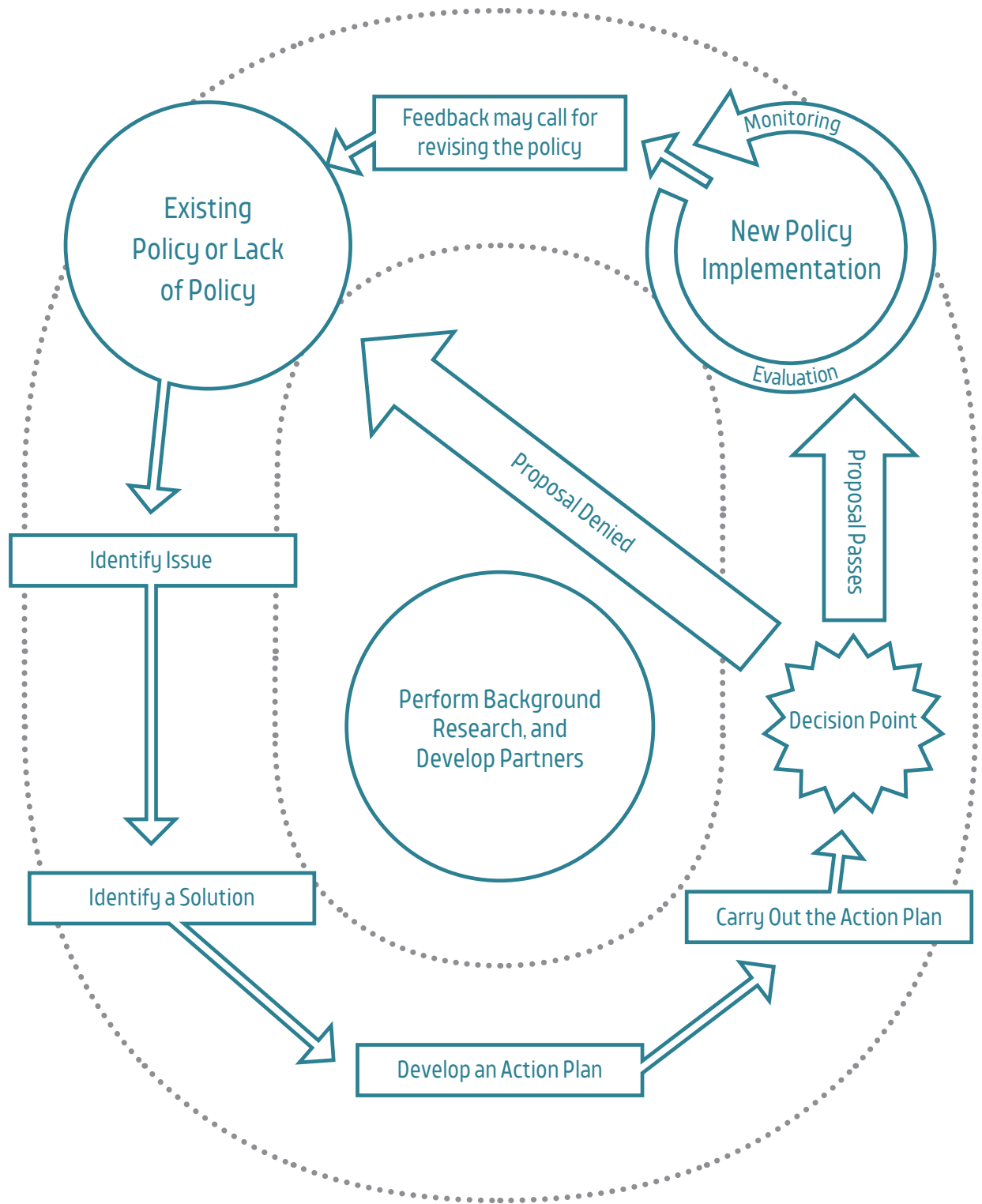# Getting to Work: Using the Policy Cycle to Make Change

Many people working to change policy use some sort of policy "wheel," or policy cycle as a mental guide for planning change. The idea of a policy cycle can be useful when you need to think about several steps in the policy change process at the same time. Although the steps involved in changing policy are usually presented in an orderly fashion (A, B, C, D), in real life the actions taken in one step may overlap with others, or you may find that you are doing A, B, and D all at one time, or that the steps need to be done out of order. For example, as your group works to put together a clear statement of the policy issue you want to address, you may uncover solutions that are being tried in other places, or find out that others in your community or state are working on the same issue.

> *Policy Cycle – A framework (often presented as a picture, or diagram) that describes the steps involved in making policy change, and the process for getting there.[8] Our version of a policy cycle diagram is found on the following page in Figure 1.*

Figure 1. Policy Cycle Diagram

Existing Policy or Lack of Policy

Feedback may call for revising the policy

New Policy Implementation

Monitoring

Evaluation

Identify Issue

Proposal Denied

Proposal Passes

Perform Background Research, and Develop Partners

Decision Point

Identify a Solution

Carry Out the Action Plan

Develop an Action Plan

If I had an hour to solve a problem I'd spend 55 minutes thinking about the problem and 5 minutes thinking about solutions.

—Albert Einstein

Steps in the policy change process

Reviewing the policy cycle diagram in Figure 1, the steps in the policy cycle are:

- **Defining an issue or problem** that you want to change;

- **Identifying a solution** that you want to propose, after considering several possibilities.

- **Developing an action plan**
  - » performing background research;
  - » making connections with partners;
  - » developing a strategy to move your proposed solution from a plan to reality.

- **Carrying out the action plan**, followed by a "decision point," where the policy proposal is accepted or rejected.

- **Implementing the change.** The implementation phase comes after a policy change is approved (a legislative bill is passed, or a new regulation is written) and the new or changed policy is put into practice. Two important activities conducted during the implementation phase are monitoring and evaluation.

The following paragraphs contain a detailed description of the important tasks and activities for each step of the policy cycle.

Identifying the problem or issue you want to address

Early activities in the "identifying the issue" phase include gathering input from young adults in your organization and others about issues that they see as important. Many chapters of Youth M.O.V.E. National have used *What Helps – What Harms* as a foundation for their policy work (http://www.youthmovenational.org/what-helps-what-harms.html).[9]

The quotes from Albert Einstein and Peter Drucker on this page emphasize the importance of *this step* – thinking carefully about the policy issue that your group might want to address. Once you have gathered information about many urgent issues, it is tempting to rush into action, looking for partners to help prepare and submit a proposal to administrators or legislators. However, achieving a clear definition of the issue that can be linked to feasible solutions is crucial because it serves as the foundation for all the next steps.

The most serious mistakes are not being made as a result of wrong answers. The truly dangerous thing is asking the wrong questions.

—Peter Drucker

STEPPING UP

"If you look at the Youth Move National website, you will see information about *What Helps What Harms*. ... It really is a youth-driven needs assessment and environmental scan and it has worked beautifully here and in other places."

"*What Helps What Harms* ... says you are asking people in all systems, all spectrums what is working, what is not working, what you feel you need in order to be successful... We address everything from violence, to racism, to mental health, to education, to community and safety ... It can be individualized by each community's needs."

Some ideas for getting started in defining the policy issue include:

- Viewing the situation with "new eyes," (setting aside your own ideas, taking a fresh look);

- Considering the values and beliefs that are reflected in the definitions of the issues that you consider; and

- Thinking about what would happen if you do nothing (see PPA 670 Public Policy Analysis notes at http://web.csulb.edu/~msaintg/ppa670/670intro.htm#670).[10]

It is important to be alert to common pitfalls in policy issue definition. An example is defining the problem as the lack of a solution you have in mind (e.g., "we need more foster care," vs. "parents are unable to provide their children with safe, nurturing environments"). The first definition calls for more foster care, but the second could lead to considering other alternatives such as support for struggling families. Other common traps are accepting other people's definitions of the problem without carefully reviewing them, and looking for simple, obvious definitions. It is also important to pay attention to the political implications of the problem definition that you choose.

Narrowing down the issues

You may find yourself wanting to make many changes to the existing system. In the Stepping Up study, youth and young adults who had worked on policy change talked about the strategy of taking on one change at a time. This helps to focus effort, avoid confusion, and not mix together issues that might conflict, risking making no progress at all.

Participants in the "Stepping Up" study described how youth and young adults members of the youth organization were involved in clarifying policy issue:

"Every year, at one of our quarterly meetings … we come up with a legislative agenda. [The members] throw out all the issues that have impacted their local chapters and say, 'OK, what does your local chapter care about? What do you see as a lot of the issues surrounding your area?' When we come up with that legislative agenda, we vote on it."

If you are deciding between issues or wondering where to start within a complex issue, it may be helpful to use the Issue Checklist presented in Figure 2.[11] This checklist is intended to help you and your group compare different issues or problems that you are interested in so that you can narrow your focus down to one. Take a moment to think about how each issue fits the criteria and rank each criterion with "low, medium, or high." A good issue will be rated high on many of the criteria and have few lows.

STEPPING UP

"In the … Campaign … we followed in a step by step order. There were certain things you had to do in order to get to our overall goal. It's going to take more than 5 years to reach our overall goal, to change people's minds."

Creating an issue statement

It is important to write a statement about what the policy issue is. Be specific. Make sure you include all of the things you wish to change and be as clear as possible so as to avoid misinterpretation. You and your group may want to work with partners to write the issue statement, which may eventually become a part of a larger policy statement.

BUILD-PS

The first *issue statement* drafted by the Building Peer Support workgroup was:

An issue with the mental health system is that there are not enough trained peer support specialists that are adequately utilized for their skills.

The BUILD-PS issue statement might seem like a good example at first glance. However, it illustrates the pit–

BUILD-PS

The following Issue Checklist was completed by the Building Peer Support workgroup. Two important issues, "lack of peer support," and "forced medication and restraint," are compared against the criteria for evaluating issues and making a decision about which policy to focus on.

Figure 2: Checklist for Assessing and Comparing Policy Issues

Criteria: Will this issue…	Lack of Peer Support	Forced Medication and Restraint
Be felt by many people?	High	Low
Have broad support?	High	High
Be supported by data?	Medium	High
Be understood by youth?	High	High
Be understood by lawmakers?	Low–Medium	Medium–High
Respond to needs of youth?	High	High
Be achievable?	Medium	Medium
Help build alliances?	Medium	Medium
Have a clear timeframe?	Low	Low
Build youth leaders?	High	Medium
Be consistent with group values?	High	High

A blank copy of this worksheet can be found in Appendix A–1.

Download this worksheet at https://www.pathwaysrtc.pdx.edu/changing-the-rules

One participant in the "Stepping Up" study reported that the results of a study helped them clarify the focus of policy change:

"The study was introduced to us by X Institute. ...[The study] found lots of kids who were automatically charged [in the justice system] as adults ... Once we figured out all the statistics, we decided to create our own campaign around the issue..."

fall noted earlier of defining the solution into the issue, explained by Bardach.[12] Defining the solution into the issue occurs when people who want to change policy believe that the problem is the lack of their proposed solution. Rather than leading with the solution, you and your group should develop a carefully defined issue. Then you will be ready to take the next step of searching for solutions.

understood, or that they and the service providers communicate well. This can result in their staying away from services, leaving them isolated and afraid to reach out for help.

BUILD-PS

After thinking things through in our Building Peer Support workgroup, we realized that having peer support is part of the solution to a deeper issue. We went back to the drawing board and developed the following revised *issue statement:*

An important issue in the mental health system is that young people often do not feel comfortable talking with professionals – may not feel that they are

Identifying a solution

After you and your group have agreed on a definition of the issue you plan to work on, the next step is to generate ideas about possible solutions, and decide which one(s) you want to pursue. If your issue is defined broadly you may find that there are several possible solutions. In this section you will find some guidance about how to generate possible solutions and choose among them.

Although members of your group might be eager to immediately begin solving the issue, it is important to generate several possible solutions, because the first solution that comes to mind might not be the best. Coming up with solutions will often be informed by your personal lived experience, and might involve

Don't throw good ideas away until you've considered all your options.

—Peter Drucker

thinking about what helped you or what you imagine would help you the most.

The next BUILD-PS example examines strategies for identifying a solution to the policy issue.

BUILD-PS

In the previous step, the Building Peer Support workgroup identified the issue we wanted to work on. In our search for solutions we identified three that might be helpful in reducing isolation and fear in the mental health system. Two of our solutions have to do with increasing or improving peer support. The other solution aims to increase providers' skills in working with youth and young adults.

There are many ways to improve the system, but it is important to narrow your choices to 3–5 possible solutions.

The top three possibilities for the Building Peer Support group were:

1. **Training for peer delivered services.** More trained peer support specialists would increase the number of available peers who know how to work with young people who need assistance and support.

2. **Funding for peer support delivered services.** Training peer support specialists will not necessarily increase the number of paid positions.

3. **Training for professionals so they are more empathetic and effective with young people.** This approach would involve helping professionals be seen by youth and young adults as more helpful and approachable.

Picking the best solution

Any of the solutions you generate might work to improve the issue, but your work will be more effective and streamlined if you focus on one solution at a time. Sometimes picking the best solution to work with can be difficult. The SMART model[11] may help you decide which solution you should choose. The SMART model is a popular approach used in business and project planning.

The SMART Model emphasizes solutions that are specific, measurable, realistic, and timely:

- **Specific:** The solution clearly states what needs to change. It does not use confusing language that can be interpreted differently by different people. It is simple to understand and leaves no grey areas.

- **Measurable:** You should be able to measure the effect of your solution. Quantitative change might be the number of peer support specialists in an agency or an increase in the number of young people who seek services or return after the first visit. Qualitative change might be higher morale of peer support specialists in an agency, or increased satisfaction of the young people who receive peer support services.

- **Achievable:** This criterion emphasizes the feasibility of the solution – can it be done? Is success likely?

- **Realistic:** This area also addresses achievability, and asks whether the solution and related objectives are set so that they are not too high, or would be too expensive. For example, it may be more realistic to seek local rather than national change.

- **Timely:** Timeliness refers both to the idea that the solution "fits" with other developments, and is not seen as either out-of-date or premature. Timely also refers to the need to set a timeframe for accomplishing the objectives related to the solution.

The SMART Solutions Worksheet in Figure 3 may be helpful in comparing possible solutions. Write each possible solution in a column, and then rank each as low, medium, or high according to the SMART criteria. (See Appendix A for a blank SMART worksheet; a digital SMART worksheet can also be downloaded at: http://www.pathwaysrtc.pdx.edu/changing-the-rules).

Writing a solution statement

After you and your group have considered each of the possible solutions using the SMART model you should have a better understanding of the one you would like to work with.

👥 BUILD-PS

From our example you can see how "funding for peer support delivered services" has 3 of 5 possible high ratings. In addition, discussions with state level mental health personnel suggested that increased funding may be achievable.

The next step is to create a solution statement. The solution statement developed by the Building Peer Support workgroup was:

"The goal is increased funding for peer support services. Increased availability of peer support services will help young people with mental health conditions feel comfortable in seeking services, and will promote their willingness to work with professionals. The objectives include (1) helping young people feel that they are understood, that they and the service providers communicate well; (2) encouraging young people to enter or continue services; (3) helping young people form connections with other young people in similar circumstances and encouraging them to reach out for help."

You may also want to add a few sentences briefly addressing each of the SMART criteria (*Specific, Measureable, Achievable, Realistic and Timely*) as supporting information in the solution statement.

BUILD-PS

The Building Peer Support problem statement was used to complete the SMART Solutions Worksheet below, ("An issue in the mental health system is that young people often do not feel comfortable talking with professionals – may not feel that they are understood, or that they and the service providers communicate well. This can result in their staying away from services, leaving them isolated and afraid to reach out for help").

Figure 3: SMART Solutions Worksheet: Building Peer Support Example

SMART Criteria	Solution 1: Training for peer support delivered services	Solution 2: Funding for peer support delivered services	Solution 3: Training for professionals
Specific	Medium	High – Easy to set specific goal	Medium
Measurable	Medium – Can count # of trainings, or satisfaction, but harder to measure outcomes.	High	Medium – Can count # of trainings, or satisfaction, but harder to measure outcomes.
Achievable	Medium	High	Medium
Realistic	Medium	Medium	Low – Incentives for service providers to get training are unclear.
Timely	Medium	Medium – Need is great, and other states have taken similar steps, but high state budget deficit is problem.	Low

A blank copy of this worksheet can be found in Appendix A-2.

Download this worksheet at https://www.pathwaysrtc.pdx.edu/changing-the-rules

Developing an action plan

The first step in developing your action plan is to gather information about your change goal (solution). One approach is to brainstorm about the kinds of information you need, and then make a plan about how you will gather this information. Sources of information for your research may include both written documents (library research, internet articles and reports), and information provided by people who have expertise and experience in the area (you may want to do personal or telephone interviews). In addition to the current situation, you may want to know about efforts that others have made in the past, as well as any plans to address your issue in the future. Many guides to brainstorming can be found online, e.g., http://www.delcaps.org/beta/wp-content/uploads/Brainstorming_step.pdf [13]

BUILD-PS

Members of the Building Peer Support workgroup threw out many ideas about what we needed to know. After 30 minutes of listing all the possible information needs we could think of, we identified four important questions as a place to begin:

1. *What does the state Medicaid plan say about peer support provided by youth or young adults? Can youth peer support currently be paid for with Medicaid funds? If not, how can the Medicaid plan be changed?*

2. *Are there any youth peer support programs in our state? Do they involve any paid peer support jobs?*

3. *Is there training for youth peer support specialists in our state? Who does the training? Does the training qualify young people for paid peer support roles?*

4. *What is happening in other states around the country? Are there places where youth- or young-adult peer support is well accepted and funded?*

Identify possible sources of information

Follow the same process to brainstorm about people and organizations who may have the information that you need. In addition to creating lots of ideas, brainstorming will help to identify members of your group who have contacts or skills that may be useful.

BUILD-PS

In our Building Peer Support workgroup we identified people in the state Office of Mental Health and people and agencies that currently provide youth peer support training, and also found some job postings online for peer support specialists.

When you have finished gathering each round of information, summarize the information that various members have collected and decide on next steps. Does what you learned change your goals or timelines in any way? Is the issue still manageable, or do you need to choose a smaller part of it as a place to begin?

BUILD-PS

In our Building Peer Support workgroup, we learned that there are several existing peer support training programs, and some peer support specialist jobs advertised on the internet. We also learned that the state Medicaid Waiver that allows peer support services for adults to be paid for is in effect for the next 12 months. Any changes would need to be included in the next application to the Federal Office of Medicaid Services, and must be prepared during the next 8 months. This helped us figure out what our timeline for action needed to be.

Identify potential partners

Partners are people and organizations who support your issue and share your goals. Some of them may help in your efforts to change policy or they may already be working on a related issue. It is possible that some of the people/organizations you contact when you are gathering information may be interested in joining your change effort. In addition, as your action plan takes shape, you may want to identify particular skills, key agencies, or individuals (champions) who care about your cause, and can help make change. Partners identified in the "Stepping Up" study included a community college, state child welfare administrators, adult board members who were attorneys who could help draft legislation, private agencies devoted to improving the lives of children and families, and coalitions of agencies interested in juvenile justice reform.

You can also use the Action Plan Worksheet to keep track of contacts with potential partners (Who will approach them? What are our target dates, etc.)? A blank copy of the Action Plan Worksheet is provided in Appendix A–3 and at this link: https://www.pathways-rtc.pdx.edu/changing-the-rules.

STEPPING UP

"We looked at what other states had done. We had a lot of help from Casey Family Programs and their policy department. They had given us a lot of resources and information about other states. ...They showed us some of the research that backed up why [extended care] was important."

BUILD-PS

It may be useful for you and your group to use the Action Plan Worksheet to organize your information. Instructions for completing this worksheet are included in Appendix A-3.

Figure 4: Action Plan Worksheet

Action steps	Who will do it?	By when?	Comments
Gather information about the state Medicaid plan as possible source of funding for peer support. Find out what the state Medicaid plan says about peer support, what is funded now? How can plan be changed?	Nancy R. will get in touch with Michelle Assam, who handles adult services at Office of Mental Health and Addictions (OMA), including peer support services.	By next meeting, in 1 week	Nancy will also ask Michelle for ideas for who in OMA might be interested in youth peer support. Ask for documents, links to online information
Learn about existing youth peer support programs – what is training, how are they funded? Contact Mental Health America Oregon (MHAO). They have a youth and young adult peer mentor training program.	John M. will talk with his friend at MHAO and ask where their funding is from, and how/where trainees find paid jobs.	By next meeting, in 1 week	MHAO might be potential ally and partner; John will explore.
Learn about existing youth peer... Follow up on advertised peer support positions on the internet, learn about how they are funded.	Sherry L. will get in touch with agencies that advertise these peer support positions.	2 weeks	Start with internet pages mentioned at this meeting. John M. will email list of links.
Learn about existing youth peer... Oregon Family Support Network (www.ofsn.org).	Need volunteer, please.		

A blank copy of this worksheet can be found in Appendix A-3

Download this worksheet at https://www.pathwaysrtc.pdx.edu/changing-the-rules

STEPPING UP

Identify people who can make the change you want

Figuring out who has the authority to make the change that you want will vary according to your change strategy. If the policy change requires getting legislation passed, then the "deciders" are members of the state legislature. If the change can be accomplished within existing policy, but will involve changes in state or local agency rules and regulations, then state agency or local administrators will need to be convinced that your ideas have merit. In some instances, they may already agree with your goals, and become partners in the change effort. In the "Stepping Up" study, this was the case for several youth groups.

Develop a strategy to reach your goal

You've accomplished a lot so far! You have defined the issue that you want to address and can write or talk about it in clear, concise terms. You have considered several solutions, and have chosen one to focus your change efforts on. You have pulled together and summarized information about your solution

and made adjustments where necessary. You and your group have identified potential partners and others who have skills or additional information that might be useful. And now you know which people and organizations have the power and authority to make the change that you want.

The last step in your action plan is to develop an overall strategy about how you are going to accomplish your goal. This strategy should identify where to begin, designate who in your group will take responsibility for various tasks such as communication and relationship-building with partners, and should also include actions that partners have done, or have agreed to take. The strategy for each group will differ depending on the issue, the proposed solution, the partnerships that are formed, and the access that you and your partners have to people that have the authority to make change. Your strategy should also reflect the values that your group holds about how to bring about change (e.g., confrontation vs. cooperation). Figure 5 shows an example of overall change strategy.

Carrying out the action plan

This process involves thinking strategically and following the steps your group has laid out. Before discussing various activities involved in the action plan, let's focus on sharing the story of your lived experience within the mental health system. This process is unique to young people who have mental health conditions and comes with both risks and benefits.

Strategic Sharing

One of the most powerful advocacy tools you can use is personal storytelling. When you use real stories from

BUILD-PS

Our Building Peer Support Workgroup developed a strategy statement that summarizes the issue, the proposed solution, and some steps that need to be taken to accomplish our goals. The overall change strategy below is designed to fit on one page and be used as both an information tool and as a way to recruit members interested in policy change.

Figure 5: Overall Change Strategy Worksheet

Increasing the Availability of Peer Support	
Issue Statement:	**Young people with mental health conditions often do not feel comfortable talking with professionals** – may not feel that they are understood, or that they and the service providers communicate well. **This can result in their staying away from services, leaving them isolated and afraid to reach out for help.**
Proposed Solution:	**Increase funding for peer support services**. Peer support services are readily accepted by many youth and young adults with mental health conditions. Adequate funding is needed to increase the number of well-trained youth peer support specialists, provide for appropriate supervision and support, and pay for peer support services within the behavioral health system.
How can we reach the solution?	**Youth peer support services needs to be added to existing legislation** about "Traditional Health Workers," which will make their services reimbursable under the state's behavioral health services.
Who has the authority to make change?	**This will require legislative action** (next legislative session begins in January of next year).
How will this bill be written?	**Staff in the state Office of Mental Health have agreed to prepare the language for the bill**.
Is there likely to be resistance?	**Push back might come from three sources**: (1) legislators concerned about costs might resist any new services; (2) behavioral health organizations might be cautious about peer services, and worry that having youth on their staff might cause additional work; (3) Individual mental health providers might see peer support as a challenge to their expertise or have concerns about the quality or appropriateness of such services.
What will the role of our group be with the legislature?	Members of our board and state mental personnel agree that youth voice will be very important in getting this bill passed. **We will prepare members of our group to testify in committee hearings (how a bill gets passed, how to tell our stories effectively, how to dress). We will also organize and prepare members to testify and provide transportation and support (e.g., per diem for meals, help with child care)**.
What other things need to be done?	(1) **Make sure that the public is aware of this potential new service** (develop a media strategy, perhaps organize informational panels, try to get on local talk shows). (2) **Develop a plan to deal with concerns of behavioral health professionals and organizations**. To be figured out. One idea is to develop a panel including youth, peer support services, peer support specialists, family members, and mental health professionals who have had positive experiences with peer support, and invite service providers. (3) **Be sure that the bill includes requirements and resources for implementation of the policy**.
Who are our group's contacts for this policy?	Mary Jo Johnson, legislative liaison (phone numbers, email address). Jim Latterly, youth voice organizer (phone, email). Larry Larson, logistics (phone, email)
When does the policy committee meet?	Monday evenings 6–8:30 pm at the Northville Community Center, 11473 W. Chesapeake St., Marysworth, MZ. EVERYONE IS WELCOME! Pizza and salad 6:00–6:45. Work groups meet 7–8:30. See our Facebook page (FB link) for weekly updates.

A blank copy of this worksheet can be found in Appendix A–4

Download this worksheet at https://www.pathwaysrtc.pdx.edu/changing-the-rules

your lived experiences, you share practical insight into the way the mental health system works and how the experience feels to consumers. The skills involved in strategic sharing need to be mastered before you start to advocate so that you can protect yourself from stigmatization, exploitation, and re-traumatization. Preparation will also help you make sure that your story has maximum impact, and will not be taken out of context, or misunderstood.

One resource to help you and your group prepare to tell your experiences in public is *The Strategic Sharing Workbook*.[14] (https://www.pathwaysrtc.pdx.edu/pdf/pbStrategicSharingGuide.pdf). This workbook will lead you and your group through exercises to clarify your reasons for talking publicly about your lived experience. It will also help you identify the risks and learn about practical ideas about how to package aspects of your story so that you will avoid potential risks. You may be asked some difficult questions when you speak in public and this workbook helps you anticipate these questions and develop strategies for deflecting them.

Three important activities will help you carry out your Action Plan. These are 1) informing the community about the issue and your solution, 2) influencing decision makers to support your solution, and 3) working with partner organizations and groups. You and your group may also need to learn or improve skills in each of these three areas. It takes time and experience to get good at policy change, so don't expect to be able to do everything well immediately.

Inform the community about your policy issue

This set of activities involves giving information to community members about the policy issue and the proposed solution that you are working on. Ways to inform the community include preparing an "elevator speech," engaging the media, and speaking to community groups. One youth-led group in the Stepping Up study sent regular email updates to interested community members and partners.

Write an elevator speech. A tool that will help you be ready for any opportunity to inform the community is

STEPPING UP

"We use the Strategic Sharing model … so I am trained to facilitate that, and we have some seasoned members who have been through it a lot of times and can train as well."

Elevator Speech – A short explanation of your ideas in the time frame it takes to ride in the elevator with someone (30 seconds to 2 minutes).

the elevator speech. The purpose of the elevator speech is to gain interest from the people around you, without taking a lot of their time. It will also come in handy when you have the opportunity to speak at a community meeting

A good elevator speech allows you to quickly describe the problem, how it affects young people like yourself, and your group's idea for a solution. It should be five or six sentences long and written in clear declarative sentences. Be sure to prepare a written electronic copy of your elevator speech so that you can paste it into an email quickly. Ask the members of your group to use similar elevator speeches so that you present a unified public message.

BUILD-PS

Sample elevator speech:

- Hello, my name is Joe and I am a member of Youth M.O.V.E. Even though serious mental health conditions touch all parts of our community, they often appear when people are in their late teens.

- Some young people say that when they have a mental health appointment they don't feel understood and often don't go back again.

- Peer Support is one promising approach to help these young people. In the Peer Support model young adults who have faced the same things give person-to-person support and help young people connect to services. We need more of them!

- My group is working on Senate Bill 222 to increase the number of Peer Support Specialists and be sure they are properly trained.

- This brochure has more information about peer support, Senate Bill 222 and contact information for my group, Youth M.O.V.E.

- Thanks for listening!

Engage with the media. The best way to reach a lot of people at once is through the media. When we think of media we usually think of local newspapers and local radio or television stations. It can be hard to get the attention of these forms of media unless you are working on a policy problem that involves an immediate community crisis. You will have the best chance of getting your story covered if you present a clear interesting story with strong human interest. It will also pay off to build good relationships with reporters and

"[If] no one knows your story, no one can fight your story. I think … people getting the knowledge of what it is like to be in the system is the most valuable part."

"We have people in the media who talk to us about how to … talk to the media. After we finish testifying, there could be a reporter wanting to talk to you. …So we get … a lot of great feedback and advice from people that … want to share their knowledge and expertise with us."

"She hears our stories, and sometimes she says, 'Look, I'm going to write you guys a bill.' She is this kind of no-nonsense kind of legislator. She hears stories and she [says], 'I want to fix that.'"

be available when they ask questions or need a comment. Don't overlook other forms of media such as your group's website, Facebook page, blogs or other electronic media. For more information about working with the media, see *Teens on Target Advocacy Guide*, http://www.youthalive.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/TNT_advocacy_manual-2001.pdf (p. 14–17).[15]

Speak to community groups. The purpose of speaking to community groups is to provide information and encourage a healthy discussion of your proposal. You will be able to sharpen your message once you understand what may be unclear or confusing to community members. People need to be feel free to challenge your ideas and offer different solutions. This will help your group identify any resistance that you may face and develop counter arguments when needed. You may want to inform the general community where you live, (neighbors, school leaders, business owners, religious groups, and police) or to educate a targeted group of people (young people and their families, mental health providers, or university faculty). Your Action Plan will guide you to know which community groups are most important to your proposed change. These are the kinds of people that should be easy to get in touch with, although they may not agree with your message. Getting close to the community means actively reaching out to individuals and groups and having conversations with them about your policy concerns. Identify and plan to attend meetings of any relevant community group. Some community meetings have an open agenda and will allow you to speak briefly at the end of the meeting. For other groups, you will need to approach the chair ahead of time and ask for time on the agenda. It's important to be brief and clear about what you want the group to do.

Influence decision makers

Identifying the people who will make the decision about your proposed policy change will depend on the level of policy you are working on (local, state, federal). Your Action Plan should have a clear statement about which decision makers are key to getting the change you want. Usually, decisions makers are elected officials at federal, state or local levels; state or county employees who manage mental health and social services, or the leadership of an agency or school.

Meet with decision makers. You may be eager to set up a meeting with one or more influential leaders. Before you set up that appointment, make sure that you have a clearly written document to give to the people you are meeting and that you have developed support in the community and with other advocacy groups. It sometimes helps to send a short statement along with your request for an appointment so that the decision maker will know what organization you represent and what you want to talk about.

Although some youth and young adult groups have great relationships and direct access to administrators and legislators, don't be surprised if a decision maker refuses to make an appointment to meet you or sets a meeting time months away. Often you will be given an appointment with an aide or staff person, rather than the decision maker. Take that opportunity to educate one more person about the change that is needed and ask them to pass the information along.

For more information about how to prepare for and conduct a meeting with a decision maker, see Friday Night Live, *Guide to Engaging Youth in Policy Change*[16] (http://www.fridaynightlive.org/wp-content/uploads/FNL-policy-toolkit-v3.pdf)

Provide testimony. If you are trying to change a law, or get a new one passed, one of the most influential things you can do to persuade lawmakers is to provide testimony during a legislative hearing. Your purpose is

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"During [legislative] sessions we send an email out every week … to keep people up to date with … what they can do to help the campaign. During the summer we sent out an alert every month to keep people up to date with what's happened. In December into January, we use it as a way to educate people on the new piece of legislation…"

to illustrate the problem and solution at a human level in order to influence their thinking.

A "hearing" usually occurs at a legislative committee meeting after a proposed bill has been assigned to that committee. For more details about the legislative process, see *Youth Voice in Policy: A Guide to Shaping History*[17] (https://www.pathwaysrtc.pdx.edu/pdf/pbYouthVoiceInPolicy.pdf)

Providing testimony is a formal procedure and rules will vary from state to state. If you are allowed to give oral testimony, you will probably be given a set time, often a few minutes, to speak. Be respectful of your speaking time, and thank the lawmakers for allowing

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"In addition to legislative hearings, we did information hearings everywhere, to talk about the broader issues, which included education and homelessness and housing."

you to speak. Often you will be asked to submit a written copy of your oral comments.

Sometimes the legislative committee that is conducting the hearing will only accept written testimony. In this case your group will want to take time to carefully prepare the written document and ask others to give you feedback before submitting it. Again, written testimony is often restricted to a few pages and

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"...The connection with the Secretary of DCF — it has been a tradition. We have breakfast and dinner or lunch with the secretary. Some of us have his personal number and are friends on Facebook."

should give a clear but brief description of your group, what the problem is, how it affects young adults like yourself, what you want to be done, and how your proposal will improve things.

For more tips about providing oral or written testimony, see *Advocacy Toolkit, Testifying before Policy Makers*[18] (https://www.acteonline.org/advocacy_testifying/#.V5pszPkrLcs).

Work with partners

As a part of your Action Plan, you identified other advocacy groups or organizations that are working on the same policy problem or who have interests similar to those of your group. As you carry out your Action Plan, it is important to maintain good working relationships with these groups. Once you have developed a clear statement of your proposed solution, share it with these partners and get feedback from them. Determine whether they can support your proposed policy change as you have stated it or whether they have different ideas. Be sure to continue to communi-

cate with them about your progress and any changes that you might make in the proposed new policy.

If you and your partners agree on the problem and the policy solution, there are several things that you might do together. You might issue a jointly written policy brief that clearly states the issues and shows that all the participating groups and organizations are on board. It can also be very powerful to give joint testimony at a hearing. You and your partners can write the testimony together and sign it, with one person making the oral presentation if allowed. Another activity is to convene a joint public meeting or panel discussion. You and your partners sponsor this event together showing that you all support the same proposal, while at the same time providing an opportunity to give information and encourage public debate. Working effectively with other advocacy groups will extend your group's reach and give it more influence. For more examples about how partnerships work as well as other resources, check out *Community Tool Box, 1. Creating and Maintaining Partnerships*[19] (http://ctb.ku.edu/en/creating-and-maintaining-partnerships).

Decision point

This step in the policy cycle occurs when the people who have the authority and responsibility to make policy decisions *act* on the policy agenda that you have worked so hard to promote. Although you and your partners in the policy change effort may work up to the last minute to convince legislators or other "deciders" that the policy change is a good one, at the point of decision all you can do is wait and see what is decided.

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"We had youth testify. That is when I think we started to see the change, where people saw the impact of youth coming in, talking about experiencing homelessness and some of the more long-term impact and then for us to come in and back it up with research."

"Representative X spoke to us … at the advocacy convening and he said … 'you guys have to come talk to us because we have no idea what you have been through. You have to talk to legislators so we actually know what is going on. All we see is numbers on paper.'"

"…We were huge partners with a community college. Their staff had experience with foster care. …They had just been working with a Commissioner around housing for foster youth at the college. That kind of converged at the same time as [our policy change]. So they were coming down and testifying in support of [our] bill and sharing their experience."

The decision point could be a vote (in the state legislature, or by county or city officials), a judicial decision, or final rules adopted by the executive staff of an agency). If the decision is a "thumbs down," then the effort to change this policy in this particular way has not succeeded, and you and your partners will probably want to review what happened, and decide how to move forward. For example, you may see that while most people understood the problem or issue, and agreed that change was needed, the solution that was proposed was seen as unrealistic (e.g., too expensive or too difficult to implement), or was opposed by influential people who had access to the decision-makers. If this is the case, a new action plan for re-addressing the issue in next year's session should start right away.

👥 BUILD-PS

Unfortunately, the proposal developed and presented by the Building Peer Support workgroup and our partners was not adopted by the legislature. However, it was favorably received by many lawmakers, and we were told that the tight fiscal climate was the main reason that it was not approved. We plan to work with our partners to prepare a revised proposal for the next legislative session, and also to work with advisors in the state mental health department to prepare a budget estimate that will be seen as more realistic by lawmakers. We are disappointed, but not discouraged. We think we did very well on our first policy change attempt.

If the decision is "thumbs up" (YES!), you can celebrate your success so far, but you and other advocates are entering the crucial and sometimes slippery implementation phase.