-behinds” means exactly what it sounds like it means: printed materials or documents that advocates, activists, and partners in change leave behind for their advocacy audience to hold on to after a meeting or presentation.

These are excellent tools to summarize key points of your advocacy agenda, reinforce core messages, or provide additional information to aid in shaping legislators’ decision-making processes when related issues are submitted for their consideration.

Some methods of conveying key information that advocates have had success with include (but are not limited to) items such as:

- **Fact sheets:** ideal for succinct dissemination of key facts, complex data, and striking statistics to quickly educate policymakers or the public on critical topics related to your advocacy agenda
  - Fact sheets are versatile and effective in various settings, such as (but not limited to) meetings, events, as parts of an information packet, and also being digitally shared in virtual spaces such as social media or a website
- **Infographics:** excellent for illustrating complex information and data in a clear, engaging manner
  - Infographics are particularly effective to convey relationships, processes, or statistics that might otherwise be challenging to understand
  - Infographics are ideal for use in a variety of settings where their visual appeal can enhance engagement and understanding that you are speaking to in your accompanying message, including (but not limited to) reports, educational materials, on social media platforms, in presentations, in meetings, or on websites
- **Pamphlets or Brochures:** useful to outline critical figures, features, or benefits related to the topic of concern
  - These tools can be particularly effective in public engagement settings where quick and easy access to information is necessary
- **One-pagers:** an effective tool to provide a concise overview of the issue, proposed solutions, and key evidence, combining essential information into a single page
  - One-pagers are perfect for leaving with decision-makers, groups, and community members after meetings or discussions, providing a snapshot of key points and advocacy messages
- **Business Cards:** a tangible way to remind legislators or others in your audience of who you are and how you presented yourself in your meeting together versus “just” what you said
  - A universal tool! Beyond providing contact information, presenting a business card to any audience will provide a physical reminder of your interaction, supporting better recall of your advocacy efforts and messages
- **Policy briefs:** offer a deeper dive into your advocacy agenda for those who have expressed curiosity to learn more, yet are still relatively short and digestible
  - A policy brief is a short document that distills and summarizes an issue, presents an overview of policy options to address that issue, and recommends the best option to act on based on key evidence
  - Policy briefs can be critical in formal settings where decision-makers need clear, actionable information to help guide policy decisions

- **White papers:** strong tool for providing comprehensive information concerning the full scope and spectrum of your advocacy agenda
  - A white paper is a concise report that provides information about an issue or an authoritative report that talks about a specific proposal.
  - White papers are suitable for situations where a detailed exploration of your advocacy agenda seems appropriate or is invited
  - A white paper usually contains proposals for a specific policy or talks about an issue in detail, like data related to the social, economic, and health impact and feasibility of a particular prioritized policy
  - Because they tend to be lengthier than many other ways of conveying information, white papers are best reserved for your more established relationships and have already been deemed a trusted messenger rather than early in the relationship

Each of these tools can be useful to meet needs and reach audiences across the life of the advocacy process, from initial consciousness-raising to deep engagement with detailed policy proposals.

By choosing a tool that fits the context and audience, you can ensure that your messages are not only heard but also acted upon, driving meaningful change in shaping the public policy conversation around your target issue.





## Reflection Point

In what ways can you distill the core message of your advocacy down to its essence in a way that is understandable to someone unfamiliar with the topic while still conveying enough nuance concerning the depth and urgency of the issue?

What specific types of materials, resources, and tools might you use to convey your messages? How might you tailor these materials to different segments of your audience to maximize your impact in generating foundational understanding and inspiring action?

Reflect on a time you successfully communicated a complex idea to an uninformed audience. What strategies and skills did you employ that helped you build understanding that could be applied to your current advocacy efforts?

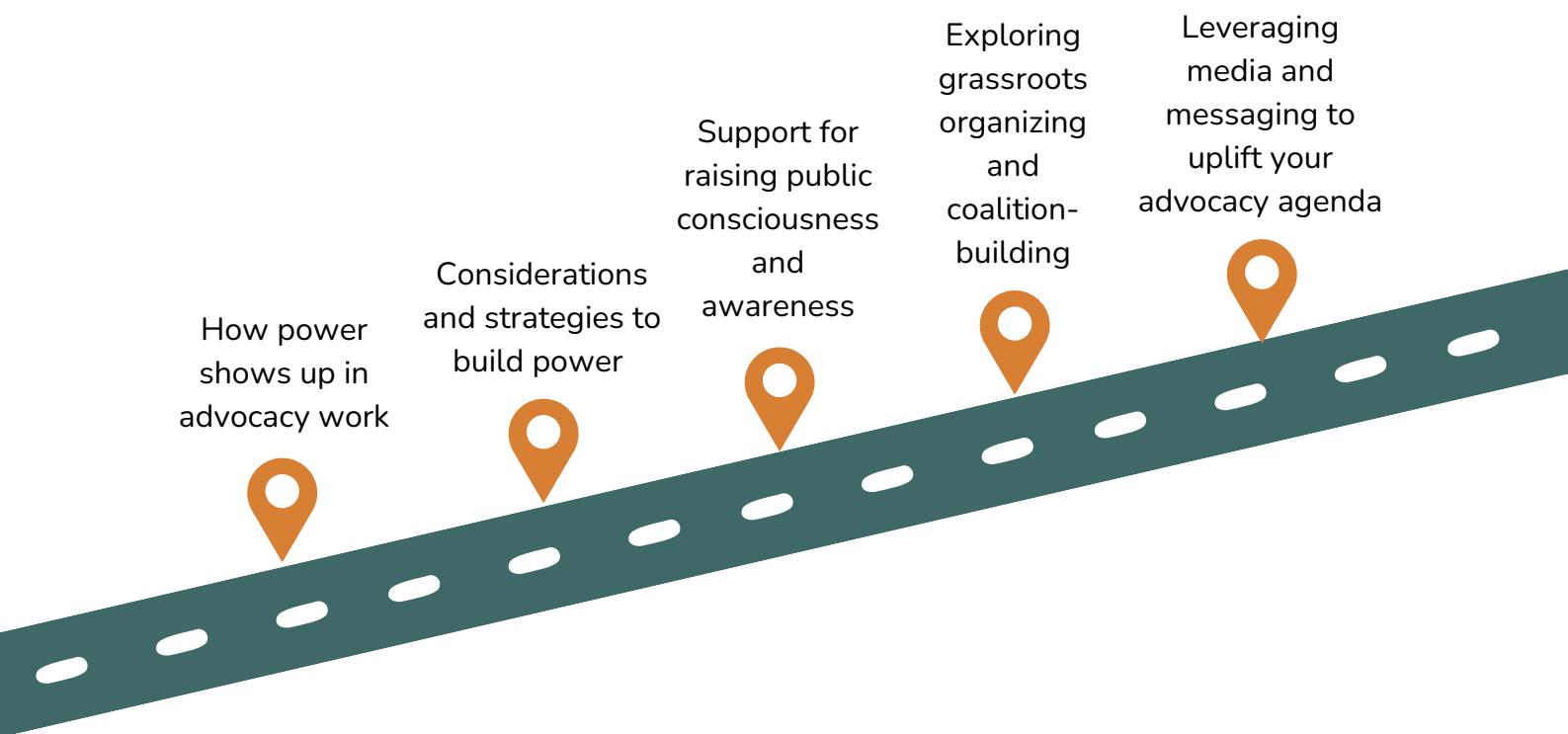
# Chapter 5: Building Power & Momentum to Advance Trauma-Informed Change

Resources, PowerPoint, Video, Reflection Questions, and More!



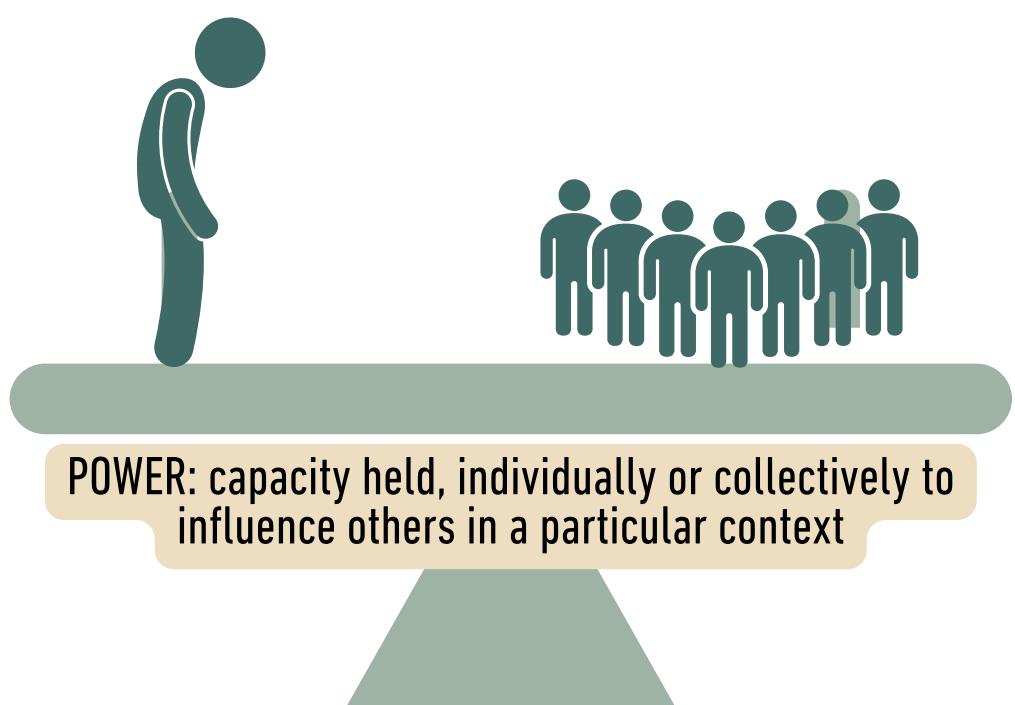
*Power concedes nothing without demand. It never has, and it never will.*  
- Frederick Douglass

# What You Can Expect in This Chapter



## WHAT IS POWER?

**Power** in advocacy refers to the capacity held, individually or collectively, to influence others in a particular context.



The way power is conceptualized and held can vary based on context. That is: power is rather than static, influenced by a variety of factors. Dimensions of power that are often useful to consider among advocates, activists, and partners in change include:

- **Visible Power:** explicit and overtly exercised through actions that are easily observed and openly acknowledged
  - Example: the President delivers a public speech and follows it with the signing of an Executive Order, clearly and visibly demonstrating their authoritative role and influence within the governmental structure
- **Invisible Power:** this type of power is not acknowledged or formally recognized, with influence operating unconsciously through broader norms, ideologies, collective beliefs, and values in society that subtly shift people's worldview and behaviors without their conscious awareness
  - Example: bias and discrimination in recruitment and promotion processes favor certain traits over others, often subconsciously, shaping career trajectories and maintaining inequities in various industries
- **Hidden Power:** hidden power functions covertly, often subtly influencing outcomes without the mechanisms of control or influence being immediately apparent as actors with hidden power operate outside of official positions of authority
  - This type of power is often intentionally concealed and may involve manipulation or control of communication and information to shape decisions without being openly acknowledged as an influence
  - Example: a group of influential donors and powerful alumni in a university setting sway administrative decisions through private meetings and funding leverage, thereby indirectly shaping the institution's policies, priorities, and operations
- **Closed Power:** often concentrated among a select few, closed power restricts decision-making processes to a select centralized group, thus limiting access to power and participation for others
  - Example: a company confines decision-making power to a small group of executives who operate behind closed doors, excluding the voices of others in key decision-making processes
- **Invited Power:** a more inclusive dimension, invited power opens up decision-making processes to a broader array of voices, actively seeking input from a diverse audience, including community members and those most impacted by the target issue, thus ensuring a variety of perspectives are considered
  - Example: a local government forms a community advisory board that includes residents reflecting the diversity of the whole community to contribute their perspectives in local planning and policy formulation

- **Created Power:** involves establishing new platforms or opportunities for influence that did not previously exist, often by those outside of more traditional circles of power
  - Example: a grassroots advocacy organization launches a social media campaign that goes viral worldwide, enabling them to set the international agenda on a specific social issue by influencing public opinion and policy discussions around the advocacy agenda

Each dimensions of power explored above affirm that power is not possessed in isolation; rather, power is exercised in relation to others and through the frameworks of societal structures and ideological assumptions.

The benefits of possessing power are many in the policy space, manifesting in a variety of ways such as through differential access to resources and structural barriers being imposed or maintained.

Understanding power dynamics in trauma-informed advocacy, where the complexity and interconnectedness of the issues and solutions explored require navigating ambiguous and complex power structures to effect meaningful change. There is no doubt that power plays a role in shaping the dominant discourse. Embedding trauma-informed values in our advocacy work ensures that those in positions of power use their influence

There is no doubt that various types of power contribute to the ways policy problems are framed in the dominant discourse. Embedding trauma-informed values in our advocacy work can help us ensure that those in power have a holistic understanding of issues and that they use their influence thoughtfully and do not perpetuate harm through their actions, decisions, or rhetoric.





## Reflection Point

What sources of power do you have access to or possess as an individual?

How about as a professional (if you are currently working or have picked up wisdom somewhere along your career path or professional experiences)?

What power do you have (or do you NOT have) as a member of any groups to which you belong, whether formal organized groups, identity-based groups, experience-based groups, interest groups, or any other group you feel connected to.

*Tool for further reflection: for support in applying this information to your target audience, The Power Cube Worksheet from Campaign Bootcamp serves as a useful activity for determining what power they hold and to whom they may be connected to inform your own efforts.*

# The Friction of Policy Change: Power Dynamics in Policy

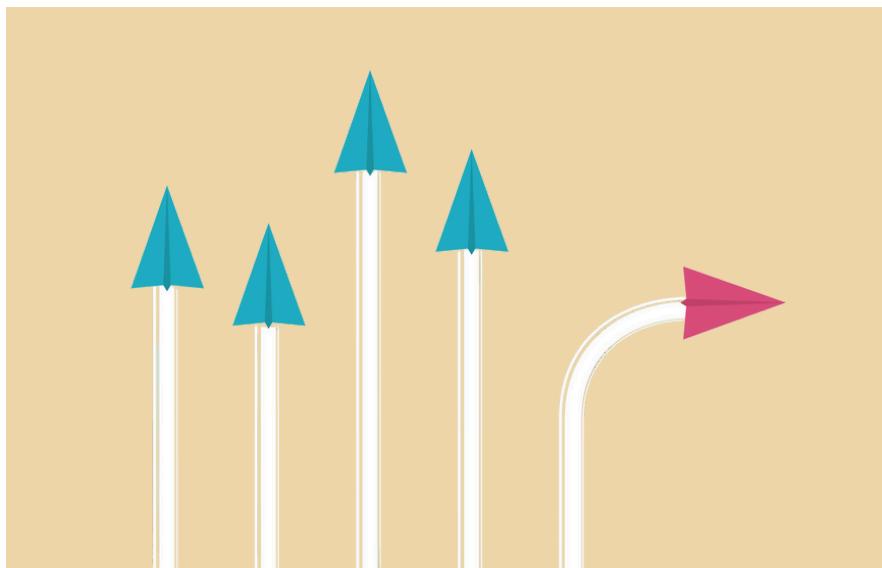
Policy advocacy almost always encounters some level of ambivalence – and maybe even resistance – because it disrupts the status quo. Existing systems, even those demonstrably functioning in a way that is harmful, tend to remain in **homeostasis**, clinging to a stable, familiar state and resisting any deviation from its established culture and context.

The reluctance of those who hold power to embrace change can be understood through a trauma-informed lens. These people and groups may perceive any change as a loss of control, or a disruption to their own well-being or established way of life.

This reflects a scarcity mindset that underpins many societal dynamics and promotes competition, and can hinder the adoption of policies that seek to support collective well-being.

A shift toward an abundance mindset – anchored in the belief that there are enough resources and opportunities for everyone to flourish and thrive – takes time, energy, and work when your advocacy audience has normalized and adhered to belief systems grounded in individualism and deficit. This means that it is not uncommon for decision-makers and people in positions of power to interpret supporting doing things differently as risky, echoing the sentiment: “When you’re accustomed to privilege, equality feels like oppression.”

We know that power is not distributed equally, and that those with power generally have greater access to other resources than those with less power, tilting the playing field in their favor. The pursuit of equity and justice inevitably will confront power-based conflict and imbalances. Advocacy accordingly necessitates a nuanced understanding of power dynamics, including how to identify where power resides and strategizing its application in support of your advocacy agenda.



The tendency of the status quo to remain stable also indicates that advocates, activists, and other partners in change may find themselves in some uncomfortable spots finding ways to strategically apply pressure to move change forward.

Consider your advocacy agenda as an airplane. We – the broader trauma-informed change movement joined together – act as the wind, pushing forward the adoption of transformation. This journey will encounter turbulence, particularly in the resistance from others whose momentum moves them in opposite directions.

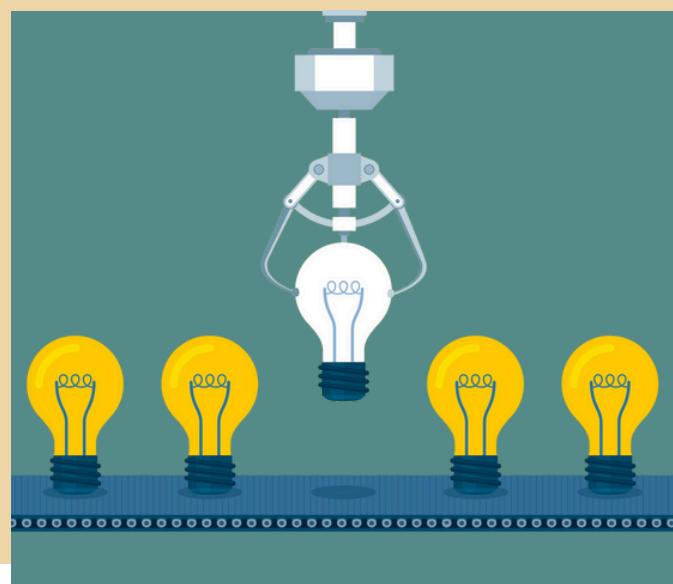
Allyship can help increase influence and power, bringing all travelers into alignment and increasing collective lift and pull toward a shared destination. Identifying with whom to ally yourself to strengthen momentum toward the change you want to see happen can be a key piece of the puzzle, which means it is important to know about the sources of power at play.

## POWER & COMPETING DEMANDS

The policy process is heavily influenced by those who wield power, who shape the discourse around human needs, what is prioritized, and the necessary policy responses.

Some power-based factors demonstrated to shape the conversation include:

- **Authority/position (formal or informal):** people who hold formal positions of authority (e.g., government officials, leaders of influential organizations, etc.) wield significant power, as do informal leaders, who may not hold official titles yet are respected and followed by communities or groups
- **Money:** financial clout is a potent enabler – those who can fund campaigns, lobbying efforts, and public relations activities often have a louder voice in the policy space
- **Personal characteristics (e.g., charisma, empathy, etc.):** certain qualities people embody and express make them persuasive and influential; those who connect with people on a human level can inspire action and often come with a network of supporters and followers of their own
- **Social identities (e.g., racial identity, able-bodiedness, gender expression, etc.):** identity factors significantly influence power dynamics, including how voices are heard
- **Political influence:** the political landscape, party affiliation, alignment with or opposition to current political leaders, and the ability to mobilize or de-mobilize action to suit their own agenda all play a role in determining power



- **Nature of role (appointed vs. elected):** appointed officials may be less susceptible to public scrutiny since they do not face direct accountability with a voter base, allowing them to potentially remain rigid around unpopular stands, whereas elected officials are more directly accountable to their constituents, bringing a greater sensitivity with them to considering the needs and opinions of voters, who has donated to their campaign, and other such factors when considering power dynamics
- **Trends and the broader sociopolitical landscape:** the prevailing social and political climate shapes the policy landscape, with trends as well as media and social media narratives influencing policymaker priorities and responses
- **Available and emerging information and knowledge:** those who possess comprehensive, timely information or who can generate new knowledge through research have the upper hand in shaping policy debates, making access to and control over information a significant power lever

The reality is that nearly any endeavor in transformative policy change will likely run into well-funded opposition from those who hold great power and have entrenched interests in keeping things the same. Their history of campaign contributions and powerful lobbying efforts grant them significant influence over the process.

Importantly, power also stems from one more noteworthy source: collective action. There is strength and power in numbers. When we join together toward a common goal, our voices are amplified, creating a force for change.

By cultivating partnerships that grow our collective power and influence, as enriched by the diverse voices and perspectives represented within, we increase the likelihood that our vision for the future becomes a reality.

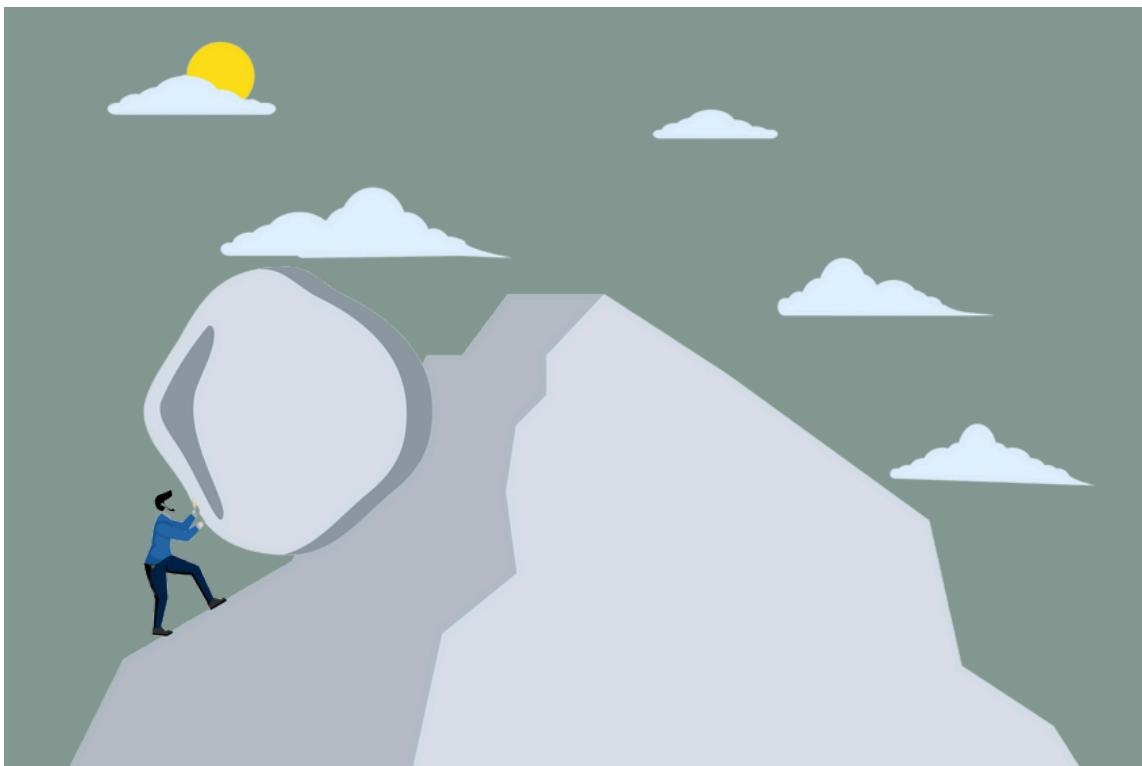
## INCREASING POWER

CTIPP's approach to advocacy is grounded in an empowerment model, bringing together diverse people and groups working toward a shared vision to achieve even more far-reaching and robust results.

Creating significant, sweeping change generally takes a lot of time, commitment, and effort. You may feel like Sisyphus as depicted below at first—like you are pushing this boulder uphill alone, facing backsliding along the way at times.

Yet, recognizing strategies to bolster your own power and influence can transform this struggle into one where there are others who share the weight of the boulder. In addition to persistence and patience, relationship-building both for power and morale purposes is often cited by advocates, activists, and partners in change as being critical cornerstones of sustaining the work.

It is through building and nurturing relationships and knowledge that momentum toward change can be strengthened and mobilized.



## Mobilizing & Uniting Advocacy Allies

There are several considerations when helping mobilize citizens of the world around shared visions and goals for the future.

### MAKE PARTICIPATION SIMPLE & PROVIDE TOOLS, WHERE POSSIBLE

It is important that participation is uncomplicated and supported by readily available tools. With many acts of advocacy being volunteer activities, people are often stretched thin and thus not everyone will have the time, energy, and resources to do their own in-depth research, construct talking points, participate in trainings or meetings, and other activities that directly support advocacy efforts.

People and groups that have the capacity and resources to help make participation in advocacy efforts easy can help ensure that all have access to meaningful participation and feel included in the advocacy network.

Providing templates and sample language for correspondence, making call scripts to legislators

available, creating guides and toolkits that clearly outline key facts and figures about the issue and solution, providing pre-designed social media messages with tags relevant to your advocacy agenda for easy sharing, and other activities that are easily accessed and completed can help advocates reach and engage new networks.



This also helps people make choices about where they are able to (and want to) contribute, creating opportunities for people to support and advance the cause without needing to make significant sacrifices or feeling pressure to go “all-in.” All efforts and levels of participation matter.

After all, without space for different avenues and levels of participation to be employed, many people who want to be a part of things would be excluded as they simply would not be able to exert a great deal of time and energy, thus meaning they would take NO action rather than contributing to the power and momentum of the collective in ways that fit for them. Instead of excluding, find ways to make inroads to engagement and participation accessible and easy to use.

## CONSIDER THE ACCESSIBILITY OF YOUR MESSAGING

Especially when your target audience is as broad as “the general public”, it is wise to avoid using too much jargon or verbiage that isn’t approachable. The average American reads around a 7th grade level, and it is important to consider factors such as this when ensuring accessibility of materials you use to convey information to facilitate participation.

Depending on what issue and solution you are uplifting, as well as what audiences you are working to bring into the conversation, it also is important to consider inclusivity in terms of languages your materials are produced in.

You can have the most beautiful, well-thought out education and advocacy materials in the field, yet if people who ought to be seated at the table are not able to access or make meaning of them, or do not feel as if these materials have been produced with them in mind, you may lose important voices and perspectives to build out your advocacy network.

## ELICIT FEEDBACK

Actively seeking and intentionally integrating feedback from those on the front lines of advocacy and from those directly affected by policy changes ensures that an advocacy strategy remains effective and grounded in what is really needed to promote sustainable, meaningful change.

This not only helps you identify additional targets to shape messaging for, but also can reveal what might be missing or still needed to increase your impact among your target audience. This on-the-ground wisdom allows for the identification of overlooked areas and unintended consequences, providing guidance to adjust the advocacy activities underway for greater alignment and efficacy.

## LOOK INWARD

Understanding the composition of the broader movement toward change can help reveal gaps concerning who is (and is not) engaged and participating. Embracing transparency by inviting optional, voluntary disclosure of demographic information (where it makes sense and is appropriate) can serve as a potent tool for accountability. This process ensures those who are disproportionately impacted by trauma and adversity are not excluded as they often are in the dominant societal paradigms, paving the way for a sense of belonging and inclusion within your advocacy network.

It is important that leadership diversity (both in terms of formal and informal leadership roles) mirrors the diversity of the groups and communities who are most impacted by the existing circumstances related to the issue as well as by the advocacy work being done. This reflection can become an indicator of the movement's integrity and effectiveness when it comes to monitoring and evaluating progress.



The process of assessing the demographic makeup within the movement for change you are a part of is most effective when conducted gently and nonjudgmentally, with a good faith intent to bring greater diversity and representation to the work.

Discovering a lack of diversity within your advocacy efforts, for instance, can serve as a catalyst for introspection, as well as an opportunity to delve into and develop strategies to more robustly support an environment of inclusivity, pave pathways for broad equitable participation, champion accessibility, embody belonging, and pursue justice.

Trust is earned rather than given or assumed, meaning it is on each of us to support and contribute to an advocacy culture through transparent, clear actions and reliable follow-through such that context and conditions for trust for all who wish to be involved are present. The culture of our advocacy spaces themselves have the opportunity to model the model of being trauma-informed, offering the warmth of belonging and the assurance that each voice will be heard and valued.

## SEEK SYNERGY THROUGH COLLABORATION

The power of collaboration is undeniable; working together gets more accomplished than people working alone. Knowing the unique strengths and capacities of those advocates, activists, and partners in change we are working alongside to advance change can be critical in growing your movement's power.

While it is easy to get caught up in the work, taking intentional pause and orienting toward the change process itself can help reveal gifts and wisdom essential to advance and amplify the efficacy of the movement. Some key skills and strengths in this work to seek out include strategic planning, effective organizing, the ability to forge and sustain connections, energizing and motivating groups, and fair and thoughtful task delegation, among many other talents and skills that contribute mightily to advocacy efforts.

It is equally important to recognize the web of connections and power dynamics within your own structures. Knowing who within your network has certain types of power and influence to help you bridge gaps and reach new audiences who may otherwise seem out of reach.

Finally, it is wise to pursue potential opportunities to collaborate without getting overly caught up on potential barriers based on assumed ideology or political affiliation. Consider entering every interaction with every individual or group with good faith and the intent to find common ground and collaborate.

Take care to enact the values of dignity and respect for all people, including those who you believe to hold opposite views from you. Unlikely partners joining together to advocate for policy change can help shift attitudes and norms in circles you may not otherwise have reached, and you can leverage one another's reach and influence to enhance the credibility of your transformational plans for change among diverse groups.

Through these collaborative processes, the likelihood for policy and systems change increases significantly, yet, if we rule people out too quickly based upon our own assumptions and biases, we miss out on these rich opportunities to grow and build resiliency.

Embracing this approach fosters a robust resilience within the movement, primed to adapt and flourish amidst the complexities of change – a reminder that the health of the systems we work within as advocates, activists, and partners in change is an important factor that impacts the work that is truly possible!

People who feel well-supported and connected in the advocacy ecosystem will have more capacity to show up and themselves embody the principles of a trauma-informed approach in their work, which, in turn, creates more space for trauma-informed policy to move forward and more trauma-informed caring to occur in and cascade through the power of community.

## CELEBRATE SUCCESS!

The act of celebrating successes – both short- and long-term, as well as big and small – is a reinforcing loop uplifting collective efforts and impacts.

Our brains inherently light up when we know that our time and energy are being invested in endeavors that are making a real impact and difference in the world. By publicly sharing updates, acknowledging the hard work of the collective, lifting up values- and vision-aligned successes, acknowledging developmental milestones in the life of the advocacy network, and honoring above-and-beyond contributions all are actions, among many others, that play a large role in sustaining morale and momentum toward change.

As humans, we also value spending our time and pouring our energy into effective and successful actions where we are recognized for our contributions. The culture you cultivate itself can be a draw or a deterrent to potential partners, who may envision themselves being recognized for contributing to further triumphs in the future.

Accordingly, the act of sharing what is going well with the public, such as by commending efforts and giving positive acknowledgments to major accomplishments on your social media channels, may itself be a compelling engagement factor for drawing in new potential supporters and growing power (in addition to being generally good practice to sustain internal morale and momentum).

# The Power of Public Awareness

Informing the populace of a public concern is often serves as the spark that ignites change in how systems and institutions respond to that concern.

Power operates at the cultural level through shared beliefs, values, and norms that its members share. Consequently, the public's voice often plays an important role in gaining institutional attention to support wide-scale change. An integral aspect of advocacy is to raise consciousness and continuously engage beyond existing networks where you already have a foothold to grow the movement.

Recent years have provided powerful examples of this phenomenon. As collective opinions and culture shifted in taking more notice of and responding to injustice that no longer felt tenable to the, individual and broader societal shifts have occurred. These shifts inform policies.

Generating political, human, and social capital through forging relationships built on trust, consistently demonstrating good will, and advocating to advance social justice and equity through policy implementation and advocacy with unwavering commitment. This is likely to attract new voices to broaden the reach of your work, who may be surprising or vital contributors to the conversation.

To ensure your message truly resonates with the public and community members you are targeting with your efforts, it is important to meet them where they are actually at, as opposed to where you *wish* they were, or where you *think* they *ought* to be.

Utilizing multiple platforms to reach people with your advocacy pitch is important, and some ideas for where it might be useful for you to direct your efforts are listed below.

### Some potential venues



- Town hall meetings
- Community meetings
- Individual conversations
- Tabling/handing out fliers
- Presentations/events/panels
- Posters in community spaces
- Hold a rally or community event

There is some guidance on creating a coherent advocacy narrative through a specific storytelling framework to support advocacy in different venues later in this book. This will take a much deeper dive in constructing and framing your personal story to make an advocacy impact.

For now, though, the following brief activities are intended to support you as you begin to think generally about messaging that might fit for you on different platforms and with different audiences.

## ACTIVITY: Creating Potent Messaging for Various Venues

Navigating the landscape of advocacy requires a readiness to seize any and all opportunities for engagement that arise, many of which surface unexpectedly outside of formal, pre-arranged meetings. You never know when you may run into an opportunity to share your work with someone who can further fortify it! These informal encounters often present valuable chances to articulate and advance your advocacy agenda to potential allies.

To effectively leverage these unforeseen opportunities, crafting a "go-to" persuasive statement can be beneficial. This statement is most impactful when it is concise yet compelling, and when it is designed to quickly communicate the key messages and calls to action to those you wish to engage.

Having this prepared statement at the ready increases the likelihood that you will feel capable and confident to seize these fleeting and informal opportunities to clearly convey and call on others to support your mission and vision.

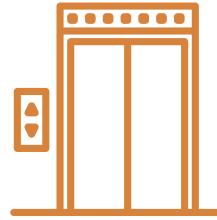
The following activities are designed to help you practice thinking about and preparing for capitalizing on any and all opportunities to grow the movement that emerge in your world. The exercises aim to refine your messaging skills, ensuring you are always ready to make a compelling case for your cause, regardless of the setting or audience.

It is our best hope that, by engaging with these activities, you feel equipped with the tools that will help you transform any chance meeting into a productive and powerful opportunity to connect with others and build power toward change.



# ACTIVITY: CREATING A POLICY ADVOCACY ELEVATOR SPEECH

It is tough to anticipate when you might encounter a member of your target audience outside of formal meetings. It can be helpful to think about a “go-to” persuasive statement to deliver so that you feel more confident and prepared to have meaningful conversations to advocate for your cause.



## Instructions

Imagine you are running into a member/members of your target audience while waiting to board an elevator. In 2 minutes or less, how would you tell your story?

- Identify an issue you care about and a policy solution you believe will remedy the issue.
- Examine the general policy landscape pertaining to your issue.
  - Notice whether there are any bills related to your issue—either aligned with or in opposition to your policy solution—that are already being considered.
- Find out where your target audience member stands on your issue/policy agenda.
- Construct your elevator speech
- Practice delivering your elevator speech either by recording yourself on your mobile device/tablet/computer or to
- Reflect
  - What do you notice about the experience of practicing/sharing your speech?
  - What else might you need to consider when it comes to delivering your speech?
  - How might you extract a “go-to” core elevator speech that you can work from to make changes as needed based on your target audience?

## Tips & Resources

- Consider using the "Public Narrative Planning Sheet" to maximize impact and effectiveness.
- Be sure to curate your elevator speech in a way that aligns with the motivations and values your target audience holds.

## REFLECTION: CREATING A POLICY ADVOCACY ELEVATOR SPEECH

- Your elevator speech can compel whatever action you choose—you likely won’t get commitment unless you directly ask! Some possible “asks” for your target audience:
  - Vote “yes” or “no” on an existing bill
  - Co-sponsor a colleague’s bill
  - Develop and sponsor a new bill
  - Write a Dear Colleague’s letter
  - Hold a hearing, briefing, community meeting, or other special events
  - Review a fact sheet, look at an infographic, etc. about your issue/policy solution

# ACTIVITY: COCKTAIL PARTY SPIEL

Chances to advocate for and advance your cause to your target audience can show up unexpectedly at any time, anywhere!

This activity aims to help you think about how you might be able to integrate your topic into discussions about other subjects to help you feel more confident and prepared to seize opportunities to grow the movement as they arise.



## Steps to Develop

1. Imagine that you are at a cocktail party and you notice a member/members of your target audience across the room.
2. When you approach the group, you notice they are already engaged in an active conversation about something completely unrelated to your issue topic. You are invited to take a moment to pause to select a random topic, to begin this activity. (E.G., Common “small talk” topics you might choose include: news/current events; popular media like shows/movies/podcasts; family; sports; travel; experiences with activities like concerts, local attractions, or events; neighborhood and community happenings; professional interests and responsibilities; etc.).
3. How might you join the conversation and engage your target audiences by steering the discussion to your issue in 2 minutes or less?

## Considerations

- How might you appeal to your target audience’s motivations and values to create a segue to engage them around your issue?
- What topics might make this a simpler task? Which topics are more challenging?
  - We invite you to get creative even if some of the topic pathways might feel a bit silly. The more ways you think about how you can shift gears and think toward the topic you advocate for in advance, the more likely you are to have a meaningful and impactful conversation during these encounters!

# REFLECTIONS: COCKTAIL PARTY SPIEL

# Amplifying Impact Through Collaboration & Coordination

Collaboration is a cornerstone of effective trauma-informed advocacy, and in the struggle for systemic and structural change, solidarity is one of our most potent tools. To reiterate: partnering with others builds the collective power to accomplish and drive more change than what any one person or group could achieve on their own.

United, we can leverage our resources and raise our voices to cultivate a consistent message that policymakers and the public cannot ignore. When we pool resources and co-construct a powerful message to amplify and uplift across the full advocate network, it becomes clear to both policymakers and the public at large that there is strong consensus around what helps and what hurts among those who are deeply engaged with the work related to our vision for the future.

Policymakers like consensus, especially when it spans perceived sociopolitical divides and disconnection, because broad consensus offers assurance that they are receiving credible and complete information, which builds their confidence to act in meaningful ways.

Consider the following as an illustrative example of how coalescing around a common message and collectively lifting that message to increase the likelihood that policymakers will feel compelled to act in response to your advocacy network's powerful push: you, a local pediatrician, a foster parent, a school guidance counselor, the leadership team of a community-based service provider, and a group of people from the community who have created a local mutual aid group all join forces following a town hall meeting where you have all shared similar ideas, comments, and concerns about the town's plan to use flexible grant funding the community received used to improve local conditions of safety.

Together, each person/group writes to their local, state, and federal representatives, presenting a unified vision for moving forward. The diversity of voices all delivering a consistent message lends credibility to your plans for change and turns up the volume of your demands, making them tougher to ignore.

## Grassroots Organizing

There are methods of organizing that tap into broader awareness and grow the power and influence of your advocacy agenda. While there are other methods to consider, this resource will explore grassroots and grasstops organizing as well as coalition-building, which are useful methods to harness the power of collective action to achieve systemic and institutional transformation.

These methods of organizing help tap into a vast network of advocates, activists, and partners in change, which is often essential to shifting the needle of public opinion as well as to getting legislation passed and enacted.



**Grassroots organizing** involves becoming skilled in the art of building momentum from the ground up. This approach invites citizens of the world to join together and collaborate to amplify collective voice and shape change.

One aspect of grassroots organizing that aligns with a trauma-informed approach is its emphasis on civilians (versus professionals in formal positions of power) defining their own goals as well as the strategies for achieving them. Grassroots organizing builds power by harnessing the ideas, energy, and wisdom from diverse lived experiences of those directly impacted, along with others who are directly invested in the advocacy agenda.

Another advantage of grassroots organizing's active engagement of such a broad swath of voices speaking to shared values and vision is that the solutions devised are more sustainable and effective than those made in echo chambers filled with those who are not directly or personally connected to the issue.

Grassroots groups generally are started from scratch, organically emerging as individuals and/or groups who are driven to address specific challenges and support the implementation of specific solutions self-organize.

If there is not already a relevant grassroots group advancing your advocacy agenda in your community that you may join, you have the opportunity to be the one to catalyze collective support by starting the process of building your own grassroots movement!

The driving force behind creating and mobilizing a grassroots base is to create a rapid, far-reaching groundswell that effectively spreads your advocacy agenda to a broad audience. Planting an initial seed of awareness itself may germinate such that, as people build knowledge around the issue and solution, new folx join as active advocates in their own right.

To demonstrate how this might work, for example: imagine a federal bill being considered in Congress allocating funding for trauma-informed approaches to community capacity-building across the country.

Your grassroots organization may strategize ways to garner co-sponsors in support of this bill. In this case, you might launch an action alert out to your network to encourage members to ask their representatives to join efforts in support of the bill.

As those who were already on the action alert list engage their own legislators and uplift the work of the grassroots group in their personal lives, in professional settings, on social media, and so forth, others in their spheres of influence may then themselves join in action toward advancing change and sign up themselves for future action alerts, with this virtuous cycle potentially cascading through communities worldwide to grow your collective voice.

The wider your grassroots network's reach, encompassing diverse regions and ideologies, the more compelling and influential your advocacy.

Big issues call for big action and a “big tent” approach. The more diverse your grassroots group, the more inclusive your solutions, and the more expansive your reach!

Grassroots groups thrive on this diversity, as group members bring a wealth of different histories, lived experiences, values, and perspectives that, when engaged in alignment with a trauma-informed approach, have the power to drive the work forward, increasing attunement and responsibility to the many dimensions of the complex, interconnected issues that we seek to address across sectors, systems, and state lines.

To this point: **grassroots advocates** come in all shapes and sizes, and can be anyone who will take action to address challenges and advance solutions that they are directly affected by or deeply concerned about.

This includes actions like donating to your cause, joining your network, signing up for and responding to your action alerts, or volunteering their time in support of group operations.

Each of these roles, no matter how small, is an important aspect of amplifying collective voice and growing power.



# Levels of Grassroots Engagement

In grassroots organizing, engagement tends to vary widely among participants, reflecting the natural and understandable inclination for different people to engage different levels of involvement and commitment based on what fits for them.

Having a general sense of the levels of engagement commonly seen in grassroots organizing helps inform the overarching strategy to tap into the full power and potential of the group to further advance your advocacy agenda.

The below image provides a look at how different levels of engagement might show up in grassroots advocacy work, including some (but not all) examples of what action at each level might look like.

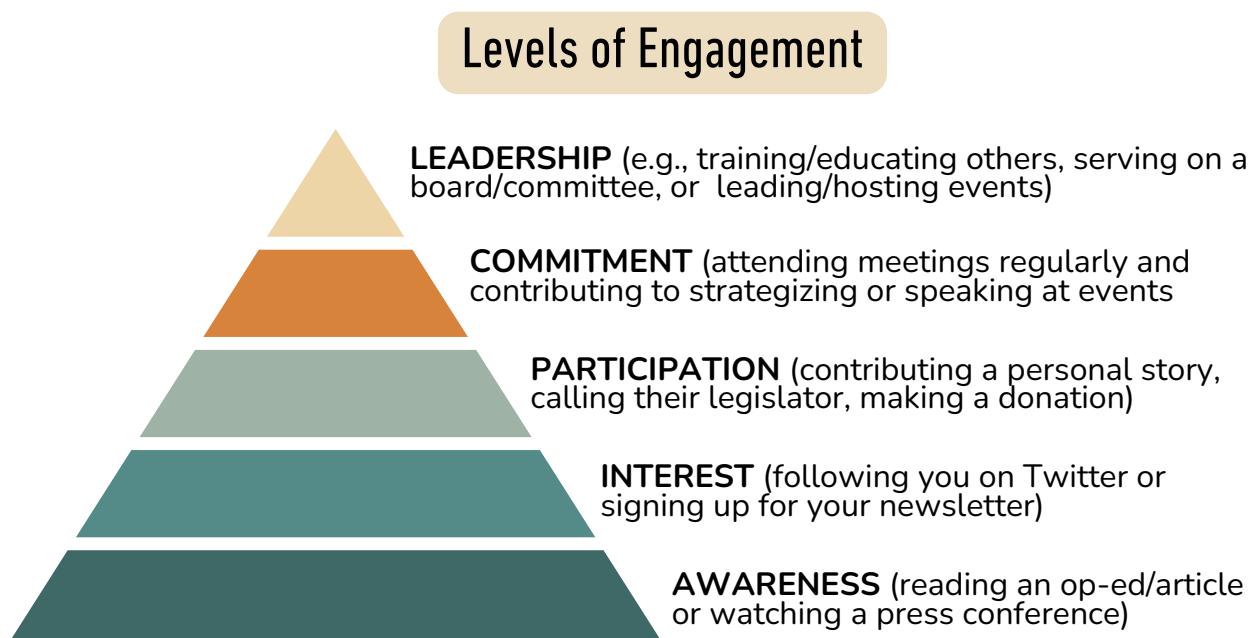


Image adapted from [Community Catalyst](#)

At the **foundation**, awareness indicates someone has knowledge of an issue or cause, often by chance encounter such as stumbling upon information through another person that they know, engaging with a particular type of media, or other such everyday activities.

It is important to avoid discounting the importance of awareness, which sparks curiosity and acts as a gateway for deeper participation. This level of engagement also contributes to your overall power in less obvious ways, as even those who are not actively engaging in your specific action alerts or other “asks” to your network are integrating and making meaning of related knowledge in ways that will shift how they engage with themselves, others, and the world around them. This can contribute to broader cultural conversations and social shifts over time.

As we ascend the pyramid, we encounter the **interest** level. Those at this level are not merely aware, but are actively seeking more information and are eager to deepen their understanding of the issue and solution at hand. This might mean that they take the intentional action of following you on Twitter/X or sign up for your newsletter. This level of engagement is crucial to any grassroots group as it prepares those who may want to participate more actively to do so, equipping them with the nuanced information necessarily to advocate effectively.

This can blossom into **participation**, which indicates a willingness to contribute time, social capital, or other resources to the cause. Those in this level of engagement may attend meetings, join protests, make a donation, or accept an invitation to share their story for you to uplift in your blog, for example. Participation is the engine of the movement, translating awareness, interest, and good intentions into concrete actions that move the broader advocacy agenda forward.

**Commitment** represents an even deeper investment. These individuals are fully dedicated to the mission, vision, values, and goals of the advocacy agenda. Those at the commitment level of engagement may facilitate a presentation on a resource you created in their workplaces or communities, or may be regular attendees and contributors in your quarterly advocacy strategy calls. Their robust engagement ensures the continuity and vibrancy of the movement.

Finally, at the pinnacle of the pyramid is **leadership**. This implies that someone is an active and prominent decision-maker and/or thought leader who engages, inspires, and guides others, and/or is pivotal in guiding the movement in general.

Leaders are crucial for maintaining a momentum's movement and coherence through activities such as training others or otherwise disseminating key information, serving in a more formal or visible leadership role such as on a board related to the cause, or may themselves arrange and facilitate major events for the group.

## CONSIDERATIONS FOR FLUCTUATIONS IN ENGAGEMENT

It is important to recognize that not everyone moves up the pyramid, and that is both expected and perfectly okay! The core trauma-informed principle of voice, choice, and empowerment shines a spotlight on the significance of ensuring advocates, activists, and partners in change have opportunities to choose how to engage in ways that align with their priorities, capacities, energy, participation interests, and life circumstances.

Engagement often deepens as people recognize the issue's relevance to their lives, influencing them to take on more robust roles to create change. Some may contribute in a manner congruent with their skills, strengths, and capacity at the time of initial engagement and they will stay in that role indefinitely, while others will find fulfillment in increasing their presence and engagement in the broader movement, ascending up the pyramid to whatever level fits for them.

Crucially: no level of engagement here is “better” or “worse” than another. Every movement needs people acting at all levels of this pyramid for maximum impact. Every effort matters, as does each person behind those efforts!

Whether an individual moves beyond the participation level of the pyramid often largely depends on the experience they have as a member of the group. There is much that can be done to nourish advocates and create an impactful, engaging, and supportive experience that leaves them feeling valued, appreciated, and empowered, and thus wanting to increase engagement as possible. This is addressed later in this resource.

It is also not uncommon for the level of engagement advocates, activists, and partners in change are demonstrating to ebb and flow across these levels over time.

Another time that engagement may increase significantly is in the face of a significant social, environmental, political, cultural, or other type of major event, where following something happening there is a major surge in action and, while some of those changemakers stay engaged at that level for a longer-term period of time, much of the momentum peters out in response to shifts in circumstances, capacity, and other factors at play.

It is critical for grassroots groups to cultivate a flexible, supportive environment that respects these fluctuations in engagement versus judging, turning away from, or ascribing a label of “uncaring” or “uninvested” when people naturally come into and out of the space.

The shame that surfaces for many advocates when they need to pull back on their advocacy work to retain holistic balance in their lives can be pervasive enough to discourage them from returning to the group at all, even when they reconnect with the capacity and interest to do so.

While this feeling may stem from a variety of places, including lived experiences of being shamed or criticized when needing to prioritize oneself or internalized expectations about commitment or perceived judgments from others within the group, there are many ways to be intentional such that folx feel socially, emotionally, and morally safe stepping out, and trust that they will be welcomed back with open arms and feel a sense of belonging when they return.

Some ideas for working with this natural human tendency include:

## **HONESTY, AND NORMALIZING THE EBB & FLOW**

Openly acknowledging and having conversations about the real nature of advocacy work, and normalizing that periods of intense action and mobilization are often followed by quieter phases.

## CREATING MULTIPLE OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENGAGEMENT

When you create action alerts, consider different “asks” for those with different capacities and interests to take action.

For example, if you are hosting a community forum on an advocacy issue, different levels of engagement presented in a related action alert may be to:

- Know that the event is happening and what it is addressing (Awareness)
- Sign up for a detailed event newsletter or to follow the event’s updates on social media so those who wish to deepen their understanding can do so (Interest)
- Attend the forum in person, with a physical presence demonstrating interest in and support for the advocacy agenda (Participation)
- Facilitate a breakout session, taking on more significant responsibilities and using a deep understanding of and dedication to the advocacy agenda to build support and power for the advocacy agenda (Commitment)
- Spearhead the event planning or represent the group in media interactions, leveraging personal gifts, influence, and expertise to galvanize broader participation and grow collective power (Leadership)

## CLEARLY COMMUNICATING EXPECTATIONS

Be transparent about how much time and energy you anticipate different tasks taking, providing opportunities for group members to make informed choices upfront about what fits for them.

## WARMLY WELCOMING RE-ENGAGEMENT

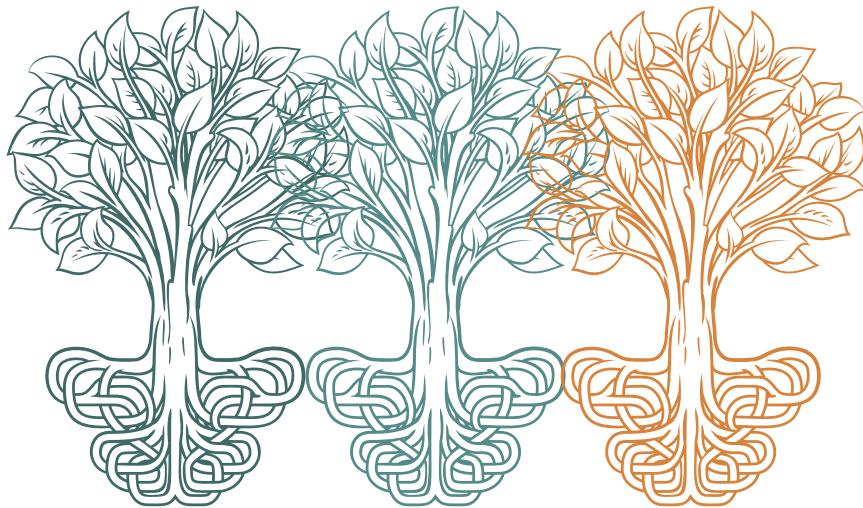
When group members are ready to return or to increase their involvement, welcome them back with enthusiasm and positivity, verbally reinforcing that their return is valued and that their contributions, regardless of frequency or volume, are integral to achieving the group’s goals.

## SUPPORTING STRONG RELATIONSHIPS

Model and encourage relationships that are based on mutual respect and personal connection versus “just” shared advocacy goals – even if this is what brought and keeps everyone together, it only represents one dimension of the full humans working together to change the world. These kinds of strong interpersonal bonds can alleviate feelings of shame and increase comfort when navigating the ebbs and flows of the work.

# Blending Grassroots & Grasstops Approaches

While grassroots advocacy mobilizes broad support through engaging large numbers of people at various levels of involvement, **grasstops advocacy** harnesses the influence of those within your advocacy network who have relationships, resources, positions, or access to other elements that build collective power to advance your advocacy agenda.



**Grasstops advocates** are influential people within your advocacy network who use their positions, resources, or connections to influence decision-making at high levels. This often includes organizational leaders, board members, and well-connected community members. These advocates can significantly impact advocacy work by using their influence to educate, persuade, and garner support from key decision-makers.

These leaders contribute by activities such as providing testimony at public hearings, speaking at press conferences on television or other media, or taking an active role in shaping strategic decisions. Their leadership is instrumental in elevating the movement as their access and influence is crucial to advance change in our current systems and structures.

As grassroots efforts grow, it can be helpful to notice who within the group is emerging as formal and informal leaders. These folks often demonstrate a deep commitment to the cause and possess the capability and capacity to navigate complex political or social networks effectively.

As the work progresses, people will also naturally rise such that they become seen as leaders in the community or in the larger movement based on how they have shown up to the work. These prominent advocates will be able to influence decision-makers through those established connections and reputations. Recognizing and nurturing leadership of all kinds within the movement naturally advances your advocacy agenda.

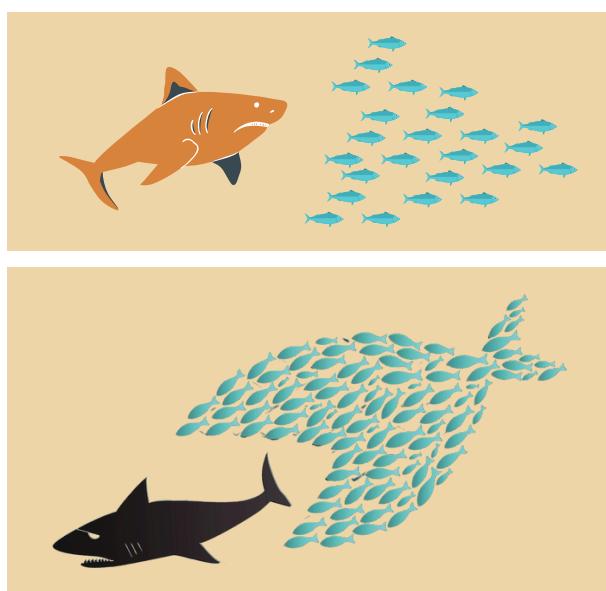
Mobilizing a grasstops approach tends to be most useful when you are reaching a critical point in the process. For instance, rather than activating grasstops leaders in the early stages of advocating to address an issue, you might instead mobilize grasstops leaders at critical points such as when a bill reaches the point of review at a hearing or is undergoing markup in a committee.

Some ideas to consider to maximize the impact when integrating grasstops with grassroots include:

- Hold meetings where grassroots and grasstops advocates have opportunities to align their strategies and share insights to ensure that all efforts are cohesive and mutually-reinforcing
- Encourage grasstops leaders to mentor grassroots advocates, helping to build skills and knowledge across your network, and preparing more members to step into leadership roles
- Ensure that all advocates, whether grassroots or grasstops, have what they need to convey key messages and create vision-aligned progress

## Building Coalitions

**Coalitions** represent a powerful alliance of diverse actors united by a common goal and engaged in coordinated efforts to influence decision-making processes and drive change. Coalitions unify advocacy voices by bringing together actors with shared core beliefs and translating these collective convictions into action that shifts systems and structures.



The adjacent fish diagram depicts the exponential power of uniting with others to tackle an issue accomplished through coalition-building.

Just as with grassroots engagement, coalition-building eliminates silos by bringing aligned actors together to grow power to shift culture and narratives. Building coalitions consisting of groups and individuals brings people out of silos, where good work is being done in isolation, missing opportunities to collaborate and increase power toward achieving mutual goals.

The seemingly intractable issues connected to trauma and resilience that those within the trauma-informed change movement seek to address are simply too large and complex for any one organization or group to tackle alone. Coalitions create hope and possibility pertaining to significant, sweeping change that would be challenging to accomplish without the power of collective action behind the trauma-informed movement, among many other movements.

## EMBEDDING SUSTAINABILITY & RESILIENCE

A key advantage to coalition-building is its tendency to naturally support sustainability due to its distribution of the workload across its membership. This prevents any one particular group or organization from becoming overwhelmed. The mutual accountability created when no one single group carries all of the water allows for the same natural ebbs and flows of advocacy work that have already been discussed to occur. This means that, when any one member group or organization has to temporarily reduce their efforts to meet immediate demands, others are able to step in to ensure the coalition's initiatives continue without disruption.

This adaptability is only useful to the extent that the coalition members have worked to co-construct a culture of reciprocity. When the relationships comprising a coalition already engage strong, supportive bonds and act in values-aligned ways that advance the greater good of the group, member organizations and groups can trust that they will be welcomed back and invited to pick their responsibilities back up when they have the capacity to do so.

## EMBRACING DIFFERENCE & DIVERSITY TO STRENGTHEN SOLUTIONS

The unparalleled diversity within coalitions brings together a broad spectrum of perspectives, wisdom, and expertise. Each member brings with them unique insights that help the coalition navigate complex challenges and increase its influence across different divides and decision-making areas.

This diversity orbits around a shared vision, which provides a consistent central purpose for all of the coalition's efforts. Although members may have different assets, strategies, constituencies, priorities, and reasons for pursuing the targeted transformation, the collective commitment to a common goal ensures that these differences complement rather than clash with each other. Collaboratively, groups identify and leverage one another's strengths, elevating the coalition's capacity to create change.

Having said that, differences within a coalition also may, at times, lead to conflict. It is important for coalitions to recognize that conflict is a natural part of the process of bringing together diverse groups, and that conflict is not inherently negative.

It is not only “okay” to not agree on everything, it is expected and even healthy to have thoughtful and intentional discussions around differences to strengthen the work to be done! In fact, conflict – when navigated skillfully, constructively, and in good faith – can lead to the co-creation of more robust, effective solutions.

Instituting clear guidelines for decision-making processes is one activity that can help with the management of intra-coalition conflict. Consider skill-building potential around models such as nonviolent communication and circle-keeping/restorative practices to facilitate having the courageous conversations necessary to resolve, repair, and reconcile following conflict.

## ENGAGING MEANINGFUL INCLUSION IN DECISION-MAKING

Given the array of different interests and viewpoints represented among a coalition, setting policy priorities can be challenging. Without structured and transparent decision-making processes, there is a significant risk of voices being stifled, particularly when groupthink tends to reflect the biases and norms of the broader culture, meaning certain voices may be at risk of being disproportionately stifled, ignored, excluded, or left unexpressed.

Engaging intentional, meaningful inclusion and belonging are critical to preventing these outcomes that are otherwise likely to disrupt the innovation, efficacy, and reach of your coalition’s work.

Ensuring that everyone feels as if they may contribute meaningfully requires all coalition members to actively join together in a shared commitment to combat biases and inequities that exist within the coalition itself as they notice them.

To ensure that all members have the awareness and skills to notice when such elements are proliferating in the culture of the coalition, this may involve activities such as facilitating workshops on power dynamics to bring awareness to the dynamics at play and encourage collective learning around co-creating a culture of inclusion and belonging.

It is important that opportunities to participate in coalition activities such as agenda-setting move beyond performative measures such as “open invitations” for input. Having formalized, scheduled meeting points for meeting to discuss key coalition values and operations, along with ongoing monitored mechanisms for general feedback submission that are responded to, all help support diverse, inclusive participation that will strengthen the work of the coalition.

Establishing norms and practices that prioritize transparency as well as emotional, social, and psychological safety has the power to cultivate environments in which coalition members can trust that they will be able to have authentic, courageous, and accountable conversations with other members without retaliation, ridicule, or rejection.

A coalition evoking a sense of belonging takes this one step further such that every member not only feels meaningfully included but also deeply valued for their unique contributions.

Celebrating the diverse talents and wisdom members bring, along with ensuring that members see the fruits of their own involvement reflected in the coalition's strategies, actions, and achievements, can reaffirm the feeling of making a difference about something that member cares about, deepening both commitment to the coalition and a strengthening one's sense of belonging as anchored in mutual progress toward shared goals.

## TAKING SPACE & MAKING SPACE

Establishing a transparent process is crucial to arrive at a mutual understanding within a coalition. This process allows each organization or group the flexibility to pursue its specific mission, goals, and purpose through its own internal group or organizational structure, while still aligning with the coalition's broader objectives.

Such an approach respects each group's/organization's autonomy and culture, ensuring that every member feels they have the space to influence the coalition's direction while still engaging in daily activities that help keep their own group/organization in operation.

Collaboration might involve institutionalizing processes for joint decision-making processes to determine which member takes the lead in a particular campaign. Support role assignment processes may establish a commitment to seeking out members with complementary skills and perspectives to further enrich the operation of such a campaign by leveraging the unique strengths of different members.

Strategies around such processes help coalitions maintain a balanced approach where members both take space as they step into leadership roles based on group consensus, and also make space for supporting members to lend their unique strengths and gifts to provide a more effective, robust, and holistic campaign.



# Overarching Media Considerations

In the realm of advocacy, media engagement – whether print, digital, broadcast, or social media – extends beyond “just” disseminating information to shape public perception and mobilize collective action.

By using media strategically, advocates, activists, and partners in change can highlight the issue, shape narratives in a way that honors the diverse lived experiences and realities of those who are impacted, and call on others to join in action toward bringing about change.



When it comes to selecting mediums for raising awareness among the general populace, collective wisdom from the field indicates that advocates and activists are most effective when they blend traditional and digital techniques to reach, educate, and activate people who are not already on board. This media can be earned organically or strategically purchased, serving as a powerful mechanism to build awareness and influence.

## A BLENDED APPROACH BROADENS REACH

There is no one medium or method that will reach all members of every possible audience. Getting creative around the way you leverage media to uplift your messaging and engage action is useful in this work.

By embracing a multifaceted media strategy that draws upon strengths offered by getting attention across various resources and platforms, advocates, activists, and partners in change are better able to strategically tailor communications to effectively reach a variety of audiences.

## KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

It is useful to get a sense of the demographics associated with engagement across a variety of types of media when you are seeking to engage new individuals and groups to support your advocacy agenda. For instance, some news websites have a media kit on their website that includes reader demographics, and there are also some think tanks and organizations that conduct research that might inform your action in this arena.

Through such exploration and research, you can get a sense of whether local or national media outreach makes sense for the audience(s) you are seeking to engage, what mediums and platforms make the most sense to use, which credible messengers you will employ to disseminate the message, and other important details surrounding the formulation and delivery of your messaging and communications strategy.

## BALANCE TARGETED LANGUAGE & FRAMING WITH CONSISTENCY IN MESSAGING

It is important to both recognize the importance of adapting framing and language to resonate with different while maintaining a consistent core message throughout. This balance is important to maintain a reputation among decision-makers as a trustworthy messenger versus a chameleon who will be, say, or do anything to get the support of various audiences.

Establishing feedback mechanisms that allow for the continuous refinement of messages based on how they are received across different audiences will further inform where adaptation may be necessary.

## ENGAGE EXPERTISE WHERE POSSIBLE

It is often useful to engage people who have expertise in framing and messaging who are familiar with relevant issues, topics, and language related to the trauma-informed movement to support this aspect of the work.

Importantly, while in some cases that may mean dedicating resources to reaching for external support, within broad coalitions, this talent and wisdom may already exist among those who are members of your network. As a first line of seeking to refine messaging strategies, tapping into the existing network often will reveal a rich resource in a talented network member who may be willing to lend their skillset to advancing the work.

To this point, it is important we do not get so caught up in details and outcomes that we miss the forest for the trees. When we are operating in a scarcity mindset and are stuck in survival mode, it can be challenging to notice the abundance of resources before us to tap into.

This is one of many reasons it is a sound practice to stay connected to the composition of your advocacy network: to avoid overlooking opportunities to engage people with media skills to stand empowered in their wisdom and contribute meaningfully to the work to the benefit of all within the movement.

## TRACK TRENDS, FILL GAPS & BUST MYTHS

It is useful to engage with different media platforms to get a finger on the pulse of the dominant discourse surrounding your advocacy agenda. All types of media provide a gateway to better understanding how existing knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, and other relevant factors are shaping the conversation in the moment.

This not only reveals windows of opportunity for you to lift up the work of the movement where you notice gaps, but also for you to get a solid understanding of where misconceptions lie so you may both correct the record as well as anticipate potential counterarguments you may encounter in the future.

## OPERATE WITH ACCESSIBILITY IN MIND

Conveying your message in a simple, approachable, inclusive way is important when messaging to a broad audience. Remember: most audiences will be laypeople when it comes to the study of your issue and solution. Making education and action accessible rather than particularly complex or technical is crucial to bringing new supporters on board and growing your power as a collective network.

Consider how you may simplify even the most complex information and distill it down to its key essence in the context of its importance to your advocacy agenda.

# Traditional Media Considerations

Navigating traditional media methods to transmit your message to a wider audience can be a strong strategy to influence the public conversation and policy related to your advocacy agenda.

One way to begin conceptualizing your traditional media strategy is to take a pulse of what is currently trending in outlets you are considering reaching out to. You can do this somewhat casually by simply skimming through popular op-eds, engaging with human interest stories, and other such activities. This exploration can help you get a sense of what type of pieces this media outlet runs, who they are getting their information from, and what is resonating with the public.

Decisions to support legislative initiatives are frequently introduced by media coverage, with press releases and media events that it is often useful to remain attuned to. Every congressional office and many other relevant bodies have a staff person who monitors the news in your state and clips articles that mention your representative or senator by name.

That means that, if you mention a policymaker in your own media messaging, their offices are likely to take notice – and other people in the state or district will take notice as well. The more this publicity happens, the more constituent pressure can be applied, and the more likely a legislator is to act.

There are a few different key ways to consider leveraging traditional media for your advocacy efforts.

**Op-eds** are opinion pieces usually written by a guest writer (i.e., a person who is not on the news outlet's editorial board). These pieces are generally longer, more detailed essays that present an argument and a supporting analysis along with facts the writer chooses to lift up.

Timing an op-ed strategically helps inform public interest and potentially legislative thinking. Op-eds are most effective when they are concise and poignant, designed to spark further public discourse at critical moments in time.

**Letters to the editor** are typically responses to published stories or prior letters or to some recent event. They are shorter than op-eds and can be used to spark public awareness at crucial moments, such as just before the legislature is getting ready to vote on relevant topics.

Letters to the editor allow the public to voice their reactions, correct oversights, and offer alternative perspectives on the way issues and solutions are being covered (or not) in the news. In letters to the editor, brevity is best, and many outlets have a somewhat low word limit it is important to be mindful of.

**Press releases** are official statements issued to news and other media outlets to announce a range of items, aiming to inform the public or specific interested parties about important events or developments within a community, group, organization, or system. Press releases can be another essential tool to employ for a robust advocacy strategy, especially when a major event happens or milestone needs to be captured.

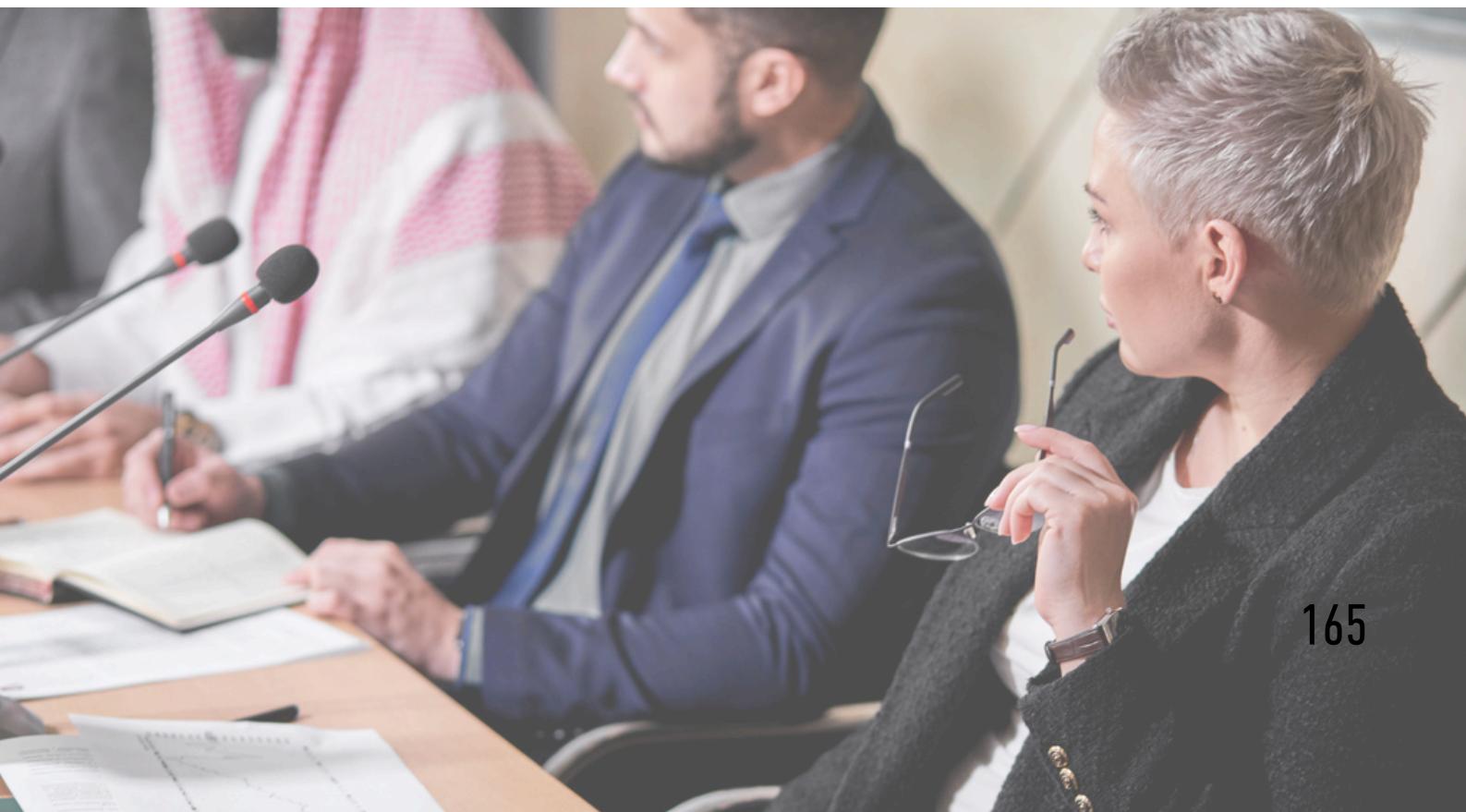
For instance, you might issue a press release to announce to launch of your campaign. As another example, you may issue a press release to acknowledge that “XYZ Organization applauds House Bill 123 to integrate trauma-informed care, PACEs, and resilience curriculum into mandated reporter training throughout the state.”

There are many apt moments to utilize this strategy, including uplifting commendable actions by decision-makers that align with your advocacy agenda priorities.

Finally, keeping engaged with the legislative process, such as noting briefings or hearings on a relevant topic, can reveal opportunities to generate interest and attention to consider uplifting in the media as well.

**Briefings** are meetings/presentations where detailed information is provided to a select audience, which might include journalists, policymakers, or others who are influential in the dialogue surrounding an issue and solution. The purpose of briefings is to inform the audience about specific issues, policies, or events, often to prepare the attendees for taking action, reporting, decision-making, or further discussion.

**Hearings** are formal meetings conducted by legislative or judicial bodies to gather information, evidence, and insights from various parties close to an issue before making decisions, drafting legislation, or conducting an investigation. Hearings are usually open to the public and can involve testimonies from experts, public figures, or people with lived experience relevant to the subjects under review.



# ACTIVITY: OP-ED PLANNER

Op-Eds can be a useful and powerful tool to inform public interest—and potentially legislative thinking—related to your advocacy agenda. This activity is intended to help you consider and plan around that which generally increases the potential impact and reach of an Op-Ed piece.



## Considerations

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- **Timing matters** – keep current on what is unfolding in the social and political landscape so you notice opportunities where it makes sense for you/your group/your organization to write and submit an Op-Ed.
- **Accessibility is important** – while you may be an expert in the field related to your advocacy agenda, it is important to steer clear of using jargon or including complex language to the extent possible to maximize reach and engagement with your piece.
- **Know your audience** – many news media websites have a page that contains information about reader demographics, which can be incredibly helpful as you consider how to choose the media publication to which you reach out, as well as how you frame your Op-Ed piece.
- **Know the criteria for getting published** – be sure you look up and comply with any requirements related to length, formatting, and other guidelines a particular publication has for Op-Ed submissions.
- **Make it memorable** – consider how you might be able to use Marshall Ganz's Public Narrative Framework ([welcomingrefugees.org](http://welcomingrefugees.org)) when writing your Op-Ed. Even though the format may differ from other story-telling, the principles and structure will help you connect with the head and the heart to build momentum and support toward change!

## REFLECTIONS: OP-ED PLANNER

*NOTE: These prompts represent one way to approach writing an Op-Ed. Feel free to explore other models or use other tools as you explore what works best for advancing your advocacy agenda.*

What is it that you hope to accomplish by writing and submitting your Op-Ed?

How will you know your best hopes in submitting the Op-Ed have been realized? (e.g., how will you monitor progress?)

What expertise and/or lived experience do you have that is related to this topic that leaves you well-positioned and credible to be writing on this topic?

How are you inviting and integrating stakeholder input to ensure your message is aligned with what those most impacted are truly experiencing and want to see happen?

What is important to know and consider about the audience you are targeting?

What news media outlets make sense for you to consider submitting your Op-Ed to, and what makes them a good fit?

What mechanisms to share and uplift your Op-Ed are available? (e.g., your own social media, sharing via listserv to advocates, sending to partner organizations, etc.)

# OP-ED COMPONENTS

Select a strong, relevant title for your piece. What will draw readers' eyes?

Create an impactful lede/hook to capture your audience's attention and set the stage. Consider popular culture, news, concurrent releases of new information (E.G., research), the general state of the world, personal experience...

State your general thesis and reasons. What is the core of what you're trying to say? For what reasons should the audience engage?

Key Supporting Point #1 (Evidence and conclusion)

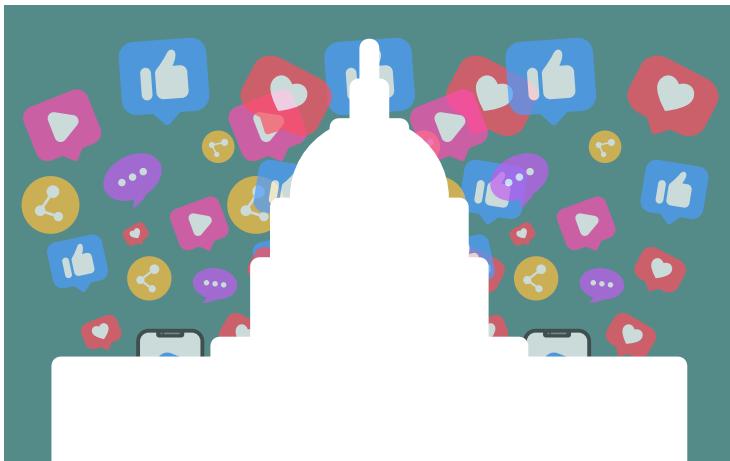
Key Supporting Point #2 (Evidence and conclusion)

Other Key Acknowledgments/Information? (E.G., addressing counter-arguments, acknowledging lack of data, etc.)

Tie it all together with a conclusion, which often calls back to the lede – end strong!

Your brief author byline (2-3 sentences). What is important for others to know about you?

# Digital & Social Media Considerations



Emerging and evolving mechanisms of digital technology and social media provide another powerful means to make policy advocacy more effective. This space is truly changing the way that democracy, civic education, and advocacy are practiced. The digital space offers a powerful, far reaching democratic platform through which previously-excluded voices can now be amplified across time, space, and sociocultural boundaries.

In addition to the meaningful implications of digital spaces being a platform for equitable citizen participation, harnessing technology for social good provides a powerful avenue to help move the needle toward policy change on a broader scale.

In recent years in particular, we have collectively witnessed the power of using social media to organize and mobilize around common causes and to make more diverse, inclusive, well-informed groups of people pushing for change.

There are myriad advantages to utilizing social media in advocacy:

- These methods are generally inexpensive, easy to use, equitable, and impactful
- Enable direct and indirect communication with policymakers
- Eye-catching, succinct messages can be used to generate initial attention and attached to more robust tools/information sources for those who engage to dig deeper
- Email can be used judiciously and with intention to keep people interested and attuned without oversaturating the audience
- Websites and social media accounts allow for choice on how people explore issues and solutions on their own time
- Interactivity and transparent communication in the digital space contributes to trust, empowerment, and affinity
- Can be used as tools to seek broader feedback, track engagement, and adapt strategies to increase your advocacy reach and impact
- You can use virtual spaces to coordinate real-world organizing, too!

Some initial considerations to support maximizing your impact in digital spaces and on social media include (but are not limited to):

- Ensure your digital presence, including websites and social media channels, is easy to find and navigate to when utilizing popular search engines
- Identify and connect to relevant and aligned trends, such as a particular hashtag
- Implement an effective action alert system to mobilize your network quickly and efficiently on social media
- Use your platform to connect with and uplift voices of diverse lived experience that otherwise may go under the radar
- Strategize the frequency of your communications to maintain interest while avoiding engagement fatigue and/or overwhelming your audience





## Reflection Point

Thinking about your own experiences...

How did you first become aware of the trauma-informed framework? Was there a particular event, article or personal experience that drew your attention to this approach?

What has motivated you when it comes to joining a movement, or even just generally participating in something new? Was it a personal connection to the cause, an inspiring leader, a community's energy, or something else that drew you in?

What aspect(s) of raising public awareness, grassroots organizing, and/or coalition-building fit for you?

What skills and strengths do you have in utilizing the traditional and digital platforms discussed? What are areas you are committed to learning more?

Reflect on your previous experiences with social causes or movements. What lessons learned will you apply to your future advocacy? What successful strategies might you try to replicate? What might you do differently?

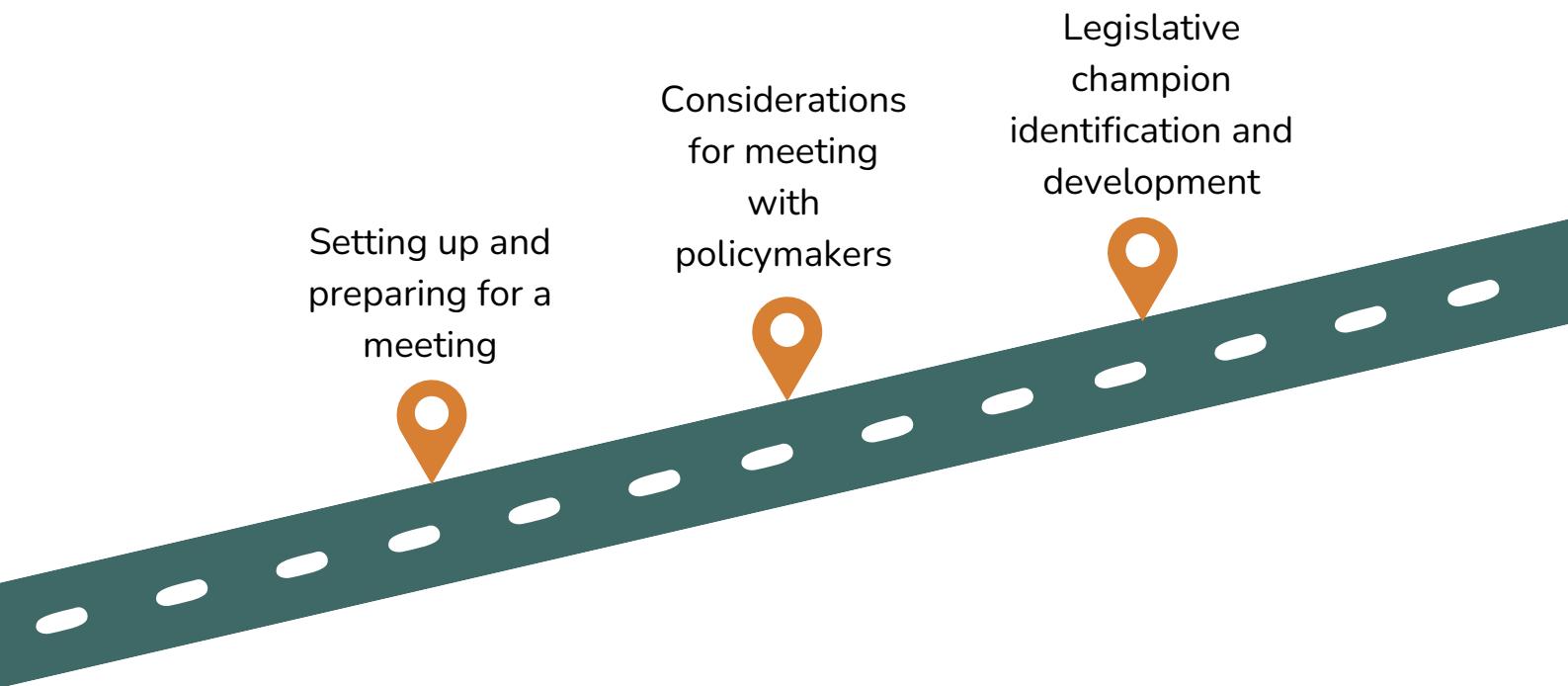
# Chapter 6: Building, Sustaining & Mobilizing Relationships with Policymakers

Resources, PowerPoint, Video, Reflection Questions, and More!



*If the time is not ripe, we must ripen the time.*  
- Dr. Dorothy I. Height

# What You Can Expect in This Chapter



Working closely with policymakers is key to enacting trauma-informed policy and creating more impactful outcomes. The resources and levers of government that elected officials have access to are often critical to the effective implementation of policy at scale.

Meetings with legislators therefore comprise deeply important work for advocates to engage in to effect wide-scale change. Honing and utilizing skills to hold effective meetings with legislators is essential to building sustained relationships that will be useful to leverage and mobilize to create change.

## The Value of Meeting with Staff

Some people may enter this work believing that they have to meet with their legislator in person to really make a difference. It is important to realize, however, that meeting with staffers can be equally effective to meeting directly with legislators.

Staffers wield considerable influence as trusted, reliable sources of relevant information, essentially serving as the eyes and the ears for their legislators by keeping current with the dominant discourse around key issues. Staffers also have strong insight on the key positions, values, and priorities of the legislators with whom they work.

Another benefit of meeting with legislative staff is that you generally will be able to have more time in your meetings with staff than you will in a direct meeting with a legislator. Using this time to help staffers see how your issue is crucial, and how your proposed policy solution aligns with the legislator's priorities, increases your chances of securing a meeting directly with the elected official in the future.

It is not uncommon for staffers to keep track of issues that constituent voices are raising and track them on a spreadsheet or in a comprehensive database. If the legislator you are seeking to reach has already formulated a position statement related to the issue raised, staffers may respond with those statements in place of holding a meeting with you.

If, however, the issue is something novel to the legislator – especially if many constituents are raising the specific issue at once, again pointing to the power of acting in harmony and in great numbers – staffers will certainly take note.

Accordingly, bringing an issue and policy solution to discussion with a staffer is particularly impactful when that issue and policy solution have not yet reached the legislator's radar.

In the case of a novel issue and solution being presented, it is possible that staffers will bring the information to the legislator, who may then invite a meeting with you to learn more about the issue and solution you are proposing. This presents a tremendous opportunity to help inform their thinking about your advocacy agenda and influence policy directly!

In some cases, you also may find opportunities to establish yourself as a go-to resource or expert on the issue that you raise and the policy solution you propose. Building relationships through this process is invaluable, as it positions you as a trusted advisor when legislative gaps need filling.

## A NOTE ON MODELING THE MODEL OF TRAUMA-INFORMED ENGAGEMENT

In addition to “talking the talk” about bringing the world more into alignment with the principles of a trauma-informed approach, it is important that advocates, activists, and partners in change are also being intentional about “walking the talk” as well when interacting with legislative staff. It is vital to realize that each staffer is a unique individual human in their own right, and that they bring their own knowledge, experiences, and values to the table.

Each person also arrives to their work with their own trauma histories and sensitivities, and being a staffer adds a complex layer in that they essentially have no choice but to listen to significant narratives of pain and suffering as a part of their roles.

Consider also that staffers often field angry, incendiary messages from constituents who are unhappy with the actions of the legislator with whom they work and are required to engage with respect and professionalism even when they do not receive the same in return.

You will get much farther with them and be more memorable for honoring their humanity and demonstrating commitment to fostering a supportive, compassionate connection rooted in common humanity.

Engaging with legislative staff is not just about conveying information and pursuing your end goal of structural transformation; it is also about building partnerships to address issues of common concern in the spirit of the trauma-informed principle of collaboration and mutuality.

Embodying a trauma-informed approach in your interactions with staff will enhance your advocacy efforts and contribute to a constructive dialogue that can lead to more impactful legislative outcomes. Accordingly, it is important you approach these interactions with respect and excitement for the rich and meaningful opportunity to expand your connections and relationships to support the change that these powerful touchpoints present!

## Asking for a Meeting With a Policymaker's Office

To secure a meeting, you have to ask for a meeting!

Many advocates report that this act itself can be somewhat mystifying, intimidating, or otherwise anxiety-inducing – feelings which can deter them from engaging in this meaningful action to support change. This act can become much less daunting when there is peer support to tap into and resources to lean on for guidance.

Filling in knowledge gaps about how to reach out to arrange a meeting and what makes sense to share upfront in an “ask,” as well as what might make sense strategically and practically to save for when the meeting happens, helps advocates stand empowered to make their voices heard and catalyze the process of building the constituent-legislator relationships that are vital to propelling the movement forward.

Most legislators provide a form on their public website that anyone can complete to request a meeting. Those that do not include such a form on their website at the very least offer an email address for outreach, which will help advocates, activists, and partners in change get in touch with the legislative office. Generally, these forms and emails are fielded by whoever on a legislator’s staff is responsible for scheduling appointments.

To easily find the names and websites of all of the elected officials who represent you in the national, state, and local legislative bodies, you may navigate to <https://www.usa.gov/elected-officials> and enter your full address.

## CONSIDERATIONS FOR YOUR INITIAL OUTREACH

When you are reaching out to an elected official's office for the first time, consider including the following:

- Your name
- Where you live if you are a constituent
- Your professional, identity, and/or other group affiliation (if relevant/comfortable)
- A very concise, high-level summary of the issue(s) you would like to discuss
- The office location you wish to visit
- Several dates/times you are available to meet

If you are a constituent, it is important to state this upfront because it is a key part of the job description for your representatives to hear and seek to address constituent needs, interests, and priorities, and legislators rely on constituents to inform them about what is happening in the community.

Without being made aware of relevant issues and perspectives of the people they have been elected to represent, it is possible that legislators will not have key local issues, perspectives, and wishes on their radar.

Constituent needs and opinions are consistently identified as one of the most influential factors in determining policy priorities among legislators, and constituents who stay in touch with their representatives are often perceived as highly reliable sources of key information since they are the experts of their communities.

If you are *not* a constituent of the legislator(s) to whom you are reaching out, it is vital to demonstrate to policymakers that, as an advocate for your issue and proposed solution, you are representing many constituencies, institutions, and voters in their communities. Consider citing the research you have done about the community a legislator represents to help them recognize that you are a steward of a message that is important for them to listen to in order to fulfill the duties of their role.

It is also important to announce affiliations you have with any particular organization, identity group, or other type of organized group you are a part of in the interest of supporting a trusting, transparent relationship from square one.

When determining when the most ideal time to meet with your selected legislator(s) may be, it is useful to remain aware of when they are scheduled to be in Washington, D.C. and when they are in their home state/district. If your target audience is elected on a national rather than a state or local level, you can generally plan on your legislators being at their home offices when recesses happen in Washington, D.C.

You can typically find the legislative calendar on the website of the body your representative belongs to, such as [this website](#) for the U.S. House of Representatives, [this website](#) for the U.S. Senate, [this website](#) for state legislatures, and relevant local legislative websites found by entering your address into [this resource](#) and following the links to your jurisdiction's main page.

If you do not receive a response acknowledging a message you sent via either online forms or direct email, do not lose hope – try following up by calling the office directly! Phone calls tend to be tougher to forget to respond to (or ignore) than emails or social media posts, making this a compelling strategy to get your foot in the door to build relationships. Persistence and patience is key!

## Planning & Preparing for Your Meeting

It is immensely valuable to take some intentional time to make a plan and prepare your policy pitch before meeting with a legislator or their staff. This proactive strategy helps advocates, activists, and partners in change stand empowered with the confidence and competence to present a compelling case for change and realize their overarching best hopes for the meeting.

Below are some general guidelines and considerations to support planning and preparing for an impactful legislative meeting.

### DO YOUR HOMEWORK & KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

As explored in greater detail in prior chapters of this resource, getting a sense of what matters to the audience to whom you are advocating ensures you are equipped with the necessary knowledge to connect with them and leave a lasting impression. Whether your goal is to educate a congressperson on a particular concept, advocate for them to support a specific bill, or request that they initiate a hearing on a key topic related to your advocacy agenda, understanding your audience is crucial.

Consider conducting research on your target audience's background, legislative priorities, what committees they are on, and past actions they have taken to support (or oppose) issues related to your advocacy priorities.

### CREATE AN AGENDA ANCHORED IN YOUR MISSION & MESSAGE

While you cannot anticipate every twist or turn that may potentially emerge in the meeting, roughly charting the course you expect and hope to take during the discussion can help you convey a clear, targeted message that covers all of the key points you seek to uplift.

We know that, when we are feeling anxious or activated, we do not always have access to our strongest skills and best thinking. This is a part of being human! Having a semi-structured framework or outline of key talking points to bring with you to your meeting can help allay anxiety and bolster your sense of self-efficacy when it comes to getting your message across effectively.

There is no shame in having and referring to notes, especially when speaking to complex issues passionately and with reference to emerging and evolving insights from the field. It may help to consider this a safety net.

To that point: even if you do not rely heavily on your notes – or look at them at all – during the meeting, having your talking points handy can provide a sense of security and empowerment, especially if it is one of your first times speaking to your advocacy agenda in front of a formal audience of policy- and decision-makers.

## ANTICIPATE CHALLENGING QUESTIONS

It is useful to try to anticipate what inquiries about your issue you may be asked and consider how you would address curiosity and ambivalence that could emerge during your meeting in advance. It is useful to consider this not as adversarial or a signal that the person you are engaging with is an opponent, but instead as an opportunity to showcase your knowledge and make a strong case for your solution! Here is where you can put the information-gathering you have already conducted around your advocacy agenda to use.

It is a sound idea to review the many sides of relevant issues/solutions across a variety of perspectives to prepare to navigate wonderments and challenges that may arise in conversation with your target audience. It also can be helpful to consider your advocacy agenda from the legislator's perspective based on what you know they personally value as a result of your research.

Some common curiosities that policymakers and their staff may express regarding the merits of the issue and solution as you present them include:

- Beyond emotional appeal or technical bias, **what are the objective facts?**
- What impact has the issue been demonstrated to have **on their constituents?**
- What are the **economic costs and/or benefits?**
- Does the issue have the commitment of an **interest group?** If so, which one(s), and what are the implications of this for the legislator with whom you are connecting?
- What is the **general public sentiment** about the issue, and how does that compare to the general **consensus within their district?**
- Who that may be of interest based on power dynamics spoken to in earlier chapters **already supports this cause?**

It is okay to not have all of the answers to the above. The mere act of thinking about these and other relevant considerations before your meeting helps you deepen your knowledge around your advocacy agenda and will likely make you more adept in navigating whatever comes up in your meeting.

## CONSIDER GOING WITH A GROUP

Brainstorming, planning, and eventually actually attending the meeting with a group can be a beneficial strategy. Not only does this demonstrate that many people are aligned in believing what is being presented is important, but having people with diverse expertise, experiences, skills, and strengths can also be a boon to remaining agile in the discussion.

If you are bringing multiple people to the meeting, it is important to let the office know in advance who will be participating. Not only is this aligned with the trauma-informed principle of trustworthiness and transparency, but as discussed earlier in this resource guide, different people value different voices, approaches, and credentials, and this can considerably influence your audience to pay that much more attention to what you present at the meeting.

If you are newer to advocacy, preparing for and attending a meeting with a group may also present opportunities to grow your advocacy skills as it presents opportunities to tap into the power of peer support and collaborative solution-building. You may even be able to practice in advance of the meeting by connecting with other advocates to engage in activities to prepare, increase your confidence, and strengthen your message, such as role playing.

In the trauma-informed movement in particular, in our experience at CTIPP, there are many generous and compassionate people who actively enjoy serving as models and mentors to those who are newer to the space.

Especially for a first meeting, it can be useful to shadow more seasoned advocates to give you an idea of what the process of meeting with legislators can look like. Having said that, it is important to realize you are not expected to be an expert on everything, and you do not need to be “perfect” to be impactful. You being in the room brings value in and of itself. Rest assured, you have unique expertise and experience, and that in and of itself means that you bring value to any conversation that you may have with a legislator!

### **Consider the Current Context**

Due to limited time and resources, it is not feasible for policymakers to address all problems at once. While the issue you are raising may be very obviously significant to you, it is important to recognize that your policy priorities may be competing with urgent and time-sensitive economic, political, social welfare, healthcare, and defense needs that are being prioritized by the person you are meeting with.

This does not mean that you cannot be successful in presenting your issue no matter what else might be happening, though; in fact, being attuned to the general context of what is happening as it connects to your advocacy agenda can serve as a bridge to reaching your legislator. A look at the current context may reveal opportunities to tie your policy vision to issues demanding immediate legislative attention.

For instance, at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, we at CTIPP strategically shifted our messaging to highlight collective trauma. This opened the door to advocating for a trauma-informed response within relief bills, some of which notably was signed into law.

While, of course, that does not necessarily mean that all of our policy goals were integrated into legislative solutions enacted at this urgent time, it is something to celebrate that trauma-informed advocates within CTIPP's network and beyond were able to share timely, valuable information with legislators that concretely and meaningfully impacted the policy response to a critical juncture in our world's history.

In the example presented, there is also promise for further action because we can monitor how the trauma-informed aspects of the bill contribute to change, further strengthening the case for meeting challenging moments with proposals to advance resiliency, healing-centered approaches, and trauma-informed practices.

### **Leave a Lasting Impression with “Leave-Behinds”**

It is not realistic to expect every legislator to be an expert in every possible issue that can be brought to the table. Most policymakers make decisions about proposed policy measures based on limited information given the wide range of challenges they are expected to address in their roles.

In meetings with your representatives and their staff, you only have a limited time to make your case before the next group of advocates come to make their case for a variety of other issues and solutions.

No matter how memorable and effective your pitch may be, the impression you make can be enhanced by creating concise, impactful materials to leave with legislators. Infographics, fact sheets, one-pagers, and other succinct, digestible documents that can quickly and effectively convey key aspects of your advocacy agenda can reinforce your message and serve as a tangible reference for busy policymakers.



## FORMULATE A SPECIFIC “ASK”

It is critical to determine what your “ask” is before you enter the meeting space. One way to think about this is: what is the purpose of your visit? What are your best hopes for the actions the legislator could take?

Whatever your “ask” ends up being, it is important to ensure that you frame your request as a clear call to action. Accordingly, when preparing your “ask,” consider how you can be clear and concise while calling on them to act in the interest of their constituency in alignment with your advocacy agenda.

## In The Meeting

Legislators and their staff juggle demanding, grueling schedules, so it is important to consider that they may need flexibility when scheduling or attending your meeting. That means your meeting could end up taking place in the office, in the hallway, or as they are actively walking to their next meeting location. All of these venues present an opportunity to make your case, and it is helpful to be prepared for the unexpected and unconventional!

There are many considerations to help ensure your meeting runs smoothly, some of which are explored below.

### BE CONCISE & RESPECTFUL OF TIME

Given legislators’ demanding schedules, being brief is often perceived as respectful, and generally facilitates a greater reception to your advocacy efforts. Further, delivering a succinct message enhances clarity and ensures you convey the most important parts of your issue and solution in ways that do not induce information overload, potentially overwhelming or confusing your audience.

### START WITH GRATITUDE

Even if you disagree on most issues, an effective way to begin your meeting is to thank your legislator for something they recently did that aligns with your advocacy work. This shines a spotlight on common ground and shared values, and acknowledges their work in a positive way.

Policymakers often receive highly critical or negative feedback, and acknowledging something that they have done that is positive and meaningful to you can bring their understandable defenses down. This helps them embody a greater capacity to hear as well as greater spaciousness to hold and consider your advocacy agenda.

## TELL YOUR STORY

Once you get past the initial cordial formalities of meeting, it is important to share your story. There is a [chapter of this resource](#) and a module in our [free self-guided online advocacy series](#) that is intended to support you in formulating and framing what you want to convey in the short time you have to connect with your target audience(s).

As a high-level introduction to this concept before digging in more deeply later in this document: telling stories has been demonstrated to increase the impact of your advocacy efforts, helping you create a stronger pitch than just using data and facts. It is wise to consider using meeting opportunities to connect emotionally with your audience and illustrate the real-world implications of your advocacy efforts.

## HONESTY REALLY IS THE BEST POLICY

It is important to recognize that, in the world of policymaking where many competing interests, motivations, and power dynamics are at play, trust is earned and built over time rather than automatically given from the beginning. To ensure you are considered to be a credible messenger, ensure that you present your evidence accurately.

Upholding trustworthiness and transparency is of the utmost importance in trauma-informed advocacy. Essentially: if you do not know, it is important that you do not stall, deflect, or make things up! When you do not know something, say so, and commit to finding out and following up.

In fact, not knowing the answer to something you are asked in the moment can be a gift! Having to say something like, “I am not entirely sure about that based on the research I have done thus far, though I do know where I can find accurate information on this. Would it be okay if I get back to you on that by the end of the week?” gives you a valid reason to continue the conversation and refresh the legislator’s recollection of your conversation and advocacy agenda.

This also further establishes you as an honest asset and reliable resource to whom the legislator can look when giving consideration to relevant issues/policy solutions. This helps strengthen the relationship and increases the salience of your advocacy agenda.

## BE SURE TO MAKE YOUR “ASK!”

Once you have told your story and have helped your target audience understand the “why,” it is time to let them know about the “what” by making your “ask!” This helps legislators understand their role in advancing your cause.

For example, your “ask” may be for your Congressperson to file a bill requiring all healthcare professionals who accept Medicaid to receive trauma-informed care training. I

If the legislator says, “Yes, I’m willing to submit a bill,” that is fabulous news! It could be useful at this point to inquire as to whether you can get that “yes” response “on the record.” If they tell you that you can do so, that means you are able to leverage your legislator’s power by uplifting their endorsement in your messaging on social media, in an op-ed, or other mediums to promote your message.

Getting a “yes” also presents you with an opportunity to ask how you can provide support. They may give you further pathways to advocate and advance change, such as asking you to mobilize your network to reach out to their representatives to motivate other legislators to co-sponsor the bill once it is drafted and submitted for consideration.

Alternatively, they may ask you to support them in obtaining additional data to create language for the bill, or any other number of activities that will help the bill progress.

These additional tasks present positive trailheads to follow, giving advocates, activists, and partners in change a clear way to stay engaged and become known as a go-to resource when it comes to this space. This, in turn, contributes to growing your power as well as that of the broader movement.

## EXPRESS GRATITUDE

Once your meeting comes to a close, be sure you thank the legislator and staffers for their time, consideration, any any commitments they have made to further action aligned with trauma-informed change. Demonstrating appreciation reinforces the positive interactions of your meeting and maintains goodwill for future engagements.

## Meeting Follow-Up

Soon after your meeting concludes, it is advisable to debrief with your group of advocates, or to take pause to reflect on the process independently if your meeting was conducted without others present.

In this process, it is helpful to acknowledge what went well, discuss lessons learned, and review the details of any outstanding action items, especially those requiring follow-up communication as promised in the meeting. Engaging in reflection on what worked will inform the action you continue to take to build on the momentum and progress you have contributed to thus far.

In addition to demonstrating gratitude in person as you end the meeting, it also is wise to send a thank you email to the staffer(s) and/or legislator you met with shortly after your meeting. This is polite and professional, and also helps to keep your name and advocacy agenda on the recipient’s mind! You might also consider reiterating your “ask” in your follow-up communication depending on how your meeting went.

In addition to immediate follow-up, it can be helpful to set a reminder on your calendar to check in with the policymaker's office every couple of months. It is important to keep the line of communication open and to be active in your outreach and relationship-building efforts.

To this point, it is important to pay attention to what is happening concerning your issue in your community, state, nationally, and internationally. If you notice a piece of legislation, new finding, or current event related to your issue/solution that either concerns you or inspires you, it can be worthwhile to spend time calling or writing to the policymaker to let them know about these developments and reinforce your advocacy priorities.





## Reflection Point

What are you noticing and thinking about as you consider “the before, the during, and the after” of holding a meeting with your target audience?

How might you capture your issue in a concise, digestible way based on what you already know about your target audience?

What have you found useful in the past to help someone without any background or expertise in this area acquire enough of a comprehension to take informed action?

# Identifying Potential Champions

Once you have built relationships with policymakers and you have conducted your research on the general landscape of your issue, it can be useful to identify potential champions for your cause.

Champions may include legislators who are likely to file, enthusiastically sponsor, and/or otherwise work to advance legislation aligned with your policy goals based on actions they have already taken or items they have spoken to.

You may begin the process of identifying champions by looking to members of relevant committees, to high-profile legislators who are in the public eye, to policymakers who are well-respected, or to elected officials who are very tenured and thus have built numerous working relationships over time.

Another place to seek champions out is among legislators who are newer to the role. Freshly elected policymakers may be more inclined and motivated to introduce new bills as they seek to find their rhythm in the role and to make their mark.

These legislators are also often open to innovative ideas and partnerships. Further, on a national scope, the leadership of the Senate and the House are often looking to give newer members some meaningful victories as they want them to be successful as they enter their roles.

It is also important to remember that any legislator has the potential to eventually assume leadership positions. For instance, someone who supports you yet is not particularly well-connected or well-known may work their way up to being a committee chair or holding another leadership position where they will ultimately have considerable influence.

In addition to looking at more formal legislative profiles of possible champions, paying attention to social media is another useful method to discover who may be a champion for your advocacy agenda.

Many elected officials leverage social media to express their positions, uplift topics they care about, and engage with the public. Consider searching for legislators who actively comment on or promote topics relevant to your advocacy efforts, who may be receptive to partnering with you to advance shared hopes and goals.

## IDENTIFYING POTENTIAL CHAMPIONS

### Look to natural sources

- Previously submitted/sponsored aligned legislation
- Sit on relevant committees
- Member of relevant caucuses
- Influential figure (among colleagues or in the public eye)

### Additional Considerations

- Specific needs illuminated in community/state
- Public personal background/history
- Map relationships
- Monitor social media



Image: master1305/Stockphoto

## Building Momentum with Champions

Once you have identified passionate and prominent legislators as champions for your cause, you will want to consider how you can effectively leverage their allyship.

Some considerations related to building momentum for the movement by engaging the champions you have built relationships are explored below.

## HARNESSING THE POWER OF NETWORKS

Your champions often have access to valuable networks with other policymakers, advocacy organizations, and others who are impacted by and share an interest in topics related to your advocacy agenda. Additionally, legislators and those in their networks will have unique, specialized knowledge regarding policymaking trends. Leveraging these insights can help you strategically position your advocacy efforts.

Mapping relationships your champions maintain can help inform engagement strategies, helping you identify potential collaborators who can broaden your reach and amplify your impact. Consider noting who your champions most frequently work and sponsor legislation with, especially when it comes to bipartisan-sponsored bills.

Working across party lines is crucial for legislative victories, and having a sense of where there may be inroads to demonstrating the broad appeal of your advocacy agenda can be tremendously important in the advocacy process.

## LEVERAGING LEGISLATIVE INFLUENCE & MESSAGING

Champions are positioned to serve as messengers of what you feel other policymakers need to know by way of drafting legislation. In legislative language that aligns with CTIPP's initiatives, for example, we often see definitions for ideas like "trauma-informed care" and similar key terms to establish a precedential definition for these concepts that shape future efforts.

Even if the specific piece of legislation using, defining, and suggesting the implementation of these relevant terms does not make its way onto the Governor's or President's desk during the immediate legislative session, introducing these concepts through legislative language marks profound progress and is something to celebrate. In such instances, it can be useful to convey your gratitude and support to those who are bringing such language and considerations to the forefront.

Champions can also elevate your message to have a substantial impact by speaking out at events, to their colleagues, in the news media, and on social media.

As decision-makers and others with influence become aware of and curious about the science and the evidence behind trauma-informed, community-led, prevention-oriented healing-centered, and resilience-building approaches based on engagement with legislative champions, advocate networks educating and activating around such concepts are more likely to be successful in reaching those who otherwise may not be as receptive to the solutions proposed.

## ENGAGING THE PUBLIC IN UNIQUE VENUES

There are many platforms, events, and settings that champions may have special access to, such as:

- Rallies
- Town halls
- Community engagements
- Press releases
- Media appearances
- Hearings
- Panels



- **Dear Colleague letters** are letters through which policymakers announce and provide support for their policy positions with the intent to rally their colleagues around working together to address a particular issue with a certain policy solution
  - Calls to action in Dear Colleague letters often entail activities such as inviting colleagues to co-sponsor a bill the author is introducing or has already introduced, to vote in favor of a bill during a committee hearing or a floor vote, or to generally raise awareness and support for the issue and solution
- **Briefings** provide opportunities for legislators and their staff to deepen their knowledge related to your issue and solution
  - Typically held by an organization or coalition and sponsored by one or more policymakers
  - Often intend to gain support to advance a particular policy proposal
  - May include a panel of experts, people with lived experience, or other selected speakers who are tasked with providing a balanced presentation about the topic under discussion
- **Events** hosted by champions has the potential to elevate your issue at the local, national, and even international levels, expanding your advocacy reach to diverse audiences



Different acts may reach different audiences and have different impacts. For instance, rallies, town halls, and community engagements may specifically increase local awareness and thus build collective capacity and interest in supporting policies that do get enacted. On the other hand, Dear Colleague Letters, briefings, and hearings may target your champions' colleagues, thus increasing the chances of getting certain policies signed into law.

## Supporting Champion Development

It is incumbent upon advocates, activists, and partners in change to provide support to and maintain strong, trust-based ties with champions. Below are some key strategies to effectively support and partner with champions to advance your advocacy agenda.

### ASK HOW YOU CAN BE OF SERVICE

It is important to recognize that policymakers, with their deep understanding of the legislative landscape, are the experts of their setting. They are well-positioned to identify what is needed (and what is not advisable) to move your advocacy agenda forward.

You can signal your willingness to help achieve mutual goals by asking your champions, “How can I best support you?” This simple question can open the door to advocates, activists, and partners in change being given meaningful roles to play in advancing change.

For instance, champions may share that they have arranged for ten of their colleagues from various districts across the nation, with equal composition of Republicans and Democrats, to host town hall meetings on a piece of federal legislation in their communities, and recruit you to tap into your network to help identify constituents who can bring questions regarding the advocacy agenda to the public conversation in any or all of the cities their colleagues represent.

Another possibility, among many, is that champions may ask you to recruit people to testify on behalf of a particular piece of legislation or ask you to testify yourself. This is where you may want to consider the storytelling framework discussed later in this resource to inform your presentation of testimony to inspire policymakers to act.

## BE RELIABLE & RESPONSIVE

Even if you are not able to commit yourself to taking action on some of what champions ask of you, it is important to at the very least acknowledge and respond to any and all requests to speak out about your issue to keep your relationships with champions healthy and strong.

It also helps to be proactive in being in touch with your Champions. That may include sending information about new research or emerging best practices related to your issue or solution as you stumble upon them, or perhaps sharing developments either from the media or from communities that have implemented similar changes to what your shared advocacy agenda proposes to strengthen the case for implementation in your community or state.

Your champions may also enlist you to support the creation of materials that they intend to circulate among their own networks, such as a one-pager, an infographic, or a similar item.

If this is in your wheelhouse, this can be mutually beneficial in that it can increase understanding around and support for the advocacy agenda, as well as because it will help build your power and reputation as a leader in advocacy efforts related to your target issue and solution.

These are just a few examples of how you can work with champions and their staff to create meaningful, sustainable relationships that, in turn, contribute to meaningful, sustainable policy change.

## NOTICE & HONOR WHEN CHAMPIONS ACT

It is important to recognize and publicly acknowledge champions for dedicating their time, energy, and passion to advancing your advocacy agenda. Some organizations and coalitions have created awards to give to legislators who go above and beyond and achieve actions that contribute mightily to advancing change. This is one of the many areas where tracking developments and staying attuned to champion activity can be helpful.

Remember, policymakers are accustomed to receiving negative attention and criticism, so demonstrating genuine appreciation for what they are doing well and uplifting their positive contributions through a solution-focused lens can strengthen your relationship as well as keep their energy focused toward doing more good work aligned with your advocacy agenda.

## MAKE MUTUAL CONNECTIONS

It is important to think bidirectionally and through a lens of reciprocity when it comes to building partnerships with champions. Seeking out opportunities to connect your champions with your existing allies and resources that can benefit their work, as well as seizing opportunities to tap into their networks can expand your influence and bolster your power.

This may look like a champion policymaker connecting you with an allied advocacy organization that they have heard from, who you may be able to join forces with. Alternatively, it may also look like you introducing your champions to people with lived experiences in your advocacy network so their voices are directly informing policy change.

Getting creative about where these connections happen is useful as well. For example, since you already have relationships with these champions by the time you are supporting these connections, you may be able to invite policymakers to visit community-based organizations that are shining examples of the work you want to see more of with the intent to further garner their support and enthusiasm to advance your advocacy agenda.

For example, you might seek to gain support for more state-wide initiatives by giving your legislative champions a tour of a school that has become a model for its trauma-responsive procedures, or by inviting students and families from the school to speak with your champions about the impacts that these trauma-informed changes have had on their lives.

Another example may be holding a community roundtable-type event and inviting the attendance of champions and their colleagues, enabling engagement directly between policymakers and those who are most impacted by the actions that occur in the halls of the legislature.

There are myriad opportunities to work with one another to support advancement toward mutual goals and hopes for the future, and these connections have the potential to broaden support networks and deepen champions' understandings of the issues at hand as well as what constituents really want to see happen to address them.

## The Power of Partnership in the Policy Process: Final Thoughts

In our experience, fostering constituent engagement to cultivate robust relationships with policymakers is a potent strategy to reach a wide array of decision-makers crucial to cultivate collective action toward systemic and structural change.

There are myriad pressing problems and salient solutions that align with our shared vision of a preferred future, characterized by policies that are designed, implemented, and evaluated through a trauma-informed lens.

Working collaboratively with policymakers helps us to issue a clarion call to advance trauma-informed, resilience-building, prevention-oriented, community-led, and healing-centered approaches, ultimately helping to usher in a more resilient, more equitable, and healthier future for all.



# Chapter 7: Story-Telling for Advocacy

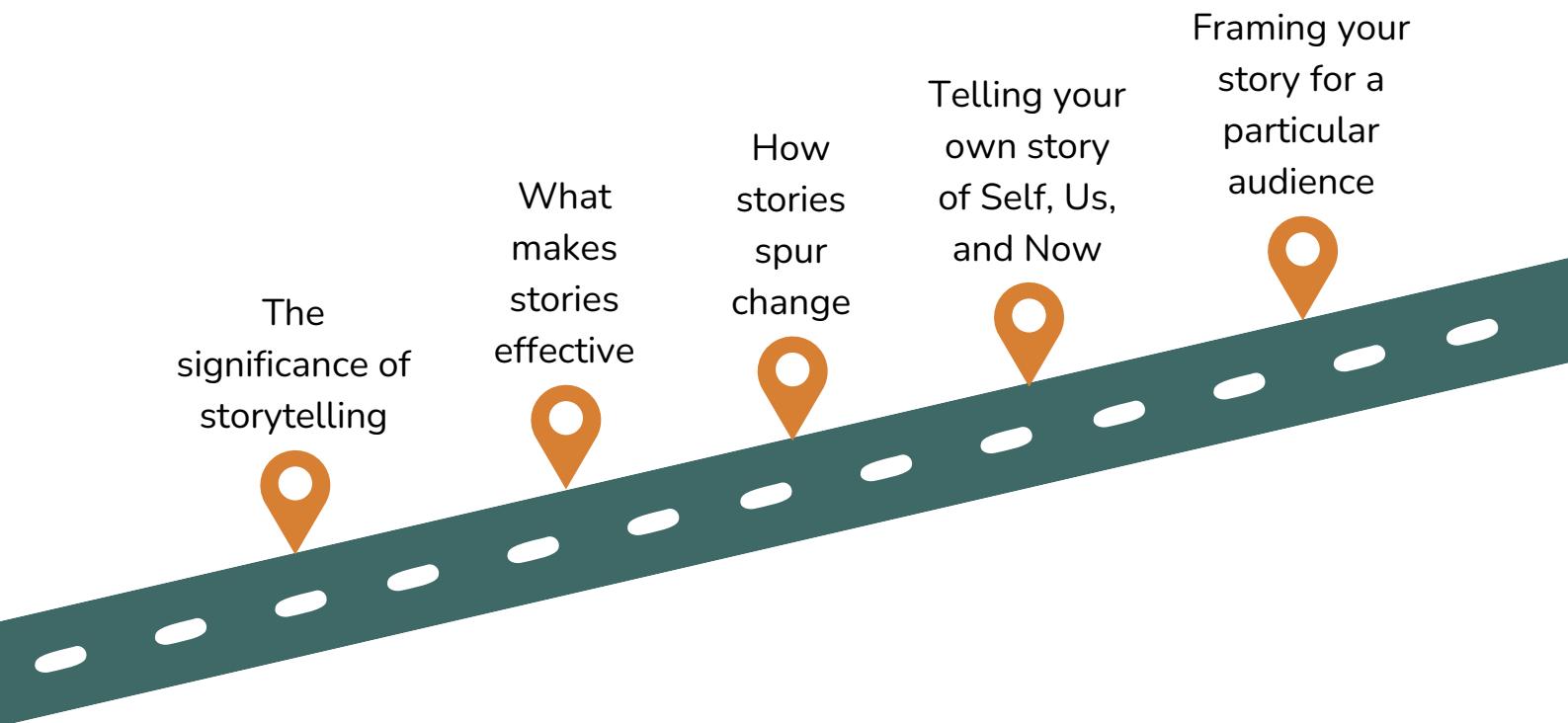
Resources, PowerPoint, Video, Reflection Questions, and More!



*The world is shaped by two things: stories told and the memories they leave behind.*

- Vera Nazarian

# What You Can Expect in This Chapter



In this chapter, we hope to highlight the transformative power storytelling in advocacy work, as well as provide information on constructing and framing a compelling personal narrative that supports each of us telling our stories in a way that spurs action among those who hear us tell them.



## Reflection Point

Before diving more deeply into this chapter, we invite you to take a moment to pause and consider what you think of when you think about stories and storytelling in general.

For some people, parables about life and its many lessons that have been passed on orally through the generations may come to mind first.

Others may initially conjure more fantastical thoughts and images, such as fairy tales that involve slaying dragons or epic voyages.

Others yet may think of “found” stories, like those that we learn about when we uncover and translate hieroglyphics or find journals that serve as time capsules illuminating past eras in our history.

There is a great range of unique responses that may come to mind, and that is because each of us connects with what stories and storytelling mean to us based on how stories have shaped each of us throughout our lives.

While how we think about and experience stories may look different from person to person, stories themselves are universal to us as humans. In fact, our brains are actually wired to remember, experience, and connect with stories.

It is through story that we explore ourselves and the world around us such that we learn about and develop our own beliefs, values, and identities.



## Reflection Point (continued)

This process plays a significant role in guiding us to make principled choices in alignment with those aspects of ourselves as individuals, as communities, as nations, and as a larger world.

We are all storytellers each day with our loved ones, our colleagues, and others we encounter, so it is a natural fit to bring this mutual manner of meaning-making to our advocacy efforts, too. It is precisely because stories are so powerful and universal that storytelling is considered one of the longest enduring and most effective tools to effect change in the policy space and beyond.

Indeed, narrative and storytelling approaches are more effective than approaches that are exclusively data-focused when seeking to reach policy- and decision-makers. This is another area where a “both/and” rather than an “either/or” approach is useful to consider.

As other chapters of this resource address, using data effectively is an important part of the full picture as well. After all, there are many people who can tell a convincing story that pulls on one’s heartstrings, yet to loosen the purse strings, it generally takes a compelling story and the inclusion of relevant data behind it to motivate folx to act.

As you move through this chapter, we encourage you to consider where you can augment and strengthen your data-based and evidence-informed case for change using storytelling to formulate a holistic, impactful pitch that will grow your power and advance your advocacy agenda.

# The Art of Storytelling

In thinking about storytelling through a trauma-informed lens, creating avenues for people and communities who have been impacted by trauma to use storytelling to invoke a voice of resistance to injustice, reclaim their right to have a say about what happens in their lives, and speak truth to power honors diverse lived experience as an important source of wisdom to inform change, speaking to the guiding trauma-informed principle of voice, choice, and empowerment.

The act of storytelling is itself often described as an important part of healing from trauma. Creating a coherent and integrated narrative of one's lived experiences can facilitate a meaning-making process, and the positive impacts of this are often amplified when those stories serve to contribute to the greater good by informing systemic and structural transformation.

In addition to being linked to experiences of post-traumatic growth, people with lived experience sharing their stories also can help restore a sense of hope and possibility among the others who have similar stories to share, creating a cascading healing effect among those whose hearts and minds are engaged in the process.

Providing a platform for the voluntary sharing of a substantial number of these stories also has the power to highlight structural shortcomings, while also illuminating the strength and resiliency embedded in the creative solutions people devised to survive in spite of the lack of support from systems and institutions.

There are benefits abound to mastering the art of storytelling in trauma-informed advocacy work!

## Why Storytelling?

There are many reasons why stories make such an impact and are an integral aspect of the advocacy process. Understanding the “why” behind the connections that stories help us make is crucial for crafting narratives that resonate deeply and drive action forward. Some of the many reasons that stories are so effective in advocacy work are explored below.

### STORIES ARE HOW WE AS HUMANS “DO” LEARNING

Storytelling in an advocacy context mobilizes the innate human inclination towards learning through stories, which have historically been a primary vehicle for generating understanding and meaning. Aligning messaging with the audience’s natural learning processes can create a more profound and resonant experience and connection between storyteller and witness.

## STORIES VIVIDLY ANSWER THE QUESTION OF “WHY”

Stories are powerfully effective to illuminate:

- Why your advocacy target ought to care about the issue
- Why the work you are doing matters
- Why your audience ought to value the solution you are proposing above other potential pathways forward
- Why the pathway of change implementation that you propose makes sense to achieve the established goals

## STORIES ARTICULATE OUR SHARED VALUES

Stories highlight shared values and help us join in action to enliven and achieve our mutual best hopes together. The commonalities found in our stories can point at once to collective struggles as well as collective paths to healing, liberation, and growth that align with your advocacy agenda.

## STORIES CUT THROUGH THE NOISE OF COMPETING DEMANDS

Stories give voice and enhanced power to a specific narrative that can help folx see things through a new lens. There are many issues and concerns that people are focused on when it comes to solving seemingly intractable issues like preventing and healing trauma, especially as we collectively continue to navigate a highly unpredictable and stressful time in the world.

Harnessing the power of compelling storytelling can help groups of people feel connected and coalesce around a particular solution from the many options available to them and, in the context of trauma-informed policy, can help the audience make connections that may not have been as clearly visible without connecting these dots through story.

## STORIES ENGAGE BOTH THE HEAD & THE HEART

If prompted to share what brought us to this advocacy work, most of us likely would not begin our stories by rattling off empirical facts or listing statistics as the focus of why we began working toward trauma-informed change.

Although those facts and statistics may be important plot points in the story we tell, we are more likely to share, for instance, that we have arrived at this work because of our diverse lived experiences, or because of our desire to make change in alignment with our deeply-held beliefs, such as the capacity to heal, fairness, resilience, equity, preventing harm, and other core values that drive the broader movement.

Despite the myths around individualism and the process of human decision-making that our society often conveys, emotions play a significant role in driving behavior – oftentimes more than logic does!

Emotions are a part of being human, and in our advocacy work, leaning into our natural inclination to connect through emotions can help us make the case for our policy solution.

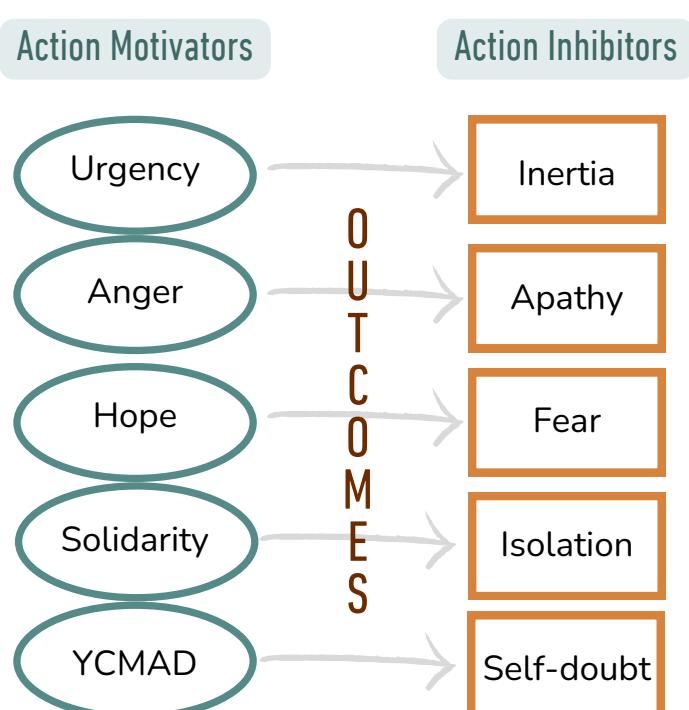
Further, authentically invoking empathy through storytelling enhances our power to change hearts and minds, including facilitating working across difference and disagreement to find common goals, values, and visions, which is critical to advancing any advocacy agenda.

## HOW STORIES SPUR CHANGE

To reiterate a key point made throughout this resource: one of the major reasons that the status quo remains the status quo is because change at the structural and institutional levels often feels threatening to those who *already* possess high levels of power, which means advocating for major change can be met with some ambivalence and even resistance.

The reactions that many potential advocates, activists, and partners in change exhibit that inhibit action all are rooted in good reasons that make a great deal of sense,

and understanding inaction through a trauma-informed lens, and understanding how action motivators can overcome these inhibitors is important to meeting them where they are at.



This image, from Marshall Ganz's work, depicts some ways storytelling inspires action that has the power to overcome barriers that often emerge in advocacy work, some of which (among others) are explored earlier in this resource. Note that "Y.C.M.A.D." stands for "You Can Make a Difference."

It is vital to consider how to break through the **inertia**, which can also be described as unwillingness to join to advocate for change. Inertia often arises not because people do not care but because we as humans are creatures of habit, and maintaining the status quo often feels safer, more predictable, and easier than the uncertainty of change.

**Urgency** can serve as an antidote to inertia. By conveying the pressing need for immediate change, advocates, activists, and partners in change can inspire people to turn toward instead of away from the discomfort advocacy work can bring about and take steps to join in action toward change in ways that fit for them.

**Apathy** can also represent a protective response to feelings overwhelmed or disconnected from taking action. People may feel that their efforts will not – or cannot – really shift the broader landscape.

Instilling righteous, principled **anger** rooted in love and compassion for humankind as well as systemic and institutional accountability can overcome apathy. Leaning into this emotion can energize potential partners in change, transforming passive disinterest into active involvement.

**Fear** is a natural and understandable response to uncertainty and the unknown, and often leads to withdrawal from civic participation. **Hope** can be a powerful counter to fear, particularly when attempts to instill hope are not "toxically positive" and instead paint a picture of a realistic, attainable preferred vision of the future.

Emphasizing progress and process over perfection in painting this hopeful picture can disarm fear because, when people feel more hopeful, they are more able to access the parts of their brains that help them face challenges and uncertainties with creativity and resilience.

**Isolation** can bring people to feel as if their struggles are unique and insurmountable, or that they are the only ones impacted by the conditions. Secrecy and isolation often breed shame and a sense of helplessness.

It is important to realize that the way our systems and structures work – along with the people who hold power within them – often intentionally and/or implicitly seek to perpetuate isolation to prevent collective action from disrupting existing dynamics.

**Solidarity** and mutuality work together to bridge this gap. When people see themselves as belonging to a movement that matters to them, it helps illuminate that none of us are alone in our struggles or do not need to be alone in this world.

**Self-doubt** can inhibit action by making people question their capabilities in making an impact. This is often compounded by past experiences of criticism, judgment, and perceived failure, especially for people who have experienced trauma and adversity.

The belief that “**You Can Make A Difference**” is crucial in overcoming self-doubt. Stories that shine a spotlight on personal and collective triumphs can inspire a sense of confidence, competence, and self-efficacy.

One feeling arguably all of us that do this work are familiar with is the tension of noticing a contradiction between where the world is, and where we wish it was or believe it ought to be.

We can mobilize our shared humanity by noticing and highlighting these discrepancies by interweaving action motivators into the stories we tell, which can create the emotional tension and sense of empowerment.



# What We Know Works: Considerations for Impactful Storytelling

The ability of stories to connect deeply with human emotions and experiences. In the context of advocacy, stories are most effective when they are:

## ENGAGING & CONNECTIVE

Stories are generally most effective when they gain and retain the attention and interest of the target audience. A key to fostering connection to your stories is to leverage alignment with your target audience's fundamental beliefs to connect around common ground, which provides inroads to influence their more malleable beliefs in favor of your proposed solution.

By understanding and speaking to what matters most to your target audience, you can create a story that not only captures their attention but also deeply resonates with their values and priorities, which can transform passive listeners into champions.

Growing this movement is about more than just enumerating facts, and how you tell your story to reach a broader audience to advance trauma-informed change is as important as the details that make up the story itself.

## FACTUAL, AUTHENTIC & HONEST

Fabricating information, or taking on someone's story and claiming it as your own, can damage larger advocacy efforts and cause harm to communities and groups you may intend to support.

Remember – even when harm is *unintentional*, it is still harm and is thus still hurtful. Authenticity and honesty are crucial in storytelling.

Audiences can often sense when a story is genuine and when it is not, and being honest helps build trust and credibility. By sharing real experiences and real emotions, you can create a powerful narrative that inspires others to join you in action toward change.

## PRESENTED IN ACCESSIBLE, INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

For broad audiences to be able to connect with your story, it is important to ensure that the language you use is accessible. Professional, polished communication does not necessarily indicate academic communication, and in fact utilizing jargon, technical terms, or complex language can actually alienate listeners and make them less likely to act.

As Ira Glass, a prolific radio broadcast personality with NPR, has famously said: “Everything is more compelling when you talk like a human being, when you talk like yourself.”

Using clear language that is concrete instead of abstract, and with accessibility and inclusion in mind helps ensure that your message is understood by your audience members, regardless of their backgrounds or expertise levels.

## SUCCINCT, YET IMPACTFUL

Most folk you are likely to target in your advocacy efforts are quite busy and may be mired by a number of internal or external competing demands for attention, so distilling to key points and thinking about timing does matter. Remember, though: being concise does not mean sacrificing depth or impact.

By focusing on the most compelling aspects of your story and presenting them succinctly, you can make a strong impression without overwhelming or otherwise losing connection with your audience.

Further, especially with policymakers who have limited time and many issues to address, this approach respects their schedule and increases the likelihood that they will both remember and act on the message and “ask” embedded in your story.

## FRAMED AROUND SALIENT POLICY ISSUES

The policy landscape often provides the conditions and context through which other change efforts are able to come to fruition or are blocked from consideration. Accordingly, it makes sense to consider this context when working with decision-makers.

By framing your story around relevant policy issues, you will more effectively connect your personal narrative to the systemic and structural solutions you seek to advance. This alignment helps to demonstrate the real-world implications of policy decisions and makes a compelling case for why specific changes are necessary and beneficial.

## TIED MORE PREDOMINANTLY TO A HERO INSTEAD OF A VILLIAN

Focusing on heroism rather than villainy creates a positive, empowering narrative that can inspire proactive and constructive actions in support of change. This approach invites your target audience to conceive themselves as the hero of the story, fostering a sense of agency and optimism about their ability to make a difference and thus increasing the likelihood that they will notice and seize opportunities to support change.

Further, staying anchored in a solution-focused, rather than problem-focused, approach aligns with the principles of trauma-informed advocacy, which emphasize strength, resilience, capacity, and possibility.

## EVOKE PARTICIPATION FROM THE AUDIENCE

Stories move the needle of public opinion and inspire others to act, especially when they seek to engage both the head and the heart. Presenting a call to action so your advocacy targets know what is expected of them and how they can make a difference is powerful to advance your agenda. How you invite participation and engage action can be almost anything depending on your role, your goal, and your audience.

A clear and compelling call to action is essential, and it is useful to consider how to clearly outline how your audience can get involved, support your cause, and make a difference. This both helps to advance your advocacy goals and builds a sense of community and shared purpose among advocates, activists, and partners in change.

## CONSIDERATIONS TO INFORM STORYTELLING: NOTICING WHAT IS ALREADY HAPPENING

If you do not yet have an advocacy target yet are seeking to construct your story, it can be helpful to consider actions already underway and resources already in place to define who you might want to speak with about advancing your proposed solution. This process also involves getting a sense of who is already enthusiastically supporting (and maybe even already doing) some of this work, along with those who have passively expressed support or interest.

Whether you are creating messaging for those who already have demonstrated commitment and alignment or you are crafting a narrative to reach those who have formally expressed opposition, it is important to consider what you hope to accomplish with each audience member you are targeting, and to think about how to frame your story based on what you know about them.

This means that, in addition to aligning your storytelling with the shared values and beliefs your target audience members hold when doing your research, it also helps to understand the thinking of those who may oppose your ideas. This will help you anticipate their arguments and frame your story accordingly.

There is evidence suggesting that stories can make us less defensive and increase our openness to new ways of knowing, being, thinking, doing, and relating. Considering both potential points of alignment as well as potential oppositional arguments can help you strategize around changing hearts and minds more effectively.

Some of the work of framing your story is contingent upon what you envision your advocacy role being and what your best hopes are. You might, for instance, believe you are well-positioned to ask leaders of a large grassroots group with similar goals or values to your advocacy agenda to invite their members to join an event you are organizing.

Or, as another example, you may be looking at working with local government authorities to ensure aligned policy changes that are already underway are implemented sustainably through a trauma-informed lens.

Perhaps you decide you want to meet with your legislators and their staff to encourage them to be a champion for your policy agenda and use their positioning to get other lawmakers on board to increase momentum and support for the issue and your proposed solution within the structures of government itself.

The potential avenues are myriad, and as you take a look at what is already happening and consider what changes you want to see as well as how you want them to come about, you likely will find it easier to identify the most promising and important advocacy targets and form a coherent narrative to help you advance the power your vision of a preferred future carries.



## KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

Once you have selected your advocacy target(s) based on what you are noticing already happening in a more general sense, digging a little deeper to truly become acquainted with your targets will be a tremendous help when crafting your story.

To reiterate a key point: storytelling can profoundly reinforce the perspective your audience has, or alternatively can help you get them to step outside of themselves and consider a new perspective. The more you know about where someone is coming from, the more powerful the story you craft will likely be. A useful starting point is to seek information about what is important to them so you can attune yourself to what they value and find points of alignment.

For instance, if you can find information on aspects such as how often your chosen audience has written or supported propositions that relate to topics relevant to addressing, healing, and preventing trauma, along with what experiences may have shaped their journey to being in the change-making role that they are in, you can gain understanding of what motivates them.

Sometimes, you might also find that, for your target audience, it is not necessarily you who is the most appropriate messenger of a story you believe needs to be told. Consider who your specific audience may need to hear the story from in order to be swayed, along with who has true ownership of the story you recognize as important to uplift to generate awareness and action.

That is to say: some stories are not necessarily yours to tell in the first place, and bolstering your message by uplifting and amplifying voices of diverse lived experience in telling their own stories as they wish to is a meaningful way to engage in trauma-informed advocacy. If you yourself are a seasoned advocate, you may even be able to take on the role of coach or mentor, perhaps sharing the storytelling framework we explore together in this chapter to help folx to construct their own coherent narrative to contribute to change, should they choose to do so.

## THE STRUCTURE OF A STORY



Challenge



Choice



Outcome

The sequence you see in the accompanying image – challenge, choice, outcome – describes the general structure of a story through the framework we will explore together.

## CHALLENGE

An effective story begins with highlighting a *challenge* to the status quo. The challenge is generally something that is unexpected or unknown. This part of the story is something that resonates with us all. That is, by virtue of being human, we each have some level of familiarity with the experience of the challenge of having to make a choice when confronting uncertainty.

While the details about challenges will differ from individual to individual and from group to group, grounding this storytelling framework by beginning with considering a challenge speaks to a universality of the human experience.

## CHOICE

Upon being confronted with a challenge, we are presented with a choice regarding which action (of the many potential actions) we may take to address the challenge.

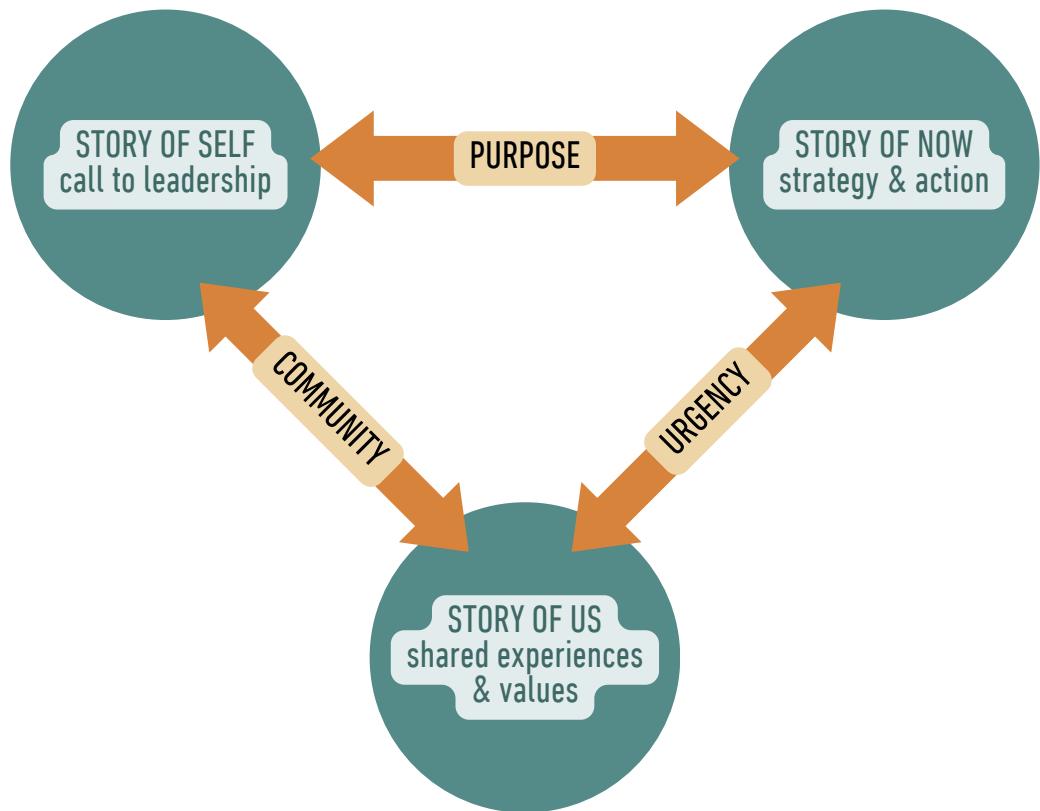
Choice points available to us in these tense and uncertain circumstances, where incongruity exists between the world as it is and the world we want, presents us with the opportunity to choose to disrupt the status quo and act in alignment with our values, and to support our broader society in shifting toward that alignment as well. This is what it means, in essence, to be an agent of change in our advocacy work – we are making choices that may “go against the grain,” so to speak, for the greater good.

## OUTCOME

The choice we make inevitably yields an *outcome*. This outcome is essentially what we have all learned in the process of making and acting upon our choice. This helps us identify and connect with the meaning and moral of the story. By framing the story in a way that generates emotional resonance, we enable our audience to empathically identify with the protagonist in the story. To this point, they not only hear about someone else’s act of courage to make a values-aligned choice in the face of a challenge, but they also stand inspired to act themselves.

Through this process, the people with whom you share your story begin to feel significant investment in the outcome. It is at this point where they begin to envision what their own storylines in furthering your proposed solution to address the challenge could look like, thus informing their choices for moving forward. It is through this story structure that the action motivators mentioned before spur change. The story encourages audience members to consider their own core values, and how each of us, when confronted with a challenge, can actively choose hope over fear, solidarity over isolation and alienation, and self-efficacy over self-doubt as agents of change.

# Developing an Effective Public Narrative: The Story of Self, Us & Now



The storytelling framework in the image depicted here is excerpted from [the work of Marshall Ganz](#) from Harvard's [John F. Kennedy School of Government](#). Among other meaningful contributions, Ganz played an instrumental role shaping Barack Obama's successful grassroots organizing model, rooted in this public narrative framework.

Before getting into the details of this model, it is important to acknowledge that your story is your story, and no one knows your story better than you.

We invite you to keep in mind that the content in this section is not about changing any of the key details of your story; rather, it is about framing your authentic, true story immersively to have the greatest impact to motivate others to act in alignment with your advocacy efforts and goals based on what we have found works well in advocacy.

In short, this framework integrates the Choice-Challenge-Change structure to help you, the storyteller, convey the values that called you to this work, the values that unite us all in action, and the urgent challenges to those values that we must join together to overcome. This is called A Story of Self, Us, and Now.



SELF

# Story of SELF

- What has called you to join in this action? What has driven you to want to create change?
- What called you to motivate others to join you in action?
- How did you get the courage/hope to act?
- What values move you to act? When did these become important to you? How might these values inspire others to act similarly?
- What did the outcome of your own actions teach you?

*"We all have stories of pain, or we wouldn't think the world needs changing.*

*We all have stories of hope, or we wouldn't think we could change it."*

-Marshall Ganz

At a high level, the *Story of Self* involves you describing the events, challenges, and choices that led you to take action toward change to achieve your hoped-for outcome.

Each of us has a unique journey of learning how to be a full human being who acts in alignment with our values. That story for each of us is multidimensional and multifaceted, and likely carries many details that feel deeply important to include in order to do our journey justice. Having said that, in advocacy work, we often have a limited time window to engage others through storytelling. Accordingly, it is useful for us to give thought to which elements feel the most vital to include when sharing our stories.

Considering what you have learned about your target audience can help you determine what elements of your story make sense to emphasize to most effectively enhance their motivation to join you in action. Perhaps, for instance, you will find that there is significant overlap in what brought you to the work and important lived experiences your advocacy target has spoken about or supported in their past work. It is powerful to connect around these shared convictions as well as to gain your audience's interest and investment by using The Story of Self.

The Story of Self is shaped around revisiting the choice points before us during key moments in our lives where, in the face of uncertainty and challenge, we feel called to act in alignment with our deeply-held beliefs. We are modeling to policymakers and society at large that each of us has the capacity to meaningfully contribute to bringing about meaningful change.

To formulate this part of your story, it is useful to consider key aspects of your own advocacy journey, as indicated in the prompts explored in the callout box.



# Story of US

- What values do you share with your targeted audience? What can you share that captures this?
- What challenges have impacted your audience? How have these been addressed?
- What change does the audience hope for? Why?
- What choice points exist for us to act together to make change in alignment with our shared values in response to collective challenges we face?
- To what values, experiences, and/or aspirations of your audience will you appeal when you call on them to join you in action?

answers the question:  
**WHY IS MY CAUSE YOUR CAUSE, TOO?**

The *Story of Us* captures the shared values, experiences, and capacities of folx joining together in action toward change.

In essence, the goal of this part of the story is to create a sense of unity, togetherness, and focus on the shared values of your audience, whoever they may be.

Highlighting specific choice points where people are already coming together to shape our world in a trauma-informed way will resonate with the audience members, especially when presented alongside shared values, describing challenges to collectively overcome, and uplifting moments of triumph and resilience.

Importantly, the identity/identities of the “us” in your storytelling approach will change along with your target audience. Here, you are inviting persuasive reflection around “why my cause is your cause, too.”

This means that the choices and challenges that you uplift in this part of the story are the ones that the community has faced, which inevitably will shape the arc of the narrative you share.

Some considerations to help inform this aspect of your advocacy storytelling are highlighted in the corresponding callout box.



# Story of NOW

- What urgent challenge do you hope to inspire others to take action on?
- What choice will you call on your audience to make to successfully meet the challenge?
- Why is now the time to organize to make this change?
- What is the risk, or what would the future look like if the change isn't made?
- What will the future look like when the change is made? What is the "big picture" impact?
- How can they begin now, at this moment?

*"Our goal is to meet this challenge, seize this hope, and turn it into concrete action."*

-Marshall Ganz

The *Story of Now* outlines the *current* challenge your audience faces, framed in a way that presents a vision for change and a potential outcome that is within reach – *if, and only if*, your advocacy targets join the effort.

This part of the story illuminates the urgency of the issue at hand in the current context, inviting advocates, activists, and partners in change to demonstrate clearly how the world out there is not as it “should” be based on common values among themselves and their chosen audience(s).

Here, we convey that we are at a key choice point, and that the choice your audience makes in this moment matters tremendously. The intention is to summon your audience to choose to take concrete to bring about change aligned with the outcome to which you aspire. This connects to you making your “ask” based on demonstrating the urgency of acting in the here and now.

Some considerations to help you formulate this part of the story are included in the callout box.

# Putting It All Together: The Story of Self, Us & Now

In sum, this framework when each component is integrated sounds like: this is the challenge we are facing, this what called me to become involved, this is how our fellow community members and citizens are impacted, this is the “why” of the story’s relevance to you (the audience), and here is a solution for action grounded in a realistic sense of hope to make a meaningful impact and attain a particular outcome, which we can only accomplish *with your help*.

By weaving together our unique stories of Self, Us, and Now, you will be well-equipped to construct a compelling and inspirational narrative in which your targets can begin to see themselves as the hero characters of the story, which, ultimately will move them to act courageously to move the needle of change.

We invite you to consider utilizing our [Public Narrative Planning Tool](#) as you begin to map out how you might distill your story down to the most powerful points to effect change based on what we know works in storytelling for advocacy.

One important acknowledgment to make as you consider constructing your own Story of Self, Us, and Now is that this is merely one framework for storytelling that we have found to be effective and a helpful way to think about impactful advocacy. If, upon reflection and practice applying this framework, this approach does not fit for you, please know there are many ways you can choose to tell your story.

## The Story Continues

Another important acknowledgment is that it is likely that your story will naturally evolve over time. In our experience at CTIPP, it can be useful to have a consistent, core plot that can be applied across the board with space to make additions and changes as needed based on who comprises your audience.

In the current context of the here and now, with each moment that passes, novel needs are emerging, existing needs are compounding, understandings about what helps and what hurts are evolving, and the sociopolitical landscape is shifting.

As your Story of Now changes, so, too, may your framing of the Challenge, Choice, and Outcome in the Story of Self and/or the Story of Us. We invite you to consider any iteration of your story to be a work in progress, and to take time over the process of your advocacy work to revisit and revise based on lessons learned and what is happening in the present moment.

# PUBLIC NARRATIVE PLANNING

Storytelling is a powerful advocacy tool that can spur others to action. Marshall Ganz's public narrative framework engages both the head and the heart in an authentic, effective way. The following prompts are intended to help formulate a brief go-to story you can build on and customize as needed depending on your target audience.



## Considerations

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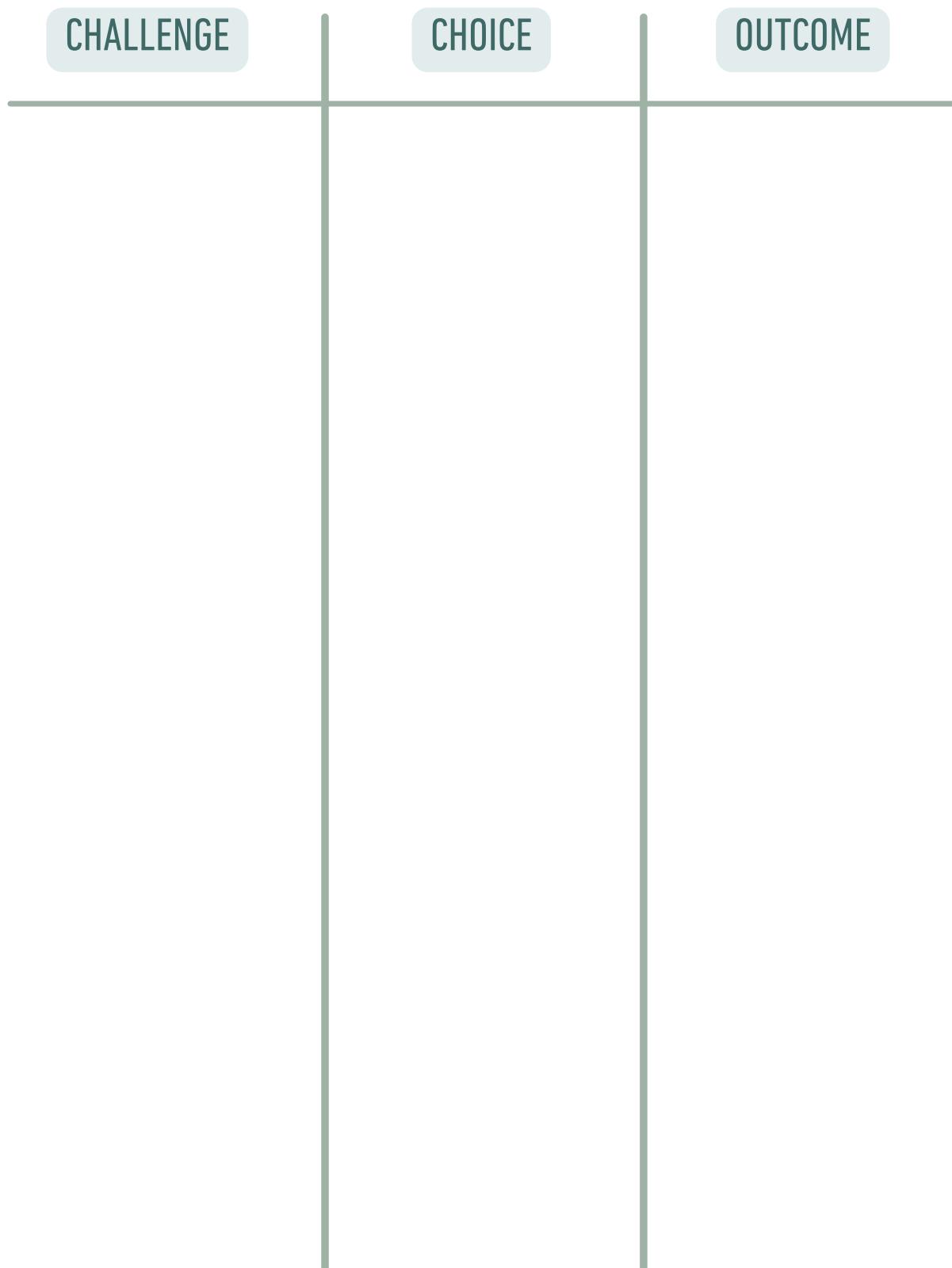
**STORY OF SELF:** What has called you to join in this action? What has driven you to want to create change? What values move you to act? How might these values inspire others to act similarly? How did you get the courage/hope to act? How can you motivate others to join you?

**STORY OF US:** What motivating values and/or experiences do you and your target audience share? What challenges have impacted your audience? What choice points exist which invite us to act? What makes your target audience poised to lead the charge to address this issue?

**STORY OF NOW:** What urgent challenge do you hope to inspire your target audience to take action on? Why is now the time to organize for this change? What is your vision of “successful” action? What would the future look like without the change? How can they begin now?

For more information or a more in-depth exploration of the dimensions of your Story of Self, Us, and Now, consider checking out Harvard's Public Narrative Participant guide.

# PUBLIC NARRATIVE PLANNING



## PUBLIC NARRATIVE PLANNING

**PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER:** Use this page to integrate all of aforementioned elements to craft your story:



## Reflection Point

Whether or not you pursue CTIPP's worksheets, activities, and informational resources, we invite you to take a moment to pause and reflect upon what in this chapter resonated with you.

Based on what was presented in this chapter, what might you consider integrating into how you tell your story the next time you are in a position to engage others in action toward change?

What opportunities to frame your story to the particular audiences you are considering targeting do you notice?

# Concluding Considerations

We at CTIPP fervently believe that making your story memorable and collaborating to amplify voices and stories of diverse lived experiences yearning to be heard is vital to support change toward a more compassionate, trauma-informed, and healing-centered world.

We also recognize that personal stories are precious and can be exploited, which can contribute to burnout and re-traumatization among advocates, activists, and partners in change.

We encourage you to be a strong advocate for protecting yourself and your energy as you find a balance of sharing that works for you, including being judicious about whether, how, and with whom you share your story.

Consistent with the African proverb stating that “if you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far, go together,” we have found collaborative strategies where groups of purpose-driven individuals and organizations join together in action tend to get more accomplished with less exertion and exhaustion than working alone.

You can be a driving force in the building that energy and momentum by harnessing and amplifying the unique and varied expertise found within compelling narratives from diverse voices as well as by engaging in effective storytelling about your own experiences that you feel called to uplift, whether it is to a policymaker or someone in the community you think might find value in joining your larger advocacy efforts.

Each of us has a role to play in advancing change, and it is our best hope that you emerge from this chapter with some ideas of how and where to exercise your vital voice to advance meaningful, sustainable change.



# Chapter 8: Meeting the Moment with a Trauma-Informed Approach

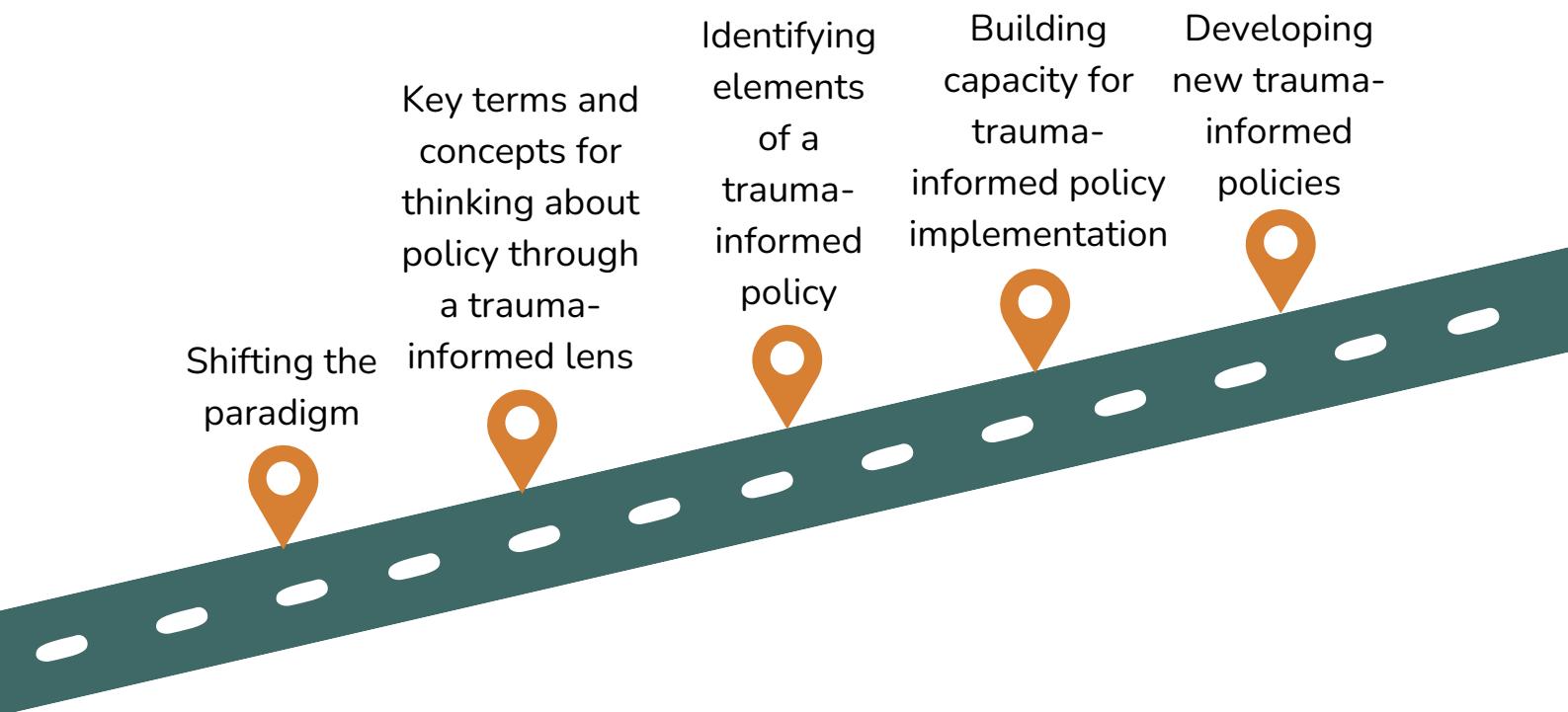
Resources, PowerPoint, Video, Reflection Questions, and More!



*Historical trauma is not just about what happened in the past. It's about what's still happening.*

– University of Minnesota

# What You Can Expect in This Chapter



This chapter covers core concepts related to the paradigm shift toward a trauma-informed approach, along with an overview of key considerations for thinking about policy through a trauma-informed lens.

This chapter also provides guidelines to support the creation, identification, and implementation of trauma-informed policy.

# Shifting the Paradigm

As discussed throughout this resource, many challenges that show up in our health, well-being, and connectedness to self, other, and the world are intertwined with experiencing trauma, and advocacy is a critical tool to build systems and structures with the resilience and capacity to heal previous hurts as well as to protect against further harm.

The influence of individual and collective experiences of trauma on our experiences and outcomes demand a trauma-informed approach to address and redress all that has happened (and all that continues to happen).

A trauma-informed approach invites us to shift the paradigm from asking “what’s wrong with...” to “what *happened* to...” and “what’s *strong* with...” a person, a group, an organization, a system, an institution, or any other place we might notice the impacts of trauma manifest.

Making this shift requires engaging in a long-term, digestive, and reflective process that evolves along with the context and conditions of the individual, group, organization, system, institution, or other entity that is targeted for change. Accordingly, the work of trauma-informed advocacy is unlikely to produce quick, dramatic accomplishments in the very-immediate future.

It is important to recognize that each step forward builds on the ones that came before it, ultimately compounding and cascading to make significant, meaningful progress toward the full integration of trauma-informed principles into the policies and practices across all contexts and communities that comprise our world.

Currently, in the United States, a host of policies at the federal, state, and local levels require change in order to truly reflect the wisdom and lessons of NEAR science has taught us about the causes and effects of childhood, adult, community, intergenerational, historical, cultural, racial, secondary, and other forms of individual, interpersonal, and collective trauma.

With a growing recognition of the pervasive impacts of trauma in the media, the halls in which laws are made, and our broader society, along with an increasingly robust body of research and wisdom helping us confirm what helps and what hurts, the link between trauma and many of our society’s most seemingly intractable, complex challenges occupies a more prominent place of public interest than at any time in history.

It is a uniquely ripe time to build on efforts to advance toward trauma-informed approaches that are already underway and to catalyze change in areas yet to be addressed both broadly and on smaller scales and promote a parallel transformation in social policy.

As CTIPP's policy reviews ([2022](#) and [2023](#)) confirm, there has been – and continues to be – meaningful action toward trauma-informed change in public policy. It is important to realize that the journey toward total trauma-informed transformation is still in its early stages, and that there is much work to be done as well as many equally valid ways to approach that work!

Indeed, there are many trailheads that you could choose to tread on in the trauma-informed policy space, each one leading to a multitude of opportunities to get involved, advocate for change, and make a difference in our world. These paths wind through various landscapes, each with its own set of challenges and potential for impact.

As we embark upon and walk alongside one another on this journey, our power is strongest when we remain guided by a deep understanding for and appreciation for the nature and impacts of trauma, and when we are equipped with a broad array of tools and skills to integrate the principles of a trauma-informed approach into our individual and collective ways of knowing, thinking, being, doing, and relating.

## Trauma: A High-Level Overview

Fundamental to making the paradigm shift toward a trauma-informed approach is to understand trauma and the profound ways it shapes our societies as well as the lived lives of the people living in those societies.

It is important to note that an exploration of trauma could easily fill a book in and of itself! This section of writing does not necessarily intend to take a deep dive into trauma as, for example, an instructional guide for professionals tasked with supporting trauma healing, recovery, and renegotiation might.

This section, rather, is intended to support advocates, activists, and partners in change who are seeking to build a solid foundational understanding of the nature, impacts, and dynamics of trauma as it operates in multiple levels of our society specifically to inform advocacy work.

We recognize that everyone who is engaging with this resource arrives at the material from a different place of learning and lived experience. It is our best hope that what is included in this section is rich enough to support you in feeling confident in your subject matter knowledge without being overwhelming or oversaturated with information beyond that which is of more universal use in trauma-informed advocacy.

## WHAT IS TRAUMA?

There are many definitions for and ways to conceptualize trauma, and the way we understand trauma is continually evolving.

To create a common framework for the purposes of this resource, CTIPP has selected the SAMHSA definition of trauma, often colloquially referred to as “The Three Es” of trauma. This conceptualization is widely used and does a sound job of honoring the individualized and contextualized nature of trauma, and emphasizes the myriad ways trauma may unfold across the life course.

Based on SAMHSA’s definition, trauma results from an **event**, a series of events, or a set of circumstances that is **experienced** as physically or emotionally harmful, overwhelming, or life-threatening, and which has lasting adverse **effects** on functioning as well as mental, physical, social, emotional, and/or spiritual well-being.

Below you will find some notable other ways to think about the scope and indelible impact of trauma, which may resonate more strongly or demonstrate more clearly how multifaceted and multidimensional experiences of trauma can be.

*“Our bodies have a form of knowledge that is different from our cognitive brains. This knowledge is typically experienced as a felt sense of constriction or expansion, pain or ease, energy or numbness. Often this knowledge is stored in our bodies as **wordless stories about what is safe and what is dangerous**. The body is where we live. It’s where we fear, hope, and react. It’s where we constrict and relax. And what the body most cares about are safety and survival. **When something happens to the body that is too much, too fast, or too soon—and we don’t get enough safety or regard—it overwhelms the body and can create trauma.**”*

Resmaa Menakem, [White-Body Supremacy as a Trauma Response](#)

- In his book, [My Grandmother’s Hands](#), Resmaa Menakem also describes trauma as: “The body’s protective responses to something it perceives as potentially dangerous.”

*“Trauma is an experience, series of experiences, and/or impacts from social conditions, that **break or betray our inherent need for safety, belonging, and dignity**. They are experiences that result in us having to vie between these inherent needs, often setting one against the other.”*

Staci Haines, [The Politics of Trauma: Somatics, Healing, and Social Justice](#)

*“Being traumatized means continuing to **organize your life as if the trauma were still going on – unchanged and immutable** – as every new encounter or event is contaminated by the past.”*

Bessel Van der Kolk, [The Body Keeps the Score](#)

*“Years ago, trauma was defined more by external events rather than the responses human beings have to those events. Psychological trauma **can happen to anyone when they perceive a situation as a threat and are unable to complete a satisfactory fight, flight, or freeze response**. The nervous system is designed to keep us psychologically intact when we perceive we cannot keep ourselves safe in a situation. However, **if we do not address the way in which our nervous and memory system categorized the event, the aftermath can be quite devastating.**”*

Peter Levine, interview on the [Higher Practice Podcast](#)

- Peter Levine also quite profoundly captures a conceptualization of trauma on the [Beyond Theory podcast](#), stating: “When bad things happen to us, our body reacts in very specific ways. **What happens in trauma is: our body doesn’t go back to where it was before, it stays in this stuck place.**”

*“It is apparent that the psyche of the community recognized the wounding of the environment, and that this awareness in turn was perceived as a wounding of the psyche. Harmony had become discord and the community’s unconscious perception was that the world was unfriendly and hostile. **The problems that were manifested and verbalized were merely symptoms of a deeper wound – the soul wound.**”*

**Eduardo Duran, Bonnie Duran, Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart, & Susan Yellow Horse-Davis, Healing the American Indian Soul Wound**

- Similarly, following colonization by the Spanish and Portuguese, Indigenous peoples of South America and Mesoamerica have used the term *susto* to describe what happens in trauma, translated directly as “fright paralysis” and “soul loss” (Arthur Rubel, Carl O’Nell, & Rolando Collado-Ardón, Susto: A Folk Illness). This also connects to the word “trauma” itself and its Greek origins, meaning “wound” or “hurt.”

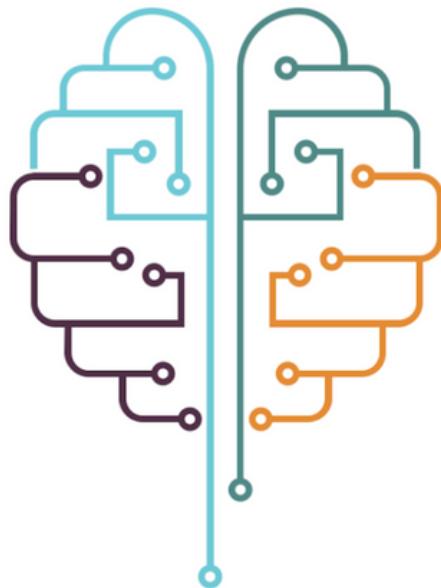
*“Any event that **overwhelm[s] the ordinary human adaptations to life.**”*

**Judith Herman, Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence –From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror**



# N.E.A.R. SCIENCE

Neuroscience | Epigenetics | Adverse Childhood Experiences | Resilience



CTIPP's work is grounded in contemporary key findings related to **Neuroscience, Epigenetics, Adverse Childhood Experiences, and Resilience** – together, referred to as NEAR science.

Emerging and evolving insights related to NEAR stand among the most significant public health discoveries of our time.

Below is a very brief and general overview of these concepts:

- Neuroscience is about understanding the nervous system's structure and function, exploring the dynamic and intricate interplay between brain processes and behavioral responses. A grounding in neuroscience is important for understanding how trauma can significantly influence neural pathways and subsequent experiences and outcomes.
- Epigenetics refers to the study of heritable changes in gene function, highlighting how environmental factors, including traumatic experiences, can influence gene expression, potentially impacting susceptibility to stress-related conditions across generations. A grounding in epigenetics demonstrates that the body and brain are always adapting and provides an evidence base for the intergenerational transmission of trauma as well as the hope of disrupting this vicious cycle to produce self-reinforcing virtuous cycles of resiliency and well-being across future generations.

- *Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)* encompass potentially traumatic events during the first 18 years of life that can profoundly impact neurobiological development and increase vulnerability to mental and physical health challenges throughout the lifespan. Recognizing, preventing, and addressing ACEs (along with increasing support for PACEs, or Protective/Positive And Compensatory Experiences) is fundamental to fostering resilience, mitigating the long-term effects of trauma, and supporting holistic well-being for all.
- *Resilience* is the dynamic process of adapting positively to adversity, involving the capacity to navigate difficulties, recover in the face of challenge, and maintain a sense of well-being. Resilience acknowledges strengths, resources, capacity, connectedness, and wisdom, promoting not only recovery but also enabling personal and collective recovery in the aftermath of trauma (which may or may not look like the same functionality that was present before trauma occurred). In the context of trauma-informed advocacy, it is important to note that resilience emerges at the individual and group levels, as well at more collective, systemic, and structural levels.

For a more in-depth overview of each the elements of NEAR, please visit [CTIPP's guide on Wisdom from the Fields of Neuroscience, Epigenetics, ACEs & Resilience \(NEAR Science\)](#).

It is important to recognize and convey to your target audience the ways that experiencing trauma and adversity – especially among those subjected to long-term collective trauma as well as to historical and/or ongoing oppression – exhibit a higher prevalence of adverse experiences and outcomes.

For those with legacies of genocide, colonization, and slavery in their history, this vulnerability remains disproportionately high even several generations after the original traumatic events occurred.

Being sure to give a full scope of the systemic and structural components of NEAR helps reorient policymakers toward a lens that acknowledges that solutions must not individualize, pathologize, or chastise that which is induced by the lack of institutional protections for the well-being of all.

This is a critical aspect of working together with policymakers to work together to address, repair, and prevent harm while supporting well-being for all.

## SOME KEY DEFINITIONS

Included below are some additional definitions and concepts that might be useful to recognize for additional context as you move through this chapter or in your advocacy work in general.

- **Adverse climate experiences:** the detrimental impacts of environmental and climate-related stressors that significantly impact holistic well-being (e.g., natural disasters, extreme weather events, environmental degradation, exposure to toxins, etc.)
- **Adverse community experiences:** aspects of the socio-cultural, physical/built, and economic environments that contribute to trauma and toxic stress (e.g., poverty, violence, poor housing quality and affordability, lack of economic/social mobility, etc.)
- **Allostatic load:** the cumulative burden of chronic stress and life events
- **Atrocious cultural experiences** (similar to cultural trauma as defined below): the harmful impacts of systemic, pervasive societal conditions, systemic and historical injustices, and oppressive social structures on development and well-being, often cascading through the generations (e.g., genocide, slavery, colonization, forced family separation, segregation, and harmful social norms)
- **Collective trauma:** psychological reactions to a traumatic event or series of events impacting an entire society or group, carried as part of collective memory and shared sense of identity
- **Cultural trauma** (similar to atrocious cultural experiences as defined above): indelible marks impacting—and possibly changing the identity of—a collectivity following being subjected to a severe event or series of events
- **Developmental adversity:** negative and potentially traumatic early life experiences associated with higher population-risk of poorer developmental or health-related outcomes
- **Historical trauma:** the cumulative emotional and psychological wounding across generations, including one's own lifespan, in connection to a legacy of collective traumatic experience(s) or event(s)
- **Lifespan/life course perspective:** encompassing a comprehensive understanding of how trauma impacts a person, group, or system across their life cycle, acknowledging how these effects shift over time and thus guiding interventions to meet diverse and evolving needs at various life stages

- **Racial trauma/race-based traumatic stress:** the stressful psychological impact and/or emotional injury related to encounters with racial bias and ethnic discrimination, microaggressions, racism, oppression, violence, and hate crimes, whether experienced personally or witnessed as perpetrated toward others
- **Secondary/vicarious trauma:** the impact of exposure to people who have experienced trauma themselves, descriptions of traumatic events by a survivor, others inflicting violence/cruelty on others, or witnessing experiences of individual or collective trauma
- **Systemic trauma:** the practices, contextual features, and procedures implemented by institutions/environments or their leaders that directly or indirectly give rise to and/or maintain psychological, emotional, economic, spiritual, physical, and/or sexual harm to particular individuals or groups of people
- **Toxic stress:** prolonged, severe, or chronic activation of a person's stress response that can contribute to challenges with development, health, and/or functioning
- **Transgenerational/intergenerational trauma:** the transmission of trauma and related effects across generations





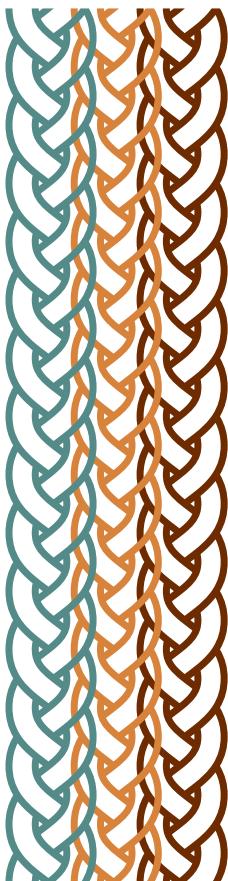
## Reflection Point

What is new to you that was presented in these frameworks? How might that impact your advocacy efforts?

What do you already know about the principles of a trauma-informed approach?

How might you identify whether a policy is trauma-informed, and what would you consider to be the larger policy priorities related to a trauma-informed approach?

# Trauma-Preventive, Trauma-Informed & Trauma-Specific Public Policy



## TRAUMA-INFORMED

- Raise awareness without trauma - universal precaution
- Promote trauma-informed practice
  - *example: policy requiring all mandated reporters receive training on trauma, ACEs, and resilience*

## TRAUMA-SPECIFIC

- Increase access to interventions and services that mitigate the impacts of trauma
- Promote healing
  - *example: Medicaid reimbursement of evidence-informed and promising trauma-focused treatment*

## TRAUMA-PREVENTIVE

- Create conditions for safe, stable, nurturing relationships, and environments
- Reduce exposure to trauma
  - *example: policy outlining a livable minimum wage, paid leave, and other family-friendly supports*

The work of Jonathan Purtle, Assistant Professor at Drexel University, provides a useful framework for conceptualizing the broad range of public policy issues that are related to trauma. These three policy categories all are important in creating trauma-informed and resilient institutions and systems.

- **Trauma-preventive** policies help reduce exposure to trauma and create the conditions for safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments.
- **Trauma-informed** policies are designed to raise awareness about trauma – both primary and secondary – and promote trauma-informed principles and practices.
- **Trauma-specific** policies increase access to interventions and services that have been demonstrated to mitigate the impact of trauma and promote healing.

Brief illustrative examples are provided on the image depicting these three categories of public policy to deepen understanding.

# What is Trauma-Informed Policy?

When determining what policy is and is not “trauma-informed,” it is important to recognize that policy is fraught with compromise, and just as trauma-informed programming may not fully actualize all principles of trauma-informed care at all times, it is unlikely that any single policy or article of legislation would fully reflect all the principles outlined in the trauma-informed framework.

The examples above provide a general conceptual overview of some aspects of policies that reflect trauma-informed approaches to varying degrees for demonstrative purposes. It has been said that one good idea can solve many problems. Embracing a broader perspective of “what counts” as potential public policy solutions to address and prevent trauma increases the possibility for alignment, action, and partnership.

For instance, you may see provisions related to practitioners being mandatorily trained in trauma-specific interventions or trauma-informed care, or that members of the community who access trauma-specific services must be included in work groups chosen to devise national training standards for community-based health centers, or any of the other aspects listed above. All of those would be considered “wins” that could have cascading positive impacts that, in turn, will further advance trauma-informed policies and practices.

Achieving policy change of this significance and magnitude, however, requires multiple strategies. At a minimum, there is the clear need to educate elected officials about NEAR science, trauma-informed values and practices, and legislative or regulatory changes required to create public policy more supportive of optimizing resilience, health, and well-being for all.

There is also the critical need to connect the dots between ACEs and the systemic/structural context in which such experiences occur in order to create urgency and accountability for prevention-focused public policies targeting trauma and its compounding intergenerational impacts. Some examples of what a policy that is aligned with a trauma-informed approach may entail include:

- Refers to the impacts of trauma, ACEs, etc. on development and well-being
- Makes resources address trauma more accessible and equitable
- Engages people with diverse lived experience and providers of trauma-informed, trauma-responsive, and trauma-specific services and supports
- Supports research and evidence related to best practices and policies grounded in NEAR science
- Language and spirit of the measure reflect the realities and diverse lived experiences represented among trauma-impacted populations
- Establishes a central locus for national or state trauma-informed policy-/decision-making

- Rolls out educational or training requirements for a sector of the workforce or in an educational program to receive accreditation
- Calls for culturally-sustaining services, cultural humility training, or other similar endeavors to support attention to cultural, gender, and historical issues
- Funds a public education or awareness program to deepen understanding of trauma, its impacts, and pathways to healing and growth
- Includes efforts to strengthen the resilience/protective factors of children, families, groups, and/or communities impacted by trauma
- Emphasizes continuity of care, coordination, and cross-sector, cross-system collaboration among child-, family-, and community-strengthening services and supports
- Helps maintain an environment of collective care for the workforce, with acknowledgment of the importance of institutional supports to counter burnout, compassion fatigue, moral injury, secondary traumatic stress, and other workplace hazards those who interface with trauma are exposed to on the job

## Blending Population Health & Public Health Approaches Into Advocacy

It is important for advocates and audiences alike to understand the key principles of population health and public health approaches.

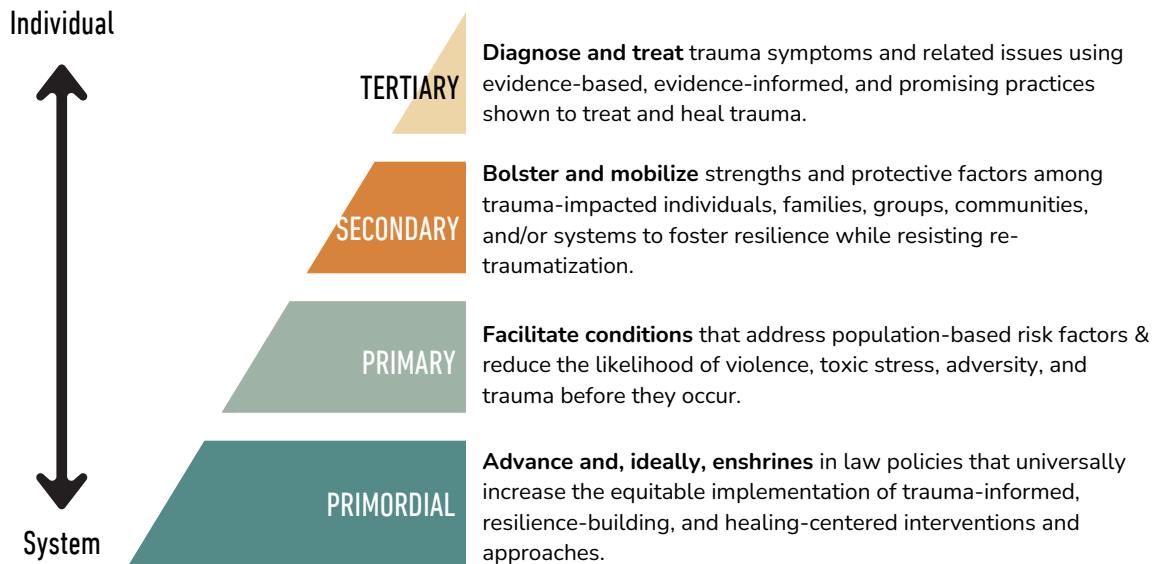
A population health approach focuses on improving health outcomes for specific groups by addressing the unique social, economic, environmental, and other systemic and structural factors that affect them, while a public health approach aims to protect and enhance the health of entire populations through broad prevention measures and public policies.

Both of these comprehensive, multifaceted, and multi-level ways of thinking about trauma and adversity consider the context and conditions with an eye toward equity that aligns with the evidence demonstrating that individuals, families, groups, communities, and systems exposed to adversity/trauma – especially when multiply marginalized or lacking in buffering/protective/resilience factors – are at greater risk of adverse outcomes that are preventable through principled, precise action that fits the unique constellations of needs of those most impacted.

These approaches shift the narrative away from pathology, deficit, and reactivity and help dispel myths that one's fate is sealed if they experience early developmental adversity or any other form of trauma.

These approaches also emphasize the interconnections of trauma at the population level and the social determinants of health. This all helps create a compelling case for demanding significant upfront investment and policy action at individual, collective, and systemic levels.

## PREVENTION



**Primordial prevention** efforts refer to programs that target social and economic policies that influence communities' or individuals' health. The most effective public health interventions are those that continue to bring together knowledge systems of people with diverse lived experience as well as evidence-based, evidence-informed, and promising practices in complementary, respectful, culturally-responsive, and mutually beneficial ways.

The goal of targeting primordial prevention with proactive supports that help create the context and conditions for empowerment, flourishing, and thriving to occur is to disrupt the emergence of trauma from happening in the first place at the broadest structural and institutional levels.

This includes activities such as promoting social equity, reducing inequality, and fostering community well-being, going beyond the mitigation of "bad" to proactively institutionalize "good" factors that promote resilience and embed holistic wellness to support healthy, self-actualized lives for all.

**Primary prevention** consists of population-based interventions intended to prevent trauma at its earliest stages aiming to thwart the impacts of trauma on individuals, groups, or communities directly. This may involve interventions such as education programs, community-based initiatives, and policies designed to reduce the risk of trauma and enhance protective factors.

Secondary and tertiary prevention efforts both involve attempts to address adverse outcomes that have already occurred, yet do so with a different overarching intent and impact.

**Secondary prevention** focuses on early detection and intervention in the immediate aftermath of a traumatic event or experience to minimize its negative impact to reduce adverse outcomes. This involves the timely identification of those who may be at risk of developing trauma-related difficulties and providing appropriate interventions to halt the adverse or harmful progression of a traumatic event/experience that has already occurred.

Examples of actions taken in alignment with secondary prevention include trauma-specific therapies, immediate crisis intervention such as Psychological First Aid, as well as support services designed to prevent the escalation of trauma-related consequences.

**Tertiary prevention** refers to reducing the complications or harms of adverse outcomes as well as preventing recurrence across the generations, aiming to thwart long-term consequences of trauma that has already taken place. This level of prevention involves interventions to support individuals who have experienced trauma in adapting, recovering, and reintegrating into their communities. Rehabilitation programs, ongoing mental health services, and community-based support initiatives are examples of tertiary prevention strategies.

To address a particular population's needs appropriately and equitably, it is important that adequate resources are available at each level of prevention and intervention.

While anchoring in these frameworks requires significant upfront investment, there is ample evidence that moving from being more of a reactive crisis-response model to more preventive models can deter some of society's most pressing problems and increase well-being for those who are currently receiving reactive support (if any right-fit supports are received at all).

Furthermore, there are costs that are avoidable when people and communities are supported through a trauma-informed, resilience-building, prevention-oriented, healing-centered lens and are given a say in leading the charge toward change that impacts them.

While it may seem clear that investment upfront is a wise decision that will prove worthwhile in the long run, it is important to remember what motivates and is important to policymakers as a general rule.

These efforts are for long-term returns, and it may seem risky to invest depending on a variety of factors that will influence whether policymakers feel safe to take that perceived risk.

# The “Four Rs” of a Trauma-Informed Approach



A **trauma-informed system** is one in which all involved:

- *Realize* the prevalence of trauma individually and collectively, along with the presence of strength and resilience
- *Recognize* how trauma affects (directly and indirectly) all involved within the system
- *Respond* by putting this knowledge into practice to promote the context and conditions for holistic well-being while layering and looping learning that emerges based on feedback from the community and those impacted
- Actively seek to *resist re-traumatization* by noticing and mobilizing strength, capacity, traditional cultural healing resources, and collective wisdom embedded in diverse lived experiences

# The Core Principles of a Trauma-Informed Approach

<b>SAFETY</b> 	<b>TRUST &amp; TRANSPARENCY</b> 	<b>EMPOWERMENT, VOICE &amp; CHOICE</b> 
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>physical &amp; psychological safety are considered &amp; prioritized</li><li>adaptive skills related to preserving safety are understood as protective &amp; resourceful</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>decisions are made &amp; processes are conducted transparently</li><li>building trust is prioritized &amp; intentional efforts are made</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>individuals, family, group, &amp; community strengths are validated &amp; built upon</li><li>capacity-building is prioritized</li><li>belief in individual/collective resiliency, healing &amp; trauma recovery</li></ul>
<b>COLLABORATION &amp; MUTUALITY</b> 	<b>CULTURAL, HISTORICAL &amp; GENDER ISSUES</b> 	<b>PEER SUPPORT &amp; MUTUAL SELF-AID</b> 
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>meaningful opportunities for the sharing of decision-making &amp; power are created</li><li>culture of doing <i>with</i> versus <i>to or for</i></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>cultural stereotypes, oppression, &amp; biases are intentionally addressed</li><li>recognition of cultural, historical, racial, historical, and collective trauma</li><li>factors of cultural resilience are honored &amp; mobilized for healing</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>voice of lived experience are valued &amp; amplified</li><li>mutual self-help/peer support are valued as vital to recovery &amp; growth</li><li>opportunities exist for fellowship, solidarity, &amp; healing</li></ul>

The enduring impacts of the syndemic have brought the public's attention to the interdependencies between well-being, resilience, and individual, interpersonal, and collective trauma. It is clear that it is more important than ever to encourage a trauma-informed response, which involves enlivening the core principles of a trauma-informed approach, including:

- Safety
- Trustworthiness and Transparency
- Empowerment, Voice, and Choice
- Collaboration and Mutuality
- Cultural, Historical and Gender Issues
- Peer Support and Mutual Aid

Some examples of policy elements representing each principle are below. Please note that this list is intended to be illustrative yet not exhaustive.

Safety	Trustworthiness & Transparency	Empowerment, Voice & Choice	Collaboration & Mutuality	Cultural, Historical & Gender Issues	Peer Support & Mutual Aid
<p>Trauma-sensitive practices in schools to facilitate greater physical and psychological safety</p> <p>Housing programs that ensure both physical security and psychological safety for survivors of IPV</p> <p>Mandatory training for law enforcement officers on trauma-informed de-escalation, mental health crisis intervention, and similar skills</p>	<p>Local grant committees comprised of diverse community members to review and approve funding applications for community projects</p> <p>Establishing official channels for community members to provide feedback on government services, supports, and policies, with mandatory response timelines, such as community advisory boards</p> <p>Create accountable practices for government reporting along with open access platforms for community members to track the development of policies affecting them, submit comments, and see how their input is incorporated</p>	<p>Protecting the right for people to have choice in their providers, services, and supports by ensuring reimbursement for relevant interventions under federally- and state-funded healthcare</p> <p>Creation of community education initiatives to support awareness of trauma, integration of trauma-informed principles into community life, and support for/connection to services to support holistic well-being</p> <p>Grants to support community-led initiatives that support trauma-impacted people and communities, with those most impacted in control of fund distribution</p>	<p>Databases, resources, and supportive infrastructure for smooth coordination from one community-based setting to other community-based settings</p> <p>Increased funding for trauma- informed cross-sector, cross-system training</p> <p>Joint agency task forces/ working groups focused on partnering together to integrate trauma-informed, preventive, resilience-building, community-led, and healing-centered practices into strategies, systems, and structures to address complex social issues</p>	<p>Protect and preserve cultural heritage sites and language access services, ensuring the involvement of local communities and relevant cultural groups in decision-making processes</p> <p>Truth and reconciliation committees and efforts</p> <p>Allocation of public funds to support communities and groups that have been historically marginalized, oppressed, and otherwise made vulnerable due to insufficient systemic and institutional supports for holistic well-being</p>	<p>Funding and technical assistance for the establishment and sustainment of community-based peer support networks joining people with overlapping targeted identities and/or lived experiences to connect and support one another in healing</p> <p>Peer navigation services to support people with aligned and overlapping lived experiences to navigate services, supports, and sustaining practices to support trauma recovery and resiliency</p> <p>Grant programs specifically dedicated to supporting the co-construction of mutual aid networks offering direct reciprocal community-led supports</p>

# Facilitating Resilience, Post-Traumatic Growth & Holistic Well-Being for All

In addition to looking for the integration of the principles of a trauma-informed approach being embedded in policies and legislative language, this work invites us to integrate ways to unlock resiliency, support post-traumatic growth, and enable all individuals, families, groups, organizations, communities, and systems to experience holistic well-being.

Supporting resilience and post-traumatic growth in the context of trauma-informed advocacy entails ensuring trauma-impacted people, communities, settings, and systems are equipped to withstand or endure hardship and/or to experience a profound sense of meaning-making and growth due to being institutionally supported in processing, metabolizing, integrating, and re-storying traumatic event(s) and experience(s).

When considering resilience, it is important to employ an ecological/living systems perspective. In order to see meaningful policy progress that supports well-being for all, it is vital we consider the ability of policy and institutions to either block or unlock human potential.

Neglecting to acknowledge the need for equitable trauma-informed systemic and structural supports to help unlock and mobilize the innate strength, capacity, and resilience that lives within all people and communities perpetuates an oppressive and re-traumatizing status quo.

How those with diverse lived experience manifest and mobilize resilience despite structural inequalities, oppression, and pejorative social and political discourses that objectify and marginalize them, and the ways that resilience often emerges not by choice but as a result of necessity, is critical to recognize as well.

Individually and collaboratively, several factors support the emergence of resilience, post-traumatic growth, and holistic well-being within a group or community:

- Equitable and accessible wellness, holistic health, and other supportive services
- Education and skill-building opportunities
- Strong cultural identity
- Access to resources (e.g., nutritious food, safe and stable housing, recreational activities and green spaces, etc.)
- Culturally-sustaining practices, inclusive spaces, and culturally-relevant resources
- Environmental safety and sustainability
- Abundant basic survival resources

- Robust collaborative partnerships and networks
- Truth-telling related to history and cultural context
- Promotion of restorative practices, diversion programming that considers diverse lived experiences, and alternatives to system involvement
- Infrastructure, governance, and leadership that honors diverse lived experiences
- Economic investment and stability
- Positive relationships, social support, and connectedness
- Acknowledgment of the collective wisdom, local history, cultural context, creative coping skills, adaptivity, gifts, and other survival strategies in the face of stress, challenge, change, trauma, and adversity
- Sense of belonging and inclusion
- Economic security and robust professional opportunities
- Prevention strategies to proactively address vulnerabilities
- Presence of and participation in community groups and networks, like shared values, strong ties, ownership, cohesion, supportive spiritual community affiliations, etc.
- Preparedness planning in place for when crises emerge
- Inclusive and participatory decision-making processes
- Opportunities for civic engagement and participation as well as volunteerism
- Access to technology and information
- Support for creative and artistic endeavors and expressions
- Intergenerational connections and interactions
- Education and training opportunities related to resilience and trauma recovery
- Collective efficacy and a sense of empowerment to generate a realistic sense of hope for moving toward a positive preferred future
- Recognition and celebration of achievements



## Reflection Point

What have you noticed work to help others understand the value of using a trauma-informed lens in the past?

What strengths and resilience-related qualities about your community do you notice can be built upon to improve experiences and outcomes? What would a next step toward change aligned with this look like?

# Enhancing Community Capacity

In the context of capacity-building to advanced trauma-informed policy, “communities” may be defined as geographic communities or communities of identification, like those belonging to a disproportionately impacted group of people who have been made vulnerable to trauma due to our systems and institutions, such as BIPOC or LGBTQIA2S+ folx.

For sustainable trauma-informed change to happen, it is important communities are supported to engage in **capacity-building**, or a process in which communities work together to improve collective skills and resources.

In other words, before meaningful outcomes stemming from enacted policy can fully come to fruition, it is vital that communities are supported and equipped to actually *implement* the policies and well-resourced to sustain the results they want to see. Policies may seem useful in practice yet, unless contextualized to the community itself, may not work as well on the ground.

It is critical through a trauma-informed lens to promote community members’ full participation in the different phases of the policymaking process by cultivating authentic and meaningful community engagement.

Community ownership is present when most community members have considerable and detailed knowledge of the issue and local efforts, and most segments of the community are highly supportive and actively involved in change processes underway. Community ownership not only ensures the relevance and sustainability of policies but also builds trusting, cooperative, connective relationships among community members.

Additionally, to support trauma-informed advocacy and action in communities, it can be helpful to have a peer-to-peer or mentoring system where community members are paired together to support one another in their change efforts. This can enrich the experience of advocacy, increase accountability to the movement, as well as thwart advocate burnout.

Engaging those who are already formal or informal leaders can help eliminate systemic barriers that stand to oppress and disempower communities, while also generating greater trust in the policy process.

This can inspire and activate others in the community who may otherwise have been disillusioned by feelings of disinclusion or a lack of a sense of belonging, thus opening additional doors for direct civic participation and bolstering the power of the trauma-informed advocacy movement.

For a much deeper dive on trauma-informed community principles and change mechanisms in the context of community capacity-building, please visit CTIPP’s [Guide to Trauma-Informed Community Change](#).

# Crafting New Legislation

Finally, there may be times when no bill is already in action to support the change that trauma-informed advocates, activists, and partners in change want to see happen in their communities, and a legislator with whom you have built a relationship asks for your help developing model legislation to further refine and submit for consideration.

## FIND PRE-EXISTING POLICY LANGUAGE (IF POSSIBLE)

A great starting point when considering crafting something new is to find pre-existing policy language from another venue or jurisdiction to draw inspiration from and to customize to the local context.

Legislation responding to a particular pervasive challenge or responding at a significant moment in time can catch on quickly in other communities and states. Highlighting recent policy advances from neighboring, nearby, or similarly-situated communities/states may provide the impetus for your legislator to follow suit, which itself may catalyze cascading action in other venues.

For some examples of trauma-informed legislation to draw inspiration from based on our in-depth trauma-informed policy analyses from [2022](#) and [2023](#), respectively, from which you might consider drawing inspiration.

It is usually much easier to amend existing policy than it is to start from scratch. If absolutely nothing similar enough to begin from exists, though, crafting policy from scratch will require expertise and meticulous attention to detail.

Generally, legislation is drafted with assistance from lawyers and experts due to its complexity. It is useful to consider who in your network has experience in this nuanced space when confronted with the challenge of drafting new language altogether.

## ENGAGE PARTICIPATION AMONG THOSE MOST IMPACTED

Practicing awareness that oppression and disenfranchisement have disproportionately impacted the access to opportunities and options some people have had to participate in the policy process is aligned with trauma-informed practices.

You can integrate equity and inclusion into the policy process by trusting the folx most impacted as experts of their own experiences and ensure that any changes proposed are responsive to the true needs and preferred solutions of the community rather than on what others who are not directly impacted assume would be best.

It is advisable to be as thorough as possible when defining and plotting provisions to avoid misinterpretations or misapplications of your policy proposals, and tapping into community wisdom to garner more specific details to insert can ensure greater fidelity to the preferences of those most impacted in implementation.

## DEFINE PARTICIPANTS & ROLES

Planning who will be involved in policy creation and implementation, and what each participant's roles and responsibilities will be, is an important component of any effort to create new policy.

Additionally, it is important to consider which entities, agencies, institutions, or groups will lead in implementation, and ensure that they themselves have a solid grounding in the values and principles of a trauma-informed approach.

## EXAMINE BARRIERS, FACILITATING FACTORS & RESOURCES

It is also useful to identify what might help and what hinder the enactment of your policy. For instance, you may be concerned about a key term being misinterpreted in ways that may present a strong argument against your legislation's passage.

In such a case, you could choose to define the term upfront using a well-respected, bipartisan or nonpartisan source to preemptively defuse challenges to your solutions and thus increase the chances of success of your proposed measure.

Additionally, it can be helpful to consider resources that are already in place as well as to identify what additional resources are necessary to implement a policy. This includes factors such as funding, staffing, technical support, or infrastructure, for example.

To ensure successful implementation and sustainability of a policy, ensuring that resources are either in place or allocated in legislative language is important. You will want to be explicit about these and other factors that policymakers give weight to when deciding whether to support a policy change or not.

## PLAN FOR THE LONG-TERM

Your policy also may be more successful if it proactively factors in sustainability and integrates protections for navigating various economic and political climates without diluting the intention, spirit, or key details of a policy. Committees often will look to impact reports to understand administrative, programmatic, fiscal, and other aspects that could impact sustainability.

While there is no 100% guaranteed formula for a policy you draft from scratch to be enacted and implemented faithfully, these considerations integrate lessons learned over time and thus may help surmount common barriers, increasing the chance of success, sustainability, and fidelity to the spirit and purpose of newly-crafted legislation upon implementation.

# Tying it All Together: A Call to Action

Bringing about sustainable trauma-informed change calls upon us to weave together our collective strengths, wisdom, and resilience.

There are many diverse and dynamic ways communities can engage in this work, from education and skill-building to fostering robust peer support systems and inclusive decision-making processes, every step we take toward building momentum and capacity to advance our comprehensive trauma-informed vision is a step toward a healthier, more connected, and more compassionate world.

Our journey toward transformation demands continuous reflection, adaptation, and commitment. By meeting the moment with a trauma-informed approach, we can ensure that the policies we work to advance are not only relevant and sustainable but also deeply rooted in the diverse lived experiences and needs of those they are designed to support.

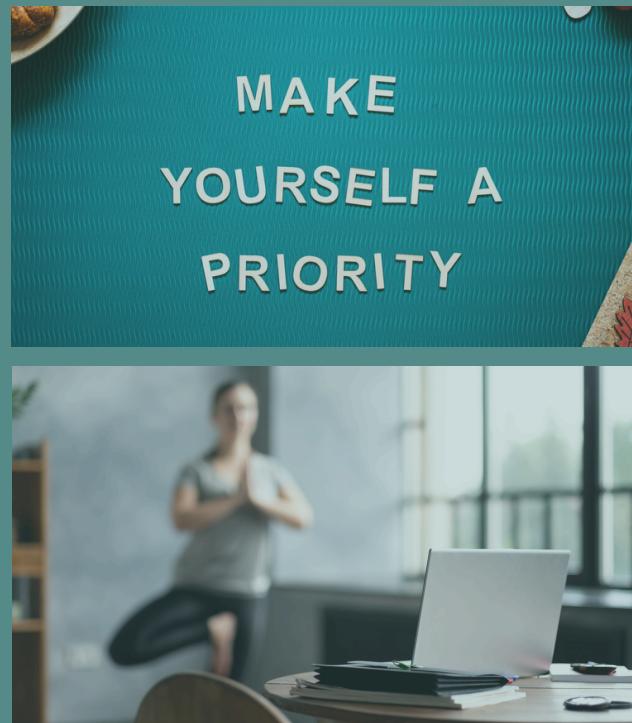
Every action, no matter how small, contributes to the larger goal of fostering holistic well-being and resilience. Your advocacy, your voice, and your commitment to integrating trauma-informed principles into all aspects of our society and our lives is essential.

Even simply by shifting your own advocacy actions in alignment with a trauma-informed approach brings us collectively closer to a more just, resilient, and healthy future for all – a topic which the next chapter explores in greater depth.



# Chapter 9: Modeling the Model in Trauma-Informed Advocacy

Resources, PowerPoint, Video, Reflection Questions, and More!



*The good we secure for ourselves is precarious and uncertain, is floating in mid-air, until it is secured for all of us and incorporated into our common life.*

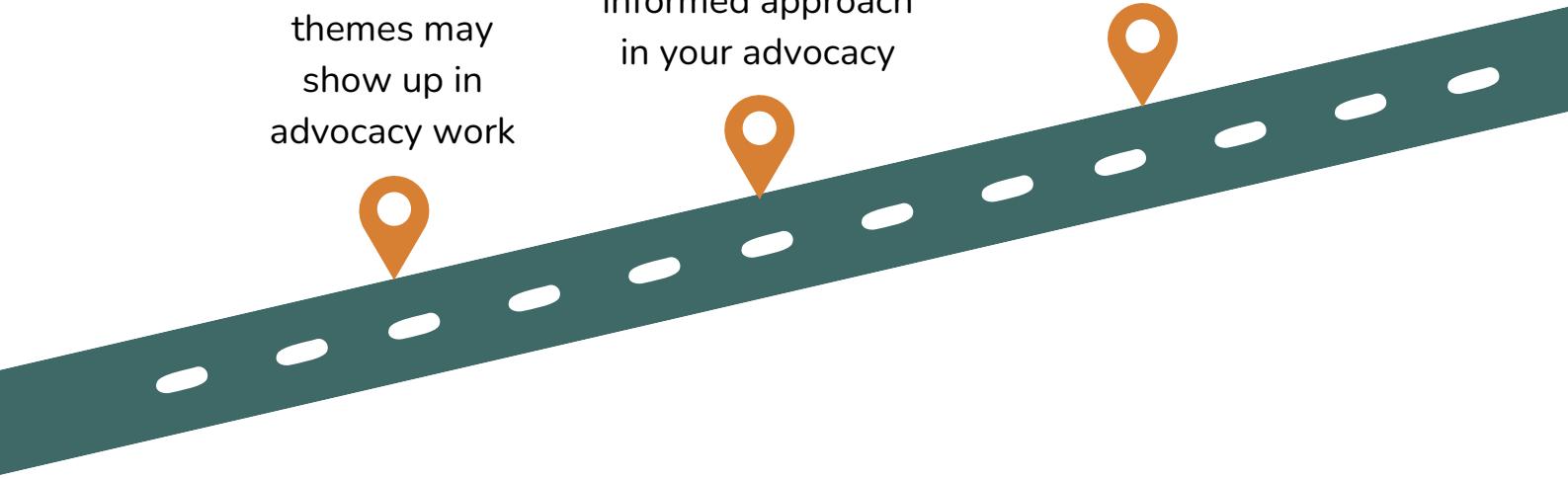
-Jane Adams

# What You Can Expect in This Chapter

How trauma themes may show up in advocacy work

Enlivening the guiding principles of a trauma-informed approach in your advocacy

The importance of attending to oneself and engaging in collective care in trauma-informed advocacy



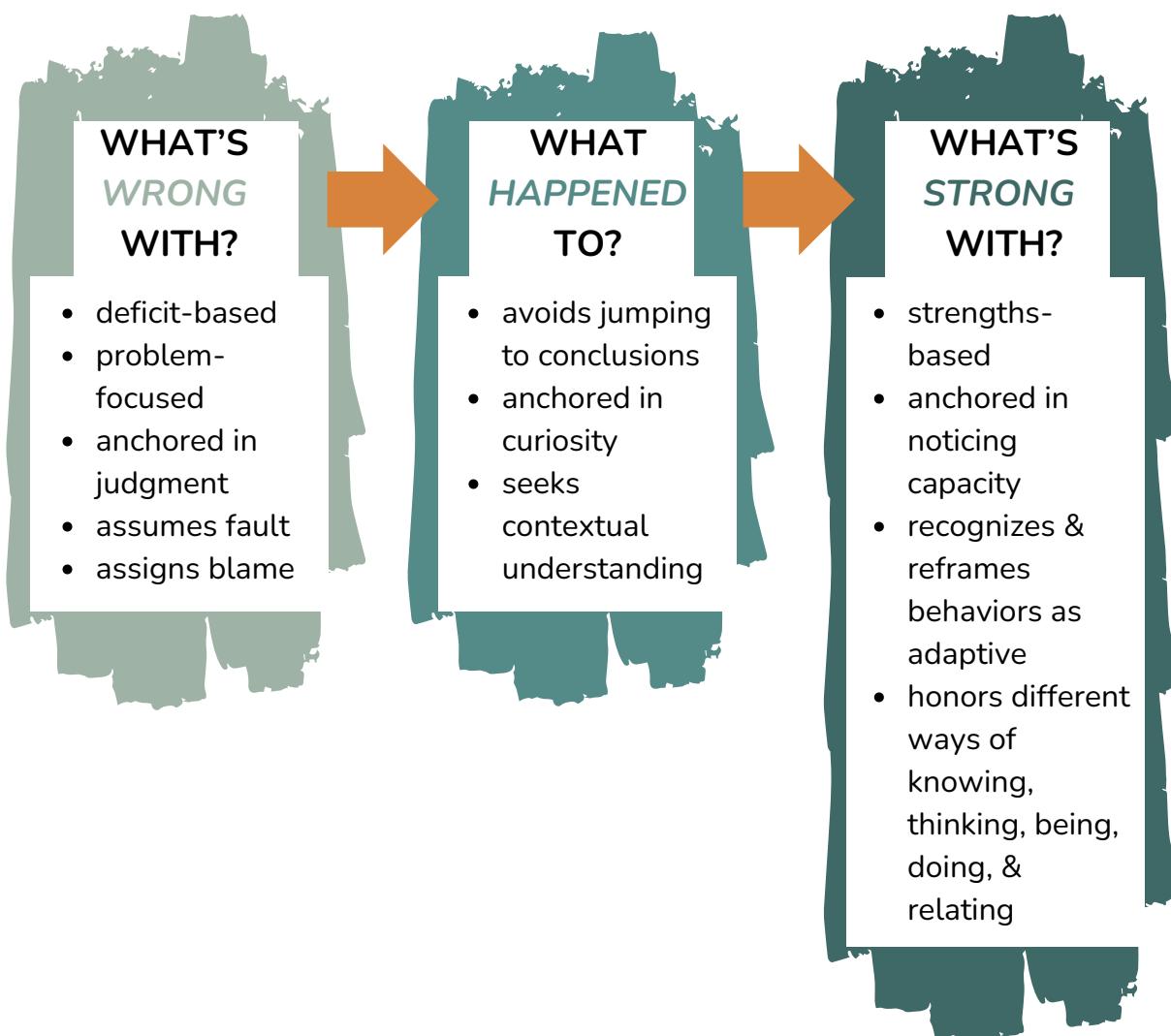
In this chapter, we will discuss how the diverse lived experiences of advocates, activists, and partners in change may notice trauma “themes” emerge for themselves in advocacy efforts, as well as strategies to integrate a trauma-informed approach into the process of engaging in advocacy itself.

Considering how to model the model of a trauma-informed approach in advocacy helps us to avoid replicating harms or re-traumatizing others in our work, and also to mobilize the full potential, gifts, and wisdom in collective efforts toward transformation.

# Shifting the Paradigm

There are many resources about trauma-informed approaches on a theoretical level, yet confusion often arises as to what this entails in practical, action-oriented terms.

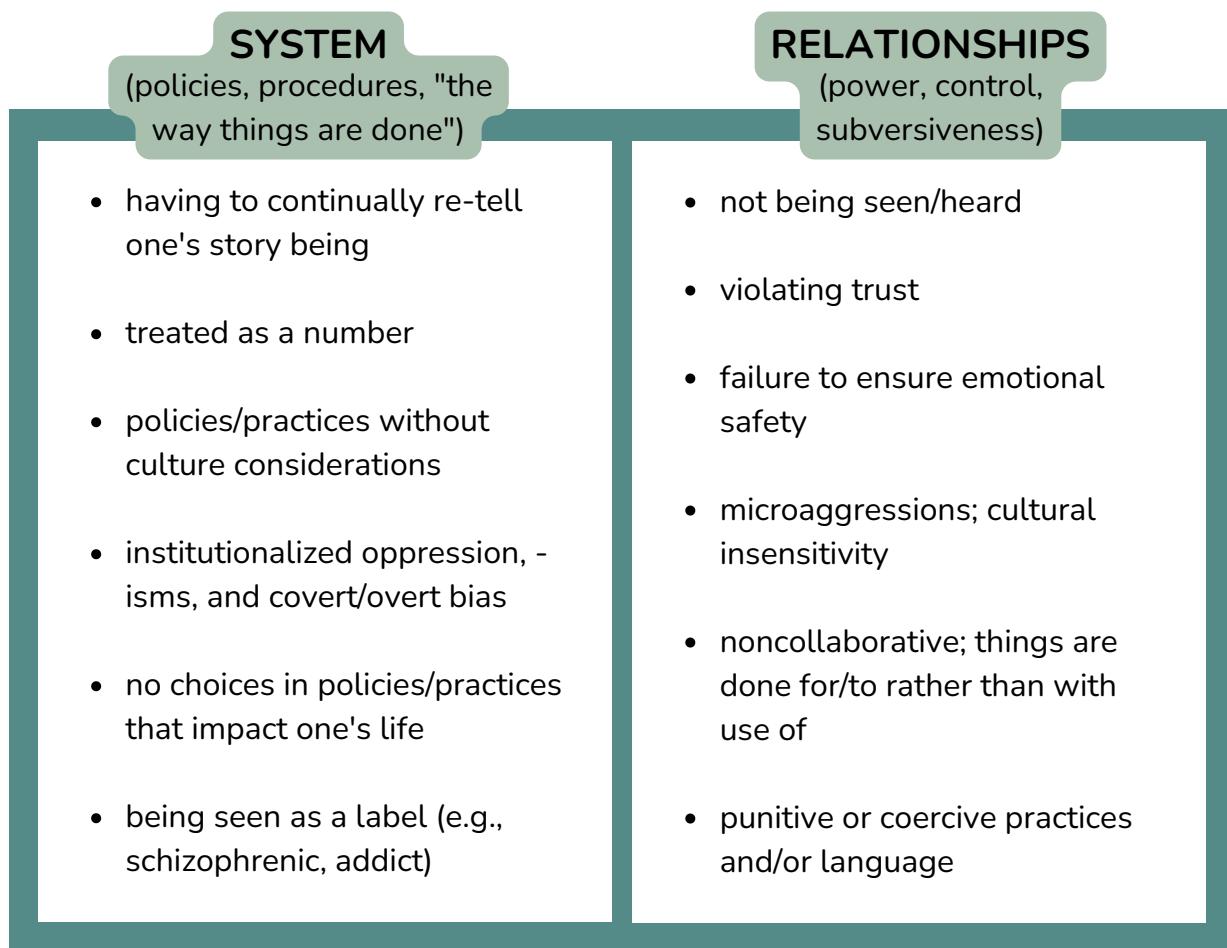
Many people associate a trauma-informed approach with individual-level engagement or clinical practice, yet that is only one part of the broader framework to consider. In this chapter, we hope to demystify what trauma-informed praxis may look like specifically in the context of policy advocacy.



# Reducing Re-Traumatization in Advocacy Work

As is consistent with the “Four Rs” of a trauma-informed approach, reducing re-traumatization is an integral component of modeling the model of a trauma-informed approach.

## RE-TRAUMATIZATION: WHAT HURTS?

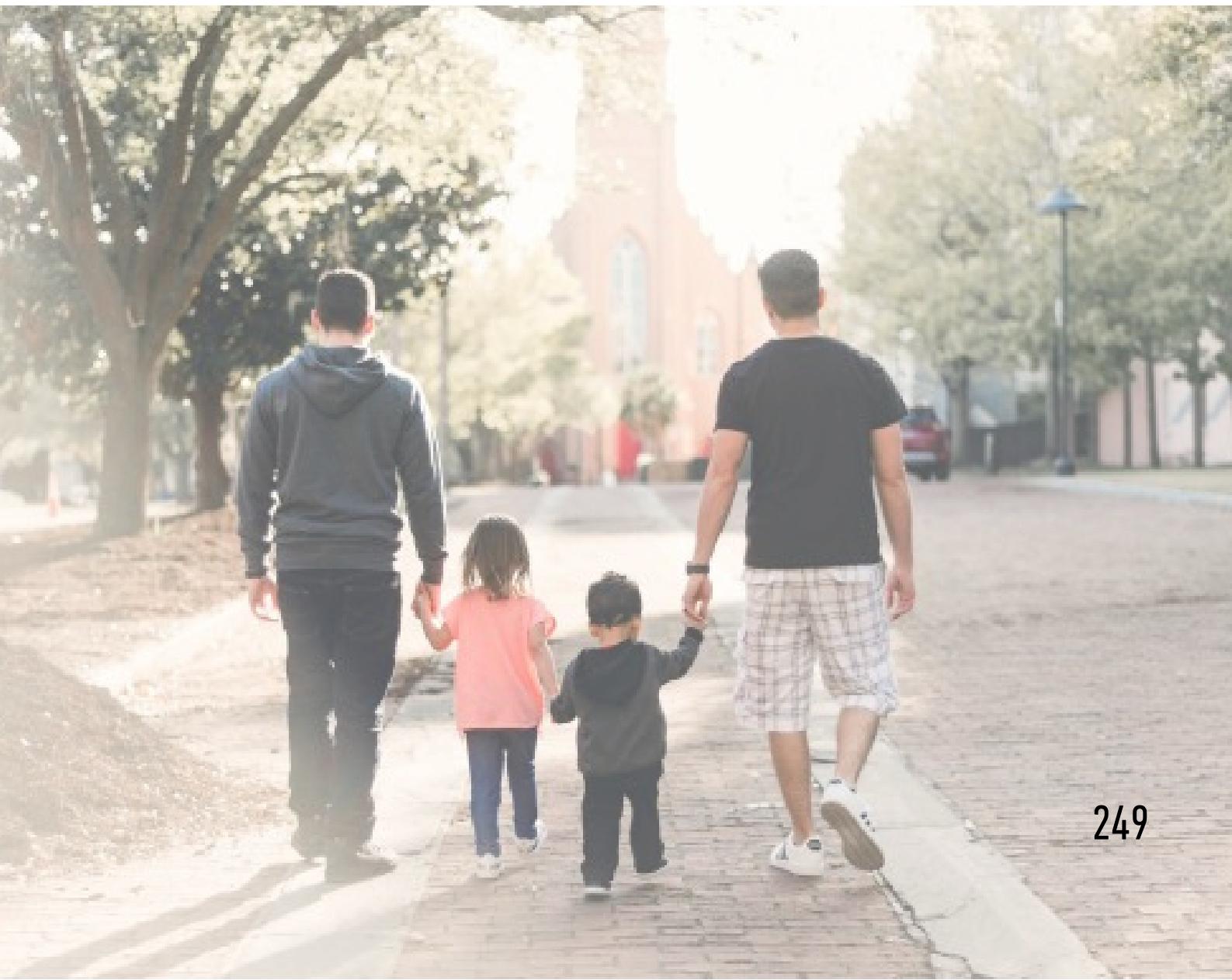


The accompanying chart depicting systemic and relational dynamics that are often experienced as re-traumatizing is an adaptation of one created by the Institute on Trauma and Trauma-Informed Care out of the University at Buffalo School of Social Work, which has a fuller and more expansive list included in its Trauma-Informed Organizational Change Manual.

Many of us are brought to this work because of our own experiences interfacing with trauma and adversity. It is accordingly of significant importance to ensure that we each are paying attention to these themes not only in the content of our advocacy but also in the process of *how* we are in community with one another as we advocate.

As we do our advocacy work, it is critical to remain attuned to these and other “themes” that are known to be particularly sensitive or activating to people with lived experience of trauma and adversity.

In the spirit of collaboration and mutuality, we each are accountable to ourselves and to one another for how we choose to respond to the challenges that arise in this work. Maintaining a stance of trauma-informed caring demands that we *walk the talk* rather than just *talk the talk* by being intentional around avoiding re-traumatization with one another.



# The Guiding Principles of a Trauma-Informed Approach

If the paradigm shift and the “Four Rs” define the “what” of being trauma-informed, the guiding principles depicted here could be considered as representing the “how” of being trauma-informed.

That is: given that there is no universal checklist to let us know that we have acted in a trauma-informed manner in any particular interaction given the importance of context, it is on each of us to navigate advocacy spaces with attention to: safety; trustworthiness and transparency; voice, choice, and empowerment; collaboration and mutuality; peer support and mutual self-help; as well as attentiveness and attunement to cultural, historical, and gender issues.

## PRINCIPLES OF A TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACH

<b>SAFETY</b> 	<b>TRUST &amp; TRANSPARENCY</b> 	<b>EMPOWERMENT, VOICE &amp; CHOICE</b> 
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>physical &amp; psychological safety are considered &amp; prioritized</li><li>adaptive skills related to preserving safety are understood as protective &amp; resourceful</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>decisions are made &amp; processes are conducted transparently</li><li>building trust is prioritized &amp; intentional efforts are made</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>individuals, family, group, &amp; community strengths are validated &amp; built upon</li><li>capacity-building is prioritized</li><li>belief in individual/collective resiliency, healing &amp; trauma recovery</li></ul>
<b>COLLABORATION &amp; MUTUALITY</b> 	<b>CULTURAL, HISTORICAL &amp; GENDER ISSUES</b> 	<b>PEER SUPPORT &amp; MUTUAL SELF-AID</b> 
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>meaningful opportunities for the sharing of decision-making &amp; power are created</li><li>culture of doing <i>with</i> versus <i>to or for</i></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>cultural stereotypes, oppression, &amp; biases are intentionally addressed</li><li>recognition of cultural, historical, racial, historical, and collective trauma</li><li>factors of cultural resilience are honored &amp; mobilized for healing</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>voice of lived experience are valued &amp; amplified</li><li>mutual self-help/peer support are valued as vital to recovery &amp; growth</li><li>opportunities exist for fellowship, solidarity, &amp; healing</li></ul>

## SAFETY

Just as we strive to increase access to economic resources, secure and stable housing, and legal protections for people who have experienced trauma, we also work with fellow advocates, activists, and partners in change to support them in strengthening their own psychological capacities to navigate the complex issues of trauma-informed advocacy.

One of the clearest challenges to this work is the rate at which those advocating interface with trauma stories and trauma content, putting them at risk of experiencing phenomena such as vicarious trauma, secondary traumatic stress, compassion fatigue, moral distress, or burnout. Indeed, trauma-informed advocacy can be incredibly rewarding, and also can be tough, taxing, and potentially triggering.

Feeling and being safe is of elevated importance in an activity like trauma-informed policy advocacy, where major wins often feel few and far between due to the long-term nature of systemic and structural change, as well as considering the presence of polarization, volatility, and animosity that can sometimes show up in this work.

It can feel (and be) deeply unsafe for many to speak truth to power, and it is important to support the context and conditions that will help advocates, activists, and partners in change feel safe to freely participate as they wish. Some of the ways that safety can be supported in group advocacy actions include:

- Establishing a culturally-attuned, inclusive, welcoming, destigmatizing, and non-retraumatizing environment
- Holding intentional discussions about the impacts of this work, both regenerative and depleting
- Creating safe avenues for heavier conversations
- Encouraging check-ins, meetings, and peer support, and protecting intentional, predictable time/space for this to occur
- Having a list of accessible resources and supports to bolster well-being
- Using a “buddy system” in preparation for and engagement with hearings, meetings, and other key advocacy activities
- Offering support and expressing solidarity
- Asking those seeking involvement in an action what safety and support mean and look like to them

- Ensuring access to legal support and advice when dealing with challenging or threatening situations related to their advocacy work.
- Providing secure meeting spaces
- Facilitating education on de-escalation techniques and conflict resolution to manage potentially volatile situations
- Creating resources on stress management, trauma recovery, resilience-building, and other relevant topics

## TRUSTWORTHINESS & TRANSPARENCY

We know that trauma can disrupt our ability to trust, along with the ways we feel about ourselves, others, and the broader world. Trust-based relationships enable a collaborative policy process and are vital to cultivate and nurture in this work.

It is also true that many factors have historically and presently limited transparency and trust in public policy and the institutions that are responsible for creating and implementing policies, which can make it challenging for those with lived experience to feel as if they want to robustly participate in making this kind of change.

One of the key ways to increase trustworthiness with various target audiences is to be transparent about what is known and what is unknown, as well as what is assumed or hypothesized versus what has been established as a fact.

Communicating in a way that lets people know what they can expect as well as what is expected of them, as well as following through by doing what you say you will do, helps build trust. When something changes or does not play out as expected or planned, explaining the rationale behind decision-making processes that take place can help mitigate the possibility that trust will be impaired.

Though policy can be ambiguous and unpredictable, particularly since information and circumstances can rapidly change, having a form of communication that remains consistent in place can help buffer anxiousness that often accompanies periods of uncertainty and change.

This may be, for instance, reliably communicating an action alert during a specific consistent day/time, or holding reliable monthly “office hours” to answer questions advocates or community members may have about the work.

It is also critical to be forthcoming about and allow choice in how personal stories collected may be used. It is important to seek informed consent about where, why, and how stories and information that others have shared or created will be disseminated.

Part of that conversation also may entail discussing the potential impacts that folx may not consider, such as how information publicly accessible on the Internet is not something that can reliably be controlled, meaning that what they share may go out beyond its original source.

Given the sensitivity of information that people may share, integrating choice and safety by inviting folx to use a pseudonym, only their first name, or otherwise removing key identifying factors may also be options that help increase comfortability with sharing to advance change.

Trust and transparency are paramount, though, for people to be able to proactively make choices based on how you can or cannot protect their privacy or maintain control over distribution, and to make choices around what they are willing to contribute.

Some additional ways to foster trustworthiness and transparency in trauma-informed advocacy include:

- Providing regular updates and clear timelines about advocacy efforts and policy developments
- Letting all involved know what to expect and what is expected of them
- Maintaining confidentiality where appropriate and being clear about when and why information might be shared
- Creating visual aids and summaries that make complex policy information more accessible and understandable.
- Facilitating opportunities for advocates, activists, and partners in change, along with community members in general, to meet with policymakers in informal settings to build trust-based connections
- Developing and sharing a code of ethics or conduct that outlines the principles and commitments of your advocacy group, reinforcing a collective sense of accountability and consistency
- Documenting and sharing the decision-making processes and the reasons behind key advocacy strategies and policy positions
- Being open about funding sources and how resources are allocated within the advocacy group

- Publishing regular reports on the impact and outcomes of advocacy efforts
- Providing clear guidelines and expectations for participation and behavior in advocacy activities
- Offering opportunities for community members and leaders reflecting the diversity of those most impacted by advocacy efforts to participate in leadership roles within the advocacy group
- Explicitly soliciting and visibly integrating community input into advocacy strategies and policy recommendations

## VOICE, CHOICE & EMPOWERMENT

A trauma-informed approach strives to move away from the deficit-based thinking that is prominent among policymakers, which posits that social problems originate at the individual level rather than the institutional level and that such problems are the result of individual moral failing, individuals not trying hard enough or not doing enough, individuals having something “wrong with” them, and/or individuals making “bad” choices.

Similarly, inequities in holistic health and other challenges rooted in current and past oppression are often linked to individuals and particular populations of identification who are labeled as “lazy,” “unmotivated,” “irresponsible,” “undeserving,” and even “criminal” rather than cast as connected to trauma and adversity as induced and exacerbated by systemic and structural shortcomings.

When we look through a trauma-informed lens, the ways that trauma-impacted people, groups, and communities continue to adapt and survive institutionalized mistreatment and disenfranchisement by drawing on their cultural values, agency, creativity, historical memory, critical consciousness, fortitude, as well as their diverse experiences of lived resilience is acknowledged.

Each of us has the opportunity to shine a spotlight on the pain institutional ills inflict as well as the capacity and tenacity of the human spirit that has helped people survive in spite of such significant challenges.

Policymaking paradigms often center reactive problem-solving rather than leveraging and building on existing strengths to build solutions, and it is important for advocates, activists, and partners to bring awareness to the ways that trauma-informed policies and practices can stop the cycle of responding to harm and move toward preventing that harm while simultaneously engaging people’s diverse wisdom and gifts to create the context and conditions for all to flourish and thrive.

In our advocacy world, it is important to consider what empowerment truly means. For the concept of empowerment to be meaningful and aligned with the spirit of a trauma-informed approach, empowerment cannot simply refer to the process whereby a powerful person or entity gives power to people who are powerless; it also must involve the taking of power by those who need it, and the preservation of power of those most impacted to shape and lead change efforts.

Through a trauma-informed lens, empowerment is best conceptualized as a noun rather than a verb, as it is more of a state of being rather than an action imposed from the outside. That is: it is important we move away from the paternalistic, saviory narrative that a person or group empowers others, and toward recognizing the inherent power that lives within and often must be reclaimed within people and communities that have had their power and agency overlooked or actively suppressed.

We can work together to co-create the conditions and context in which empowerment is more accessible and able to emerge among all people. This means honoring autonomy and self-determination, particularly among those who have been historically disenfranchised and disincluded in the policy process.

Removing barriers to experiencing the natural emergence of human resilience and empowerment will help our world collectively honor the intrinsic dignity and potential of every person and community, ensuring that broader advocacy efforts are not centered on ideas about bestowing power and instead on recognizing, centering, unlocking, and amplifying that which already exists within people and communities everywhere.

Remember: this can be a significant shift from the way many have conceptualized empowerment, and many potential audiences may feel like this is an uncomfortable or distressing challenge to their own sense of identity. This is especially true among those who have potentially thought of themselves as “saving,” “serving,” or otherwise being responsible for what really is supporting others in demonstrating *their own* strength and resiliency in living in our world.

From a trauma-informed perspective, it is critical that the concept of empowerment reflects not only a rhetoric of liberation and anti-oppression, but also clearly demonstrates *actual shared power* in terms of extending decision-making ability to the target populations of public policies proposed.

To shape policy so that it better reflects the realities of the full range of human experience in the spirit of the principle of voice, choice, and empowerment, it is critical that policymakers hear directly from those on the ground and in the communities who will be impacted by policy-based actions taken.

For advocates, activists, and partners in change, this may mean finding ways to connect people with diverse lived experience to legislators, or otherwise finding ways to uplift their voices and incorporate their perspectives in messaging and movement-building in ways that they express fit for them. Community engagement, capacity-building, and other strategies to support you in beginning thinking about how to provide platforms to support empowerment emerging in the context of creating positive systemic and structural change are explored in other chapters of this book.

Promoting voice and choice to the greatest extent possible has been recognized as a principle of strengths-based social policy as well, and ensuring individuals and communities have choices can be built into solutions presented to legislators to advance trauma-informed approaches to policy to ensure that there is a balance of having a strong structure to preserve key principles and the spirit of trauma-informed legislation while also incorporating flexibility to ensure that the unique constellations of needs, priorities, and preferences among those impacted by policy change are considered for sustainable, impactful implementation.

Realistically, there is no one-size-fits-all intervention that will help prevent and heal trauma that can be universally applied across the board. Increasing accessibility to a variety of evidence-based, evidence-informed, and promising practices at the individual and collective levels is another important factor in ensuring each person who has been impacted by trauma and adversity has agency, is acknowledged as the experts of themselves, and is given a variety of choices in how their trajectory looks.

Some ways to foster voice, choice, and empowerment in trauma-informed advocacy work include:

- Creating opportunities for community members to participate in the evaluation of advocacy strategies and their effectiveness
- Hosting workshops and seminars to build awareness and understanding about the trauma-informed advocacy process and their role within it
- Creating platforms for individuals to voice their opinions and experiences if they so choose
- Providing multiple choices and avenues for participation in advocacy efforts to ensure everyone has a space that fits for them to contribute their unique wisdom and gifts to the movement
- Ensuring that all voices, especially those of groups and communities that have historically been silenced or disregarded, are heard and respected
- Facilitating community-based learning opportunities that focus on self-advocacy, storytelling, and other skills that will help advocates, activists, and partners in change participate and contribute meaningfully
- Promoting autonomy and self-determination in all advocacy activities by avoiding micromanaging projects and trusting advocates, activists, and partners in change as experts of themselves

- Providing access to information and resources that help people make informed decisions about their participation in advocacy activities and efforts
- Engaging in shared decision-making processes
- Offering opportunities for community members to lead workshops, learning sessions, and other community-based collective knowledge-building activities
- Ensuring that advocacy materials are accessible, clear, linguistically-relevant, and understandable to a broad and diverse audience

## COLLABORATION & MUTUALITY

In trauma-informed change efforts, it is important to illuminate the importance of reverence for community wisdom, embody reciprocity, engage mutual trust and respect, support cohesion and connectedness, as well as negotiate clear and consistent terms of collaboration amongst all parties. Providing a variety of meaningful ways to contribute based on matching skills, strengths, experiences, and expressed best hopes for participation can cultivate a more collaborative culture when advocating.

Receiving “air time” in and of itself is an equity issue, and the idea of “stepping up and stepping back” or “taking space and making space” can be useful to keep in mind to ensure those with positionality that the status quo privileges as more valuable or who are more comfortable to speak out because they have been socially conditioned to feel safe doing so are not the only voices that are heard.

Trauma-informed advocacy seeks to actively integrate indigenous knowledge and the input of those impacted by policies into shaping the direction for the work, demanding that each of us reflect on how we are both contributing ourselves as well as how we are space-holding for others to do the same.

It is important to recognize that different people may have different conceptualizations of what “success” looks like when it comes to advocacy activities, and ensuring that there are avenues for people to share and integrate their own best hopes and goals when it comes to agenda-setting for the collective is an important part of modeling the model. Notably, this also strengthens broader advocacy efforts by considering a greater diversity of perspective and informing the formulation of more holistic solutions.

While keeping your eyes on what your advocacy effort has collectively defined as its “North Star,” it is crucial to ensure that different ways of bringing that vision to life are considered when devising strategies and taking action.

Embracing shared learning and uplifting various types of wisdom in this work signals inclusion and enhances belonging in ways that provide pathways for people with diverse lived experience to gain trust and connect with their own self-efficacy to be an agent of change in collaboration with others rather than as individual actors, all of which further strengthen the movement’s collective voice and power.

It is also vital that advocates, activists, and partners in change who are working toward a common vision of trauma-informed transformation set goals together as well as transparently share data, such as evaluation processes and outcomes, across relevant networks to strengthen the power and impact of the broader movement. This also helps ensure efforts are not duplicated and that energy is being channeled in an efficient, impactful manner.

Ultimately, collaboration enables advocates to constantly be learning from and alongside one another to align efforts and combine strengths to improve community conditions for all.

Some ways to foster collaboration and mutuality in trauma-informed advocacy include:

- Sharing resources and information openly
- Breaking through silos and co-creating cross-sector, cross-system partnerships and alliances
- Creating inclusive, accessible spaces for dialogue and discussion
- Promoting shared leadership and mutual responsibility for operating processes and outcomes
- Facilitating regular check-ins and updates to maintain connectedness and cohesion
- Providing opportunities for skill-sharing, co-learning, wisdom exchange, and collective capacity-building
- Engaging in joint advocacy campaigns and initiatives
- Developing clear and consistent terms of collaboration
- Building networks of mutual interest, support, and solidarity
- Celebrating collective achievements and milestones together
- Encouraging collaborative problem-solving and innovation
- Promoting joint planning and goal-setting activities
- Creating mechanisms for accountability and shared governance
- Encouraging reflective practices to learn from experiences
- Promoting a culture of gratitude and recognition

## PEER SUPPORT & MUTUAL SELF-HELP/MUTUAL AID

Emphasizing the integration of collective, community-based solutions fosters a sense of shared responsibility and resilience and creates pathways for advocates to serve as supporters of one another to stay well in the work while engaging with what can be challenging and heavy content.

Creating opportunities for advocates, activists, and partners in change to provide support to one another not only enriches the advocacy process, but also helps mitigate some of the potential adverse impacts of doing this hard work as well as ensures that trauma-informed practices align with the unique context and diverse expertise of the community.

Further, this creates opportunities for sharing through which advocates can find a sense of belonging and connectedness to others, which can facilitate healing, growth, and hope in and of itself.

Facilitating activities that provide opportunities for advocates with similar interests, stories, or other factors to connect is essential for mutual support that can sustain us in the work to emerge.

When advocates, activists, and partners in change come together to share their insights, strategies, and personal lived experiences in the advocacy space or even more broadly in the world, they create a rich reserve of wisdom that can lead to more effective, culturally-relevant solutions.

Illuminating common values, goals, and experiences through being in community with one another also builds solidarity that strengthens the broader movement and reinforces the understanding that no one is alone in their journey. This solidarity often helps folx feel supported, seen, and self-efficacious, knowing that they are part of a larger movement working toward shared goals.

Whether through structured support groups, informal meetups, or online forums, co-creating highly supportive, active spaces where advocates, activists, and partners in change can connect to find common ground is crucial. These connection points often become essential spaces for sharing resources, knowledge, and emotional support, further reinforcing the trauma-informed model.

Through these processes themselves, folx actively contribute to the establishment of a resilient community that can more effectively prevent, heal, and address trauma. Indeed, a community that prioritizes mutual aid and peer support will be better-equipped to step up to support one another in navigating adversity and to help one another preserve well-being as well as their collective connection to resilience and well-being.

While we are continuing to strive for systemic and institutional support for holistic well-being, given the current absence of such support, we must tap into our own resourcefulness and wisdom to keep each other safe and supported.

This is another “both/and” approach rather than an “either/or” way of thinking in that we know structural change needs to happen and we need to demand that the future looks different from the present moment, and yet, many do not have the privilege to wait for the long-term vision to be realized.

It is vital we find opportunities both to demonstrate the need for more systemic supports for holistic well-being while also finding opportunities to reduce reducible suffering among our communities and cared-for ones.

Some additional ways to foster peer support and mutual self-help/mutual aid in trauma-informed advocacy include:

- Establishing peer support groups tailored to specific shared needs or lived experiences
- Facilitating workshops on self- and collective care
- Creating resource-sharing platforms for tools, strategies, and information
- Creating mentorship programs or “buddy systems” where experienced advocates, activists, and partners in change provide support and encouragement to those who are newer in the trauma-informed advocacy space
- Hosting regular community-building events to strengthen bonds among those moving the advocacy agenda forward
- Setting up online forums, social media groups, and/or virtual communities on apps such as GroupMe, WhatsApp, or Signal for continuous connection
- Encouraging advocates to share personal stories and diverse lived experiences as they feel called to do in safe, supportive spaces for courageous conversations to happen
- Offering debriefing sessions after challenging advocacy activities
- Developing a directory of peer support resources and contacts
- Offering crisis support and intervention training for advocates
- Creating opportunities for intergenerational support and knowledge exchange
- Providing logistical and emotional support for fellow advocates, activists, and partners in change who are facing challenges

## ATTENTIVENESS & ATTUNEMENT TO CULTURAL, GENDER & HISTORICAL ISSUES

Living at the intersections of multiple oppressions is oftentimes itself experienced as traumatic. This is inherently connected to the struggle for social justice and human rights, as well as to the objective fact that, while trauma is more normative than not among *all* of the citizens of the world, trauma and its indelible impacts are *not* equally distributed in our world.

Because our systems and structures have forced certain groups to the margins of society, there are people and communities that experience increased vulnerability to enduring individual, interpersonal, and collective trauma themselves, as well as to endure challenges related to having a legacy characterized by historical, racial, cultural, and other types of intergenerational trauma.

In turn, these people and communities often have fewer resources with which to cope with trauma's negative effects, contributing to vicious cycles that trauma-informed approaches seek to disrupt, dismantle, and redress.

Trauma-informed approaches can support inclusive, equitable, and just outcomes by highlighting that embracing and honoring diversity is integral to growth and our world's collective well-being. Accordingly, it is vital to support policymakers to move past socially-constructed stratification, destructive norms, harmful stereotypes, and destabilizing biases.

Individual advocates, advocacy groups, and the broader movement themselves are not immune from falling into these patterns as well, and it is important to be intentional about retaining awareness of intersectionality and integrate an understanding of how factors such as race, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, and other parts of the kaleidoscope human identity and diversity inherently incur or deter access to certain privileges into all advocacy activities and objectives.

It is also incumbent on us all to notice how, despite discriminatory policy, oppressive systems, and negative social discourse often reinforcing one other in ways that lead to the continued denial of rights to certain individuals, groups, and communities, those who have been impacted continue to adapt creatively to survive.

We each hold many identities that make each of us ourselves, and it is important to engage ongoing self-awareness and practice continued self-reflection to embody cultural humility and a trauma-informed approach.

This includes recognizing where our identities are both privileged and targeted, and using this understanding to further advance equitable change in ways that feel accessible, meaningful, and safe enough for us.

Another important aspect of modeling this trauma-informed principle is leveraging the healing value of cultural connections in our own work, as well as devising strategies to negotiate dynamics of difference and sameness within the context of power within our advocacy work in relation to race, class, citizenship, gender, sexuality, and other such factors.

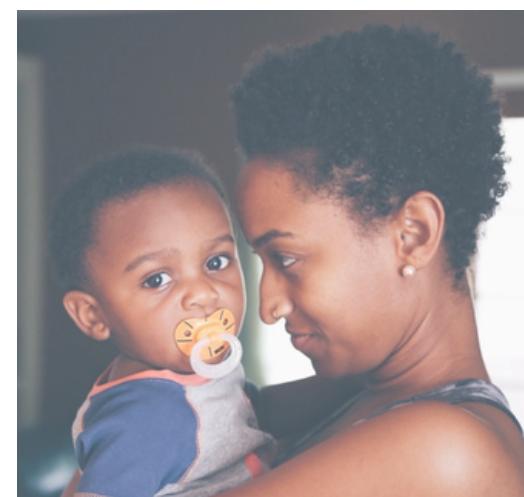
We must model breaking down barriers that deny individuals, families, groups, and communities their right to live dignified, engaged, self-actualized lives.

Notably, the learnings we develop by committing ourselves to these practices can be brought to policy- and decision-makers such that cultural resiliency, wisdom, capacity, and strengths are acknowledged, honored, and mobilized through public policy, which ultimately can contribute to shifting the dominant discourse from pathology and problems toward resiliency, well-being, and hope.

To facilitate attentiveness and attunement to cultural, gender, and historical issues, advocates, activists, and partners in change may consider:

- Aligning materials and the makeup of the movement to represent and accurately reflect the diversity of experiences and identities related to the advocacy agenda
- Highlighting the importance of intersectionality in policy discussions
- Engaging in continuous education and training on cultural competence and humility
- Promoting policies that recognize and address the unique needs of marginalized communities
- Facilitating dialogues that include diverse voices and perspectives
- Advocating for the collection and use of disaggregated data to better understand the impacts of policies on different groups
- Supporting community-led initiatives that address cultural, historical, and other forms of collective and intergenerational trauma that disproportionate impact some groups and communities
- Encouraging policymakers to consider historical contexts of trauma and adversity when crafting legislation
- Collaborating with culturally-specific organizations to integrate traditional practices into advocacy activities
- Promoting the use of culturally-relevant and culturally-sustaining healing practices

- Integrating research that explores the connections between strong cultural identity and resilience among various groups into the advocacy agenda as well as processes to advance it
- Advocating for the protection and promotion of cultural heritage and traditions
- Collaborating with community leaders to develop culturally-sensitive advocacy strategies
- Supporting the creation of affinity spaces within the advocacy group





## Reflection Point

What are you *already* doing to demonstrate commitment to the guiding six principles of a trauma-informed approach?

What principle(s) do you notice you might benefit from refining or practicing more intentionally in terms of how you engage with others to better “model the model” of a trauma-informed approach in your advocacy work?

How do you envision the principles of a trauma-informed approach serving as a basis for guiding policy advocacy for your issue of choice?

# Applying an Anti-Oppressive, Equity-Centered Lens to Trauma-Informed Advocacy

To further delve into considerations related to the cultural, gender, and historical issues principle of a trauma-informed approach, it is important to emphasize that oppressive behavior reinforces historical hierarchies of power and holds us back individually and collectively from reaching our full potential.

Oppressive systems reinforce and reproduce trauma, and by working to undermine oppressive systems in our daily life as well as in our policy advocacy work, we strengthen our work toward a more resilient, healing-centered, prevention-oriented, and trauma-informed future.

Much like “being trauma-informed” is not an end destination but instead an iterative journey of integrating ongoing learning into existing frameworks to shape our ways of moving in and engaging with the world, learning about and being attentive to oppression through lens of cultural humility invites us to embark upon a lifelong personal journey through which we strive to learn about issues and perspectives impacting individuals and groups.

It is important to realize that we *all* have biases which we may not always be mindful of, and that these biases, if left unchecked, have the potential to unintentionally emerge in ways that re-traumatize others as we do our work. We know that trauma arises not only as an experience of isolated violence, but also from compounding hardship, systemic oppression, discrimination, and significant challenges that people who have experienced trauma face. Understanding the intersections of these issues is tremendously important.

A key facet of embodying a trauma-informed approach is acknowledging and seeking a deep understanding of the communities we work in partnership with, including their sociocultural and sociopolitical history along with current context, intersections of oppression, and various forms of trauma that may have individual and/or collective impacts upon people who comprise the community or group. Bringing awareness to these dynamics provides opportunities for trauma-informed advocates, activists, and partners in change to offer support and express solidarity without colonizing the campaign.

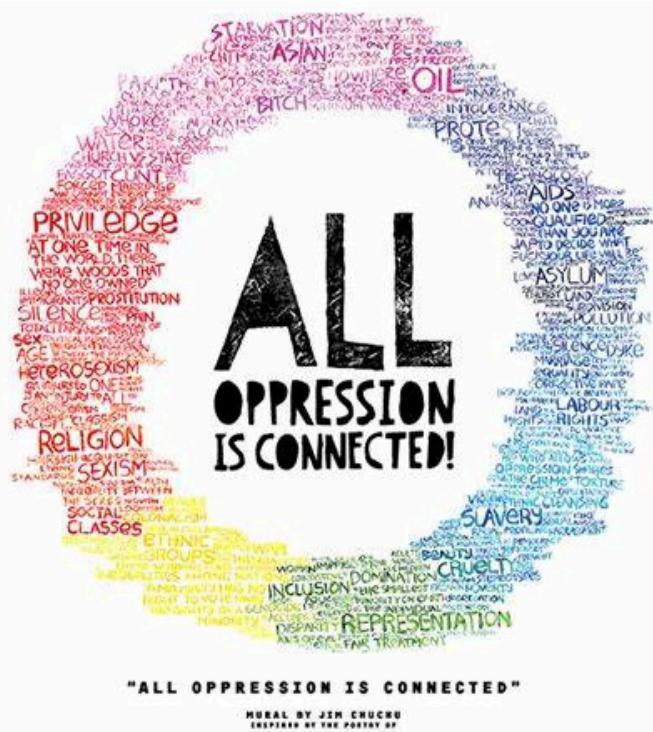
To reiterate: although no population is immune to experiencing trauma, some types of trauma are disproportionately experienced by certain groups in relation to these deeply entrenched structural inequalities that constrain agency, civic participation, and progress toward living a healthy, fulfilling, self-actualized life.

In order for true justice and liberation from the confines of oppressive systems and structures to be achieved, it is important that we all get radically honest about the past, as well as acknowledge the ongoing intergenerational harm, the loss of cultural practices, the tokenistic approach to inclusion, and the ways that our institutions contribute to certain groups and communities experiencing disparities in holistic well-being and disproportionate involvement the legal system, healthcare system, and other systems that themselves further perpetrate and perpetuate trauma.

Ideally, the advocacy work we all do together will fundamentally change communities and their structural underpinnings on a broad scale such that resources and power are more equitably distributed, thus creating the cascading change needed to break intergenerational cycles of oppression.

This is a lens to look through for every single bill we advocate for or against, as well as when examining our own practices as trauma-informed advocates. This work, while not always easy, is vital to secure holistic well-being for all.

# APPLYING AN ANTI-OPPRESSIVE, EQUITY-CENTERED LENS TO TRAUMA-INFORMED ADVOCACY





## Reflection Point

Take a moment to pause and reflect on your own experiences with identity, privilege, equity, diversity, oppression, and trauma.

What are your targeted identities, or those that predispose you to potential bias, barriers, judgment, or discrimination?

What privileges, whether earned or unearned simply by virtue of the identities you hold, do you have access to?

What do you need to learn, unlearn, or re-learn in order to embody the principles explored in this chapter?

What will help you remain curious and open to challenging your own perceptions, and to remain open to the many ways of knowing, thinking, being, doing, and relating across the spectrum of human experience?

How can you not only recognize injustice, but act with intentionality and urgency to redress it?

# The Importance of Self- & Collective Care

Advocacy can be and often is a highly rewarding experience, especially when you can clearly see the difference you are contributing to in the world and in people's lives. If you are constantly giving and not taking time to attend to yourself, however, you may be at higher risk for hazards to holistic well-being.

Conversely, when we feel supported and able to engage in practices that preserve our well-being and sense of self, we are able to tap into some beautiful impacts that can sustain us in this work.

Being trauma-informed and trauma-responsive in any context is a total paradigm shift in which a high value is placed on self-reflection, self-awareness, and self-care. Reflection helps us to make thoughtful decisions with knowledge of how our personal reactions and feelings are operating.

It is important to pay attention to and acknowledge one's own personal beliefs about and experiences with trauma, as well as respond to the situation appropriately so each advocate can show up well enough to continue to support this important work.

It is also important to consider how the discoveries you make through engaging in critical ongoing self-reflection can inform your engagement with others, including helping other advocates, colleagues, and other players recognize how their own privileges may shape their ability to work authentically and humbly across differences.

Of course, when we are in survival mode, we know our brains cannot access our best thinking or behavioral responses to align ourselves with our values, ideals, and the principles of a trauma-informed approach.

Accordingly, it is useful to take a “both/and” approach to encouraging self-care among advocates, activists, and partners in change, while also committing to working together to ensure that there are more collective supports and opportunities, especially in larger groups that have resources and paid staff to dedicate to building sustainability into the movement, are considered and integrated as well.

When tensions or a lapse in engagement arise in this work, it can be easy to fall victim to cultural scripts that emphasize individualism, or which suggest that a person does not care or is not dedicated if they set boundaries, or that they ought to be doing more/are not dedicated to the cause if they take a break from the work.

A trauma-informed lens presents us with opportunities to consider how someone withdrawing a bit from the work could be related to how exposure to trauma themes in the work or their own lived experiences in their personal lives, whether firsthand or secondary exposure to trauma, may play a role in how someone shows up in the work.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF ATTENDING TO SELF

- Enacting the principles of a trauma-informed approach is an ongoing, digestive process in which self-reflection, self-awareness, & self-care are critical to:
  - Making thoughtful decisions based on one's expertise of themselves
  - Sustaining oneself while interfacing with trauma
  - Actively & intentionally resisting retraumatization in advocacy efforts
- Mindfulness with compassion
- Curiosity alongside critical journey
- Facilitate check-ins (allowing anyone to pass or not participate) and allow time/space for advocates to discuss what they are noticing & how they maintain well-being
- Strive to recognize the ways in which experiences may be related to stress/trauma responses (whether primary or secondary exposure)



It is important to be cognizant of how much you ask of your advocates if you are in a leadership role. It can be especially hard for people with lived experience of trauma and adversity, who are actively engaged on all the issues that directly impact their livelihoods and perhaps not always seeing the change they would have hoped for, to feel supported and to stay engaged in the work over time.

We each can play a role in helping the environments in which we advocate cultivate and sustain a culture of collective care by embodying a trauma-informed approach in how we engage with ourselves and others.

One way to support a culture of collective care is to co-create safety plans and wellness plans for the collective. An activity to help you individually begin thinking about your own well-being and safety in this work follows later in this chapter as well.

It also cannot be reiterated enough how important it is for each of us to reflect on the impact of the work that we do either privately or with trusted others, including supervisors, peers, therapists, family, friends, or anyone who helps us feel witnessed and understood.

To stay engaged in this work in a way that feels impactful and meaningful means we must take the intentional time to pause and check in around what is happening inside of us, both in times of success and in times of stress. Connection is important, and leaning into healthy supports will help sustain us in ways that help retain a sense of hope, possibility, curiosity, and compassion for ourselves and for others.

The next section explores some of the ways we may notice the impacts of the work in ourselves and in others based on how the above-referenced strategies are engaged (or not).

## Some Possible Impacts of Advocacy Work

There are some adverse experiences that are not uncommon to notice emerge in doing this work that represent understandable reactions to significant challenges that advocates, activists, and partners in change often encounter when engaging in revolutionary work like trauma-informed transformation.

Importantly, the reactions explored below are the human mind and body's *natural response* to stress and trauma exposure when caring for oneself is not prioritized, to which vulnerability is increased when there are few established supports to tap into in order to access collective care.

Additionally, more welcome and positive impacts of the work that we can tap into to maintain a sense of resilience and vitality in doing this work are explored below as well.



## SECONDARY TRAUMATIC STRESS

*When empathic engagement with significantly stressful, traumatic, or adverse event(s) manifests in trauma responses and post-traumatic stress symptomology in a person who did not directly experience the trauma themselves*

- Typically quick in onset and associated with a specific event
- Intrusive thoughts of the event(s)
- Re-experiencing the event(s)
- Having nightmares
- Increased psychological arousal/hypervigilance
- Feeling angry or cynical
- Misplaced feelings of guilt
- Self-isolation from cared-for ones
- Feeling detached, numb, apathetic
- Avoidance of certain situations, particularly ones that activate a trauma “theme” related to the event(s)

## COMPASSION FATIGUE

*A combination of physical, emotional, and spiritual depletion associated with caring for and/or witnessing others who are in significant pain or distress*

- Markedly reduced capacity for empathy and compassion toward others
- Unrealistic/unchecked expectations of self/others
- Increased shame
- Resentment
- Impaired attention/focus
- Coming to dislike one's role in the work or the advocacy organization/broader movement itself
- Avoidance of particularly complicated or heavy tasks or responsibilities
- Decreased capacity to show up in one's role

## VICARIOUS TRAUMA

*The development of negative shifts in worldview in relation to the cumulative impacts of being exposed to and/or witnessing trauma/adversity over time*

- Develops gradually over time
- Loss of meaning/hope

- Decreased capacity for decision-making
- Difficulty regulating/managing emotions
- Low self-efficacy or self-compassion
- Excessive worry about the state of the world
- Challenges managing healthy boundaries
- Somatic complaints (i.e., stomachache, newly-developed chronic pain, migraine, etc.)

## BURNOUT

*A state of physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual exhaustion related to long-term involvement in emotionally-demanding situations*

- Develops gradually over time, particularly among advocacy groups/settings with minimal supports for well-being
- Feelings of hopelessness or cynicism
- Quickness to overwhelm
- Decrease in efficacy and productivity
- Easily frustrated/irritable
- Coping through numbing, avoiding, withdrawing, procrastinating, dissociating, substance use, etc.
- Increased mental distance from the movement itself
- Sense of futility/meaninglessness of doing the work
- Less person-centered interactions
- More absenteeism and presenteeism (e.g., being “there” without really being invested)

## MORAL DISTRESS & INJURY

*The distressing psychological, behavioral, social, and/or spiritual aftermath of perpetrating, failing to prevent, bearing witness to, or learning about acts that transgress deeply-held moral beliefs, values, or expectations*

- Loss of sense of meaning/purpose
- Self-condemnation and shame
- Negative sense of self
- Feelings of futility/failure/incapacity
- Empathic strain

- Loss of faith/spiritual connections
- Unresolved anger with bureaucracy, systemic issues, fellow advocates, etc.
- Worry, fear, and/or overwhelm
- Challenges maintaining healthy boundaries
- Loss of sense of safety/control/trust
- Hypervigilance

## COMPASSION RESILIENCE

*The ability to maintain one's physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual well-being while compassionately doing advocacy work*

- Boundaries that protect personal energy and emotional capacity are maintained
- Capacity to navigate challenging conversations with patience and empathy
- Prioritizing practices and connections that promote physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental wellness
- Ability to recognize and empathize with others' suffering without becoming overwhelmed
- Modeling the use of self-regulation skills with self and co-regulation skills with others to promote a culture of compassion and presence
- Engaging in reciprocal support with colleagues, creating a network of mutual support

## COMPASSION SATISFACTION

*The pleasure derived from being able to perform one's role in the advocacy work and in support of others effectively*

- Experiencing positive feelings about helping others
- Ability to see "the bigger picture" of the work, such as contributing to societal greater good
- Sense of meaning/value of one's contributions
- Greater empathic attunement with others
- Capacity to notice others' strengths and gifts
- Increased capacity for resourcefulness, creativity, and innovation
- Increased self-awareness and self-care practices
- Feeling a deep sense of connection to and meaning in the work of advocacy

## VICARIOUS RESILIENCE

*Positive meaning-making and transformation experienced through engaging with those who have demonstrated resiliency in their ability to withstand and survive trauma*

- Noticing others as models and important sources of information for one's own learning about coping with trauma and hardships
- Increased capacity for remaining present and grounded while listening to others' trauma narratives
- More readily able to positively reframe and see meaning in adverse events and experiences
- Increased consciousness about cultural humility and power relative to social location
- Understanding and valuing spiritual dimensions of healing
- Greater empathy and compassion for others
- Appreciation for others' strength and tenacity
- Increased or restored hope and optimism

## VICARIOUS POST-TRAUMATIC GROWTH

*Positive psychological changes experienced as a result of working with people who demonstrate profound growth after experiencing trauma/adversity*

- Deepened sense of connection to self, others, and the broader world
- Appreciation and gratitude towards life in general becomes more accessible
- Greater sense of hope and meaning
- More attentiveness to maintaining emotional and spiritual well-being
- Increased emotional strength and resiliency
- Greater capacity to see and seize new possibilities

## MORAL COURAGE

*The demonstration of one's commitment and capacity to express personal convictions and take principled action in the face of moral challenges, conflict, or ethical dilemmas – even if it involves personal risk, discomfort, or possible admonishment from those with status/power*

- Sense of pride, empowerment, and self-efficacy for oneself, as well as for others who are themselves inspired to "do the right thing" after seeing moral courage modeled

- Connection to meaning and purpose
- Personal and professional development
- Self-awareness and reflexivity

## MORAL RESILIENCE

*The capacity to withstand moral challenges while sustaining/restoring identity and integrity*

- Self-stewardship and self-regulation
- Felt sense of values alignment and integrity
- Strengthened commitment to personal principles and convictions
- Buoyancy
- Greater self-efficacy and self-compassion
- Increased ability to remain regulated in times of stress, challenge, and change
- Integrating lessons learned and personal growth acquired through navigating ethical dilemmas

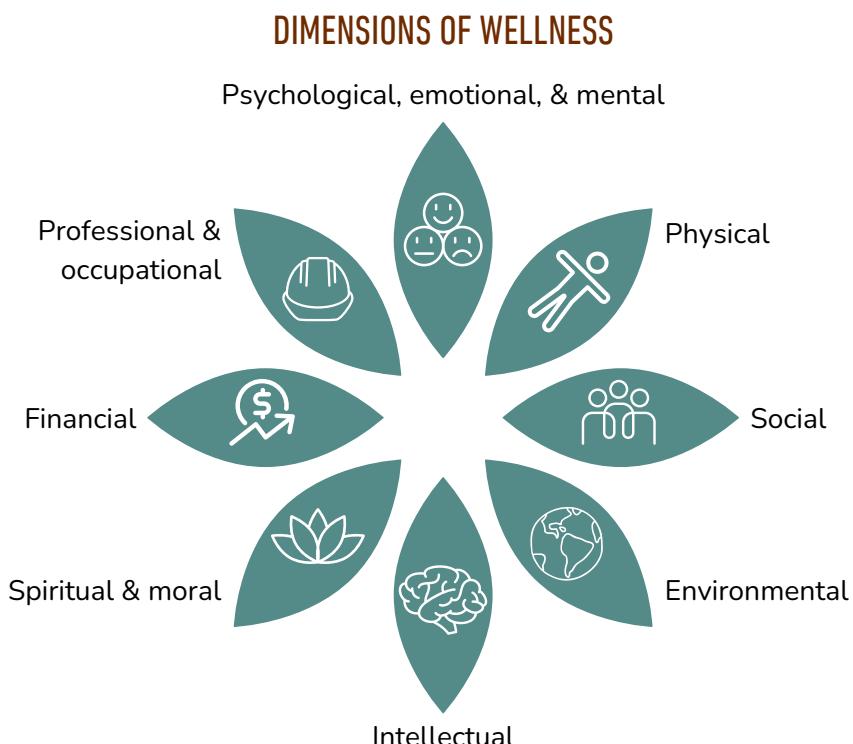
# ACTIVITY: Advocate Self- & Collective Care Planning Tool

This work challenges each of us to engage in ongoing critical reflection and dialogue in a way that can feel activating or confronting. Especially when paired with the other demands of the lives we each lead, caring for our whole selves is vital to combat burnout and maximize well-being, meaning, and success both in this work as well as in our general lives.

Please read through the content presented below and then complete your own personal wellness plan on the pages that follow.

## Considerations to Inform Wellness Planning:

To help you balance the demands of this work while staying present to attend to other significant areas in your life, it is important to consider each of the eight dimensions of wellness depicted and defined below.



- **Psychological/Emotional/Mental:** developing awareness of feelings/thoughts; coping effectively
- **Physical:** engaging in movement, getting enough rest, and maintaining a balanced diet
- **Social:** developing a sense of connection and belonging; intentionality in nurturing relationships
- **Environmental:** occupying pleasant, stimulating environments that support well-being
- **Intellectual:** expanding knowledge/skills through creative and intellectually-stimulating activities
- **Spiritual/Moral:** attending to a sense of meaning in life; acting in alignment with core values
- **Financial:** managing financial resources to sufficiently meet one's needs
- **Professional/Occupational:** finding personal satisfaction and enrichment from one's work

\*Excerpted and adapted from William & Mary's and UC Davis' frameworks.

Stress is an inevitable part of life that each of us is responsible for attending to, and it is our best hope that you find that this activity helps you begin to think about what fits for you in terms of practices and resources to tap into in order to stay well while interfacing with what is sometimes quite heavy, demanding work. While it is important to realize all stress is not necessarily “bad,” as shown on the following continuum, where stress is not managed effectively, it can accumulate and impact our functioning across any/all of the above-referenced dimensions of wellness over time.

**Being intentional about attending to ourselves can help us recognize stress-related changes as they emerge so we can proactively respond and take action to stay well before stress and/or exposure to trauma and its related impacts cause us (and/or others we engage with) substantial harm.**

OPENHEARTED	THRIVING	SURVIVING	STRUGGLING	CRITICAL
<i>I'm creating and in flow.</i>	<i>I've got this!</i>	<i>Something isn't right.</i>	<i>I can't keep this up.</i>	<i>I can't survive this.</i>
optimal functioning; confidence, curiosity, vitality	well-regulated emotions calm & steady mood with minor mood fluctuations	increased/more intense mood fluctuations; transient/mild distress or loss of functioning; nervousness, sadness	dysregulated emotions; persistent / pervasive fear, panic, anxiousness, anger, hopelessness	disabling distress & loss of function; panic attacks, nightmares / flashbacks, intrusive thoughts, thoughts of self-harm or suicide
clear & energized	calm & steady	lower energy	exhausted	no energy; inability to remain alert
courageously pursuing interests & passions; modeling ethics	consistent performance; well-trained & prepared	inconsistent performance	difficulty making decisions / concentrating	careless mistakes; inability to focus; notably poor performance
compassionate & kind; gratitude; having fun	emotionally available; able to take things in stride	more easily irritated or overwhelmed	shorter fuse; inner conflict	reactive; easily enraged or aggressive
actively seeking out feedback; growth mindset	able to take & act on feedback with humility	able to take some feedback; may bristle when feedback is more critical	challenges with taking feedback personally	rejecting of all feedback
connected & open communication	able to communicate effectively	relationships become more stressful or less interesting / appealing	avoiding interactions with colleagues, friends, and/or family	significant withdrawal from relationships; broken relationships
dynamic & fulfilling balance of life priorities & needs	consistent, balanced sleep patterns & appetite	trouble eating or sleeping; muscle tension, headaches	restless, disturbed sleep; fatigue, aches, & pains	unable to fall or stay asleep; feeling numb, lost, or out of control; physical impacts are felt
critical thinking; consciousness development & meaning-making	room for complexity; learning & adaptive growth	increased need for control & difficulty adjusting to change	loss of creativity, interest, and/or motivation; engaging in numbing behaviors	avoiding important life events / obligations; dependence on substances, food, or other numbing activities to cope

Many of us in this work provide care and support to others either professionally or personally, and it is an unfortunate trend that many of us place caring for ourselves at the bottom of our priority list.

While institutional and systemic issues may present challenges that we cannot necessarily “self-care” our way out of, it can be quite useful to reflect around how you can most effectively maintain mindfulness and stress resiliency so that you are able to help yourself stay as holistically well and anchored in compassion to self and other in this work.

How we show up in the world impacts our inner world and also our communities, and modeling the model of being trauma-informed invites each of us to consider how we are working to embed self- and collective care into the ways we move in space and time.

Importantly: there is no “one-size-fits-all” wellness plan and therefore there are no “right” or “wrong” answers for the prompts below; each of us has different experiences, capacities, strengths, values, and priorities, and that will influence what we each will need in order to attend to the various dimensions of our wellness. You are the expert of you!

When choosing activities/strategies, it can be helpful to...

- Focus on things you can do for yourself, by yourself (self-regulation)
- Integrate some strategies that evoke a sense of connectedness to self and to others, with consideration for who and where you feel the greatest sense of acceptance, belonging, support, and security
- Consider integrating distracting/calming/sensory items and keeping them accessible
- You might find it useful to incorporate a variety of types of activities/strategies (e.g., physical actions [breathing, humming, self-massage] mixed with something that takes you somewhere else in your mind [meditation, viewing picture of a loved one, visualization], etc. so you have a variety of strategies at the ready to address different scenarios and stressors)
- It can be helpful to select things that can be done without much thought and in different settings/situations, though giving consideration to more “special” processes requiring of planning may make sense for you, too

## Final Words & Final Reflections

We would encourage you to take a moment to consider what struck you most throughout this resource, and what you will take forward with you as you take your *next small step* toward building a more trauma-informed and trauma-responsive world, along with how you will applaud yourself as well as take care of yourself after the energy you have dedicated to engaging with this guide.

We at CTIPP deeply value the work each of you is doing, and we know from being in community with and witnessing our incredible network of advocates, activists, and partners in change take collective action toward transformation that each and every effort matters. The significance of your efforts in disrupting the intergenerational transmission of trauma are not lost on us.

We appreciate your past, present, and future actions to create a just, equitable, resilient, compassionate, healthy, and trauma-informed world.

We remain hopeful and committed to collaboratively building momentum in this movement, and we on the CTIPP team truly rest assured despite the uncertain road ahead knowing that advocates like you are contributing to co-construct a society that will better support all people and communities in achieving greater well-being, thriving, and flourishing for generations to come.

Thank you for your continued engagement with these materials and the work!

# Glossary

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**ACTION** carrying out the adopted policy decisions as planned.

**ADOPTION** the selection of which policy proposal will be enacted into law by relevant policymakers.

**ADVERSE COMMUNITY EXPERIENCES** aspects of the socio-cultural, physical/built, and economic environments that contribute to trauma and toxic stress.

**ADVOCACY** is broadly defined as any endeavor undertaken to secure, safeguard, or champion rights, support the fulfillment of needs, rectify injustices, or otherwise promote the well-being of individuals, families, groups, or communities.

**AGENDA SETTING** identifying and uplifting a key issue that is able to be addressed through a specified policy solution.

**ALLOSTATIC LOAD** the cumulative burden of chronic stress and life events.

**BILLS** designed to create laws as well as to amend or repeal existing laws.

**BRIEFINGS** are meetings/presentations where detailed information is provided to a select audience, which might include journalists, policymakers, or others who are influential in the dialogue surrounding an issue and solution.

**BURNOUT** a state of physical and emotional exhaustion that is often characterized by a loss of passion or a sense of detachment from your advocacy work; A state of physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual exhaustion related to long-term involvement in emotionally-demanding situations.

**CAPACITY-BUILDING** a process in which communities work to improve their collective skills and resources.

**COALITIONS** a powerful alliance of diverse actors united by a common goal and engaged in coordinated efforts to influence decision-making processes and drive change.

**COLLECTIVE TRAUMA** psychological reactions to a traumatic event or series of events impacting an entire society or group, carried as part of collective memory and shared sense of identity.

**COMPANION LEGISLATION** related bills introduced simultaneously in both chambers of a legislature that are highly similar in their intent and content, though not necessarily identical down the the letter.

# Glossary

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**COMPASSION FATIGUE** a combination of physical, emotional, and spiritual depletion associated with caring for and/or witnessing others who are in significant pain or distress.

**COMPASSION RESILIENCE** The ability to maintain one's physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual well-being while compassionately doing advocacy work.

**COMPASSION SATISFACTION** the pleasure derived from being able to perform one's role in the advocacy work and in support of others effectively.

**CULTURAL TRAUMA** indelible marks impacting—and possibly changing the identity of—a collectivity following being subjected to a severe event or series of events.

**DESIGN** developing specific policy strategies and solutions to address issues and needs highlighted when setting an agenda.

**DEVELOPMENTAL ADVERSITY** negative early life experiences associated with higher population-risk of poorer developmental or health-related outcomes.

**DIRECT LOBBYING** refers to communications with legislators that express a particular viewpoint about how they ought to vote on a specific piece of legislation.

**EFFICIENCY** using the least amount of resources to achieve the best possible outcomes.

**EQUITY** seeks equality of outcomes.

**EVALUATION** is a systematic review of the efficacy and impact of activities you are monitoring that occurs periodically throughout the lifespan of your advocacy work.

**GRASSROOTS ADVOCATES** anyone who will take action to address challenges and advance solutions that they are directly affected by or deeply concerned about.

**GRASSROOTS or INDIRECT LOBBYING** involves communicating with the public and urging them to take action and contact their lawmakers with the intent to sway legislative outcomes.

**GRASSROOTS ORGANIZING** invites citizens of the world to join together and collaborate to amplify collective voice and shape change.

**GRASSTOPS ADVOCACY** harnesses the influence of those within your advocacy network who have relationships, resources, positions, or access to other elements that build collective power to advance your advocacy agenda.

# Glossary

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**GRASSTOPS ADVOCATES** are influential people within your advocacy network who use their positions, resources, or connections to influence decision-making at high levels.

**HEARING** the committee calls witnesses to testify, providing valuable insights that either support or oppose what is stated in the legislation.

**HEARINGS** are formal meetings conducted by legislative or judicial bodies to gather information, evidence, and insights from various parties close to an issue before making decisions, drafting legislation, or conducting an investigation.

**HISTORICAL TRAUMA** the cumulative emotional and psychological wounding across generations, including one's own lifespan, in connection to a collective traumatic experience(s) or event(s).

**HOMEOSTASIS** is clinging to a stable, familiar state and resisting any deviation from its established culture and context.

**IMPLEMENTATION PHASE** marks the transition from policy adoption to real-world application.

**“LEAVE-BEHINDS”** printed materials or documents that advocates, activists, and partners in change leave behind for their advocacy audience to hold on to after a meeting or presentation.

**LEGISLATIVE BRANCH** is the branch of government responsible for creating, editing, and passing pieces of legislation.

**LETTERS TO THE EDITOR** responses to published stories or prior letters or to some recent event.

**LIBERTY** a balancing of freedom from coercion and freedom from harm caused by others, along with conceptualizations of individual and public rights and responsibilities.

**LIFESPAN/LIFE COURSE PERSPECTIVE** encompassing a comprehensive understanding of how trauma impacts a person across their entire life, acknowledging how these effects shift over time and thus guiding interventions to meet diverse and evolving needs at various life stages.

**MARKUP** is where the language and text of the bill is scrutinized line-by-line and may be modified.

**MONITORING** is a dynamic, ongoing process tracking the moment-to-moment operational aspects of the advocacy process.

# Glossary

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**MORAL COURAGE** the demonstration of one's commitment and capacity to express personal convictions and take principled action in the face of moral challenges, conflict, or ethical dilemmas – even if it involves personal risk, discomfort, or possible admonishment from those with status/power.

**MORAL DISTRESS AND MORAL INJURY** the distressing psychological, behavioral, social, and/or spiritual aftermath of perpetrating, failing to prevent, bearing witness to, or learning about acts that transgress deeply-held moral beliefs, values, or expectations.

**MORAL RESILIENCE** the capacity to withstand moral challenges while sustaining/restoring identity and integrity.

**OP-EDs** opinion pieces usually written by a guest writer (i.e., a person who is not on the news outlet's editorial board).

**POLICIES** are rules and principles that tell us which actions--among a multitude of possible actions--we may and may not take.

**POLICY ADVOCACY** informing, advising, and influencing policy- and decision-makers to modify the conditions of society that seriously threaten well-being or prevent people from achieving their full potential.

**POLICY BRIEF** a short document that distills and summarizes an issue, presents an overview of policy options to address that issue, and recommends the best option to act on based on key evidence.

**POLICY FORMULATION** creation of policy proposals that articulate policy objectives and define the mechanisms through which policy goals will be achieved.

**POLICY LEVERS** tools or mechanisms through which public policy can be influenced or changed.

**POLICY MEASURE** generally a bill or resolution, serves as a vehicle through which legislative changes are proposed and enacted.

**POLICY REVIEW** assess the extent to which a policy has accomplished what it initially set forth to accomplish, if the policy decision implemented is adequate to address the targeted problem in practice, and whether the policy is implemented faithfully and in alignment with what the legislative text states.

# Glossary

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**POLICY SOLUTIONS** are designed to create systemic and institutional change through the modification of laws and regulations.

**POLICY TOOL** a method or technique through which governing authorities seek to achieve a policy goal.

**POPULATION-HEALTH APPROACH** acknowledges the evidence stating that individuals, families, groups, communities, and systems exposed to these experiences and conditions without the presence of buffering factors or appropriate intervention at the right moment in time are at greater risk of having divergent outcomes.

**POWER** the capacity held, individually or collectively, to influence others in a particular context.

**PRESS RELEASES** are official statements issued to news and other media outlets to announce a range of items, aiming to inform the public or specific interested parties about important events or developments within a community, group, organization, or system.

**PRIMARY PREVENTION** population-based interventions intended to target the prevention of trauma at its earliest stages aiming to thwart the impacts of trauma on individuals or communities directly.

**PRIMORDIAL PREVENTION** programs that target social and economic policies that influence communities' or individuals' health.

**PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION** recognizes and articulates the specific issues requiring policy change and institutional intervention.

**PUBLIC POLICY** institutionalized proposals concerning a given topic endorsed and disseminated by a governmental entity or its representatives.

**RACIAL TRAUMA/RACE-BASED TRAUMATIC STRESS** the stressful mental impact and/or emotional injury related to encounters with racial bias and ethnic discrimination, microaggressions, racism, oppression, violence, and hate crimes, whether experienced personally or witnessed as perpetrated toward others.

**RESOLUTIONS** are formal statements or decisions used to express the collective opinion, intent, or will of the legislative body producing the resolution.

# Glossary

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**RESOURCES** a comprehensive array of supports, capacities, strengths, gifts, wisdom, and other elements that both facilitate you realizing your advocacy goals and also are accessible for you (and/or your partners in charge) to tap into and mobilize.

**SALUTARY LENS** when setting goals, meaning using language that speaks to the value of the presence of something desirable that your solution will bring rather than simply speaking to the eradication or absence of the core issue.

**SECONDARY PREVENTION** early detection and intervention in the immediate aftermath of a traumatic event or experience to minimize its negative impact to reduce adverse outcomes.

**SECONDARY TRAUMATIC STRESS** when empathic engagement with significantly stressful, traumatic, or adverse event(s) manifests in trauma responses and post-traumatic stress symptomology in a person who did not directly experience the trauma themselves

**SECONDARY/VICARIOUS TRAUMA** the impact of exposure to people who have experienced trauma themselves, descriptions of traumatic events by a survivor, others inflicting violence/cruelty on others, or witnessing experiences of individual or collective trauma.

**SECURITY** a holistic, comprehensive evaluation of risk that integrates both scientific measurements and experiential dimensions.

**SOCIAL POLICY** a form of public policy related to what, how, and to whom opportunities and resources are made available and distributed so that people may flourish and lead fruitful, fulfilling lives.

**SYSTEMIC TRAUMA** the practices, contextual features, and procedures implemented by institutions/environments or their leaders that directly or indirectly give rise to and/or maintain psychological, emotional, economic, spiritual, physical, and/or sexual harm to particular individuals or groups of people

**TERTIARY PREVENTION** reducing the complications or harms of adverse outcomes as well as preventing recurrence across the generations, aiming to thwart long-term consequences of trauma that has already taken place.

**TOXIC STRESS** prolonged, severe, or chronic activation of a person's stress response that can contribute to challenges with development, health, and/or functioning.

**TRANSGENERATIONAL/INTERGENERATIONAL TRAUMA** the transmission of trauma and related effects to subsequent generations.

# Glossary

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**TRAUMA-INFORMED** policies are designed to raise awareness about trauma—both primary and secondary—and promote trauma-informed practice.

## **TRAUMA-INFORMED SYSTEM**

- Realize the prevalence of trauma individually and collectively and the presence of strength and resilience
- Recognize how trauma affects, directly and indirectly, all involved within the system
- Respond by putting this knowledge into practice by learning from community, promoting safety and cultural wellness
- Actively seek to *resist* re-traumatization by drawing from strengths, cultural resiliency, traditional healing tools, and collective wisdom

**TRAUMA-PREVENTIVE** policies help reduce exposure to trauma and create the conditions for safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments.

**TRAUMA-SPECIFIC** policies increase access to interventions and services that mitigate the impact of trauma and promote healing.

**VETO** is a formal executive decision to reject a bill.

**VICARIOUS POST-TRAUMATIC GROWTH** Positive psychological changes experienced as a result of working with people who demonstrate profound growth after experiencing trauma/adversity.

**VICARIOUS RESILIENCE** positive meaning-making and transformation experienced through engaging with those who have demonstrated resiliency in their ability to withstand and survive trauma.

**VICARIOUS TRAUMA** the development of negative shifts in worldview in relation to the cumulative impacts of being exposed to and/or witnessing trauma/adversity over time.

**WELFARE/NEED** intricate balance between providing immediate support and planning for sustainable, long-term solutions, all considered while remaining attuned to the potential impacts of short-term and long-term action on individual and collective well-being.

**WHITE PAPER** a concise report that provides information about an issue or an authoritative report that talks about a specific proposal.

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