

Section III

Developing A Statewide Health Freedom Organization Or Steering Committee

In rare instances, legislation can be passed or defeated single-handedly by one person, as long as a piece of legislation is in the hands of a powerful legislator. However, in most cases, for legislation where it is controversial or there are interests groups who both support and oppose the legislation, it takes a concerted effort of talented individuals to get a bill passed or defeated in the legislature. A good team can make a big difference.

However a viable health freedom organization in any state cannot successfully occur via a “Cookie cutter” approach. Here are some basic guidelines with the understanding that they are only suggestions and groups come together in a variety of modes and there is no “right way” to make change happen!

1. Identify like-minded people who have similar concerns about health freedom.

Almost 30 states already have Health Freedom groups or organizations. You can find out more about them at www.nationalhealthfreedom.org or by calling National Health Freedom Action at 651-690-0732. Contact these leaders and share your concerns and see how you can help. If there is not an existing organization begin your networking to find likeminded people.

2. Who wants to make change happen?

If there is not a group in your state then you will need to consider starting one. To begin look for group members. When you look you may find people with great vision or wonderful organizational or political talents but who are not able to contribute as a worker bee for an effort. Or you may find some people who have no knowledge or skills in passing legislation but really want to be given a task and want to jump in and help. Great. And then you may find some people with both talent and time and resources that they are will to bring to a group. Look for all kinds of persons who would like to become core members of a group or steering committee. However keep in touch with all the people you meet for future reference.

3. Build Your Team

Identify people who can function in a collaborative leadership group with good communication skills. In order to work together people need to be able to work within a group process, functioning in an ambassadorial manner in a diverse community. Identifying compatible group members and group leaders is a spontaneous process. Groups generally find their own rhythms, with maybe some road bumps in this process.

4. Decide on an organizational structure. There are many ways to form grassroots action groups that can receive donations. Some require the setting up of corporations and some are more informal. (For more information on setting up a non-profit corporation see www.nationalhealthfreedom.org on: "*How to Start a Health Freedom Organization in Your State*").

Here are some structure options:

a. An informal steering committee of individuals functioning by Roberts Rules of Order. This is often how organizations function in the early stages of development. They generally do not have a checking account and are made up solely of volunteers. The drawback is that if they are offered a large donation they have no way of accepting it except to ask the donor to directly pay bills that come up such as paying a printer for a brochure.

b. Incorporate as a non-profit or form a legal Coop. This requires incorporating under state law and then going on to apply for federal tax status. The benefits of being incorporated include the ability to do business, to receive donations and the ability to have tax-exempt income. Whether your donors receive tax deductions for their donations and whether an organization can lobby as opposed to restricting their activities to educational purposes only will depend on the federal tax status of the organization and what their mission statement includes. There are many federal tax status options such as 501©3 status for educational organizations where donor can receive a tax deduction for their donations. And 501© 4 status for lobbying where donor receive no deductions. There are also 501 © 6 for professional associations that can lobby and many other. (See www.nationalhealthfreedom.org for how to set up a corporation).

c. Informal federation of organizations. In some states there are already a number of organizations that want to promote health freedom and they do not wish to form a new organization but would rather just all work together and stay autonomous. In this instance delegates from each interested organization get together on a steering committee and make strategic decisions together and hold meetings according to Roberts Rule of Order. When it comes time to do specific tasks or to pay certain bills such as lobbyists, the organizations decide between them who will do the task and who will pay the bill. Often they split the cost of lobbying because it is a large cost. In terms of websites and memberships, the group often point to all of the websites or just choose one organizations' website to house all of the health freedom information on it. Also for memberships, they encourage people who speak with them to choose one of the organizations that belong to the federation and join that one. Federations are more complex when holding meetings of the steering committee but promote strength in that major organizations have delegates always at the table. In addition federations can notify their delegate members to do press releases to their organization's data bases thus increasing the exposure for press releases and calls to action.

NOTE for Example Texas: Texas uses the federation model and here are some comments that the leader of the Texas Health Freedom steering committee, Peter McCarthy, had to say about the federation they use:

“In many states, a number of groups and individuals step forward to assist with effort. Representatives from a number of large nutritional manufacturing companies, professional organizations, and interested individuals combined to form a steering committee, which cooperated effectively to oppose the objectionable legislation. This occurred because:

a. The leaders of each group decided that the mutual goal was more important than the share of credit each group received, and was willing to devote time and resources to the committee’s operations in order to achieve the desired goals.

b. The leaders ensured that parochial organizational interests were not permitted to encroach upon the achievement of the mutually agreed upon goals.

c. The leadership of the committee was perceived to be an “honest broker,” and not tied to any particular group’s interests and agenda. This is a key prerequisite for the creation of a successful organization. The leadership must be very conscientious in conducting the operation of the group in a way that does not favor one part of the organization over another. Otherwise, the group will not long function as a viable whole.” (See Peter McCarthy’s complete document at www.tcam.org)

iv. Other Options are many even including a for-profit organization doing lobbying and education. ***The most important aspect of the structure of a group is to know exactly what the structure is*** so that there is financial accountability and clarity among group members.

5. Make a decision to meet regularly by whatever means (even if only a short time) unless the legislature is not in session and there are no tasks to be done. Whether you have a group of 2-3 or 8-12, a regular meeting will strengthen the efficiency and professional quality of your group. It will enhance the accuracy of your strategies and the brilliance of your plan. It will keep the workload spread out evenly amongst the group and help to avoid burnout. It will provide a forum for discussing situations that are difficult or stuck, and it will increase the friendship and fun of working together.

6. Identify what further resources you need and make a commitment to gathering them. Fundraising is an integral part of a strong organization. In addition you’d be surprised at how many necessities can come in the form of donations including rental space for meetings, free printing, free media space, speaking engagements, use of utilities such as database management or faxes etc.

7. Decide which jobs which steering committee members will do.

a. Right up front it is important for members of the steering committee meetings to have a Chairperson or facilitator to run the weekly meetings, for a Secretary to take notes, and for a Treasurer to give financial reports.

b. Review the list of team players and divide up the work. If there are only three persons in the group, do not worry. Pick the top priorities that you can accomplish and go with it and keep open to making your team bigger.

c. Decide about decision-making. Who will make the decisions about your movement going forward? Will it be a formal, well-defined group such as the board or boards you set up? Will it be the people who end up meeting regularly and doing the work? Will you give your lobbyist power to negotiate and make deals, or will you retain decisions in your own group? Will you require consensus to go forward? (100 % agreement) or a simple majority, or two-thirds majority? Have discussions about this and note in your meeting minutes what was decided.

8. Write down your goals and take manageable steps to reach them. Having well-defined goals is essential to staying on task when reaching a goal. The political process can lure us into many whirlpools and we can easily lose sight of what our goals are. The opposing parties to health freedom will work to distract or call for compromises. So make sure and write down your goals and keep them handy and revisit them often and don't get sidetracked. Stay focused. Write down: 1. Your goal; 2. Your current people and resources; 3. Steps that need to be taken.

9. Consider setting up a website. A website is a powerful tool that acts as a central source of communication for the state movement. It allows consumers to get the most up to date latest information and directives from the steering committee and helps mobilizing for action steps.

NOTE: Words from Texas Health Freedom Leader Peter McCarthy on Communication based on Texas 2004-2005 session experience.

“Develop an effective communications system. This includes not only intra-organizational communications, but also communications with elected officials and their staffs. The most effective communications media are those which can generate a massive, rapid response. In Texas, the committee leaders chose to set up a weekly series of conference calls, using the resources of the web based organization www.freeconferencecall.com, with national level leaders in attendance to give advice on strategy and tactics and offer substantive assistance like mass mailing media. These were used very effectively to formulate strategy and identify those individuals who would take specific actions. The leaders also made extensive use of e-mail and individual phone calls to keep the group abreast

of fast breaking events. This was especially valuable for the one bill which actually made it to a hearing. The committee encouraged the members of the individual groups to make maximum use of traditional means of communication with the legislature, i.e., phone calls, faxes, letters, etc. Additionally, the committee had the advantage of a well-constructed web site which permitted anyone who logged on to instantaneously send both an e-mail and a fax to every health committee member in both legislative houses. The site had off-line programming available to do the same for every member of the legislature, if any of the bills had made it out of committee. Finally, the committee availed themselves of the knowledge that its members gained from conversations with lobbyists, elected official staff members, national level health freedom advocates, and other sources such as the state legislative web site, public pronouncements of key federal health officials, and person-to-person contact with state officials to craft a series of hard hitting, factually based communications which were given wide exposure within the natural and alternative health community and offered as examples which anyone could copy for their own communication with the legislature. Any member of a state committee with written communications skills should freely share their own written correspondence with the other members of the committee so that the maximum number of people have access to that product and can use it on an individual, personalized basis to help generate a broad response with coherent themes.” (See Peter McCarthy’s Health Freedom Master Planning Document at www.tcam.org)

10. Learn about the lobbying rules of your state legislature.

State legislatures have the authority to make laws regarding health care practitioners so bills are introduced into individual state legislatures. Each state legislature is unique and they each have different dates for beginning and ending of session and how committees work and who can and cannot lobby. Each state legislature has a “lobbying office” where people must sign up to lobby depending on the rules of each state. Grassroots groups should know these lobbying rules and abide by them carefully.

11. Learn about the political process in your state including session rules and how bills move through the legislature.

Remember, you don’t have to do all of this alone! Government employees and Legislative employees and aids are very helpful at helping citizens learn about how their state government works. Going to the capitol, talking to aids of legislators, and going to committee hearings, and reading over the rules is very helpful. Each state is unique and grassroots group must learn how their legislature works. From how many years for a session, to when session begins and ends, how bills are introduced, when do bills go to committees and what it takes to defeat bills or pass them out of committees. Find people in the community who have been involved with state government and having them speak at your group or join your phone conferences to teach you about how the process works. Even after you think you have learned about the process it is good to have a person you know that you can call for future questions about process at any time.

Skills and Talents to Look for On the Health Freedom Team

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Teams are created to keep a project moving smoothly and efficiently and to have clear communications about responsibilities and strategies. Don't be discouraged if you don't have all of these skills on your team at the beginning. Start the process and attract the people you need to help. Take the time to start doing the work and your team will grow as your movement grows. These are examples of helpful member skills:

a. Administrative support;

Administrative support is needed for setting up conference calling and conferences, meetings, historical record keeper and minute taker, photographer. Some people may not be at the capital but they are extremely good at chairing meetings, being secretary or treasurer, or doing administrative skills and will strengthen the organization by having the dependability of these functions.

b. Accounting

A group will always need a person responsible for keeping track of all funds solicited or used by the group, keeping receipts and records, and keeping the group updated on their financial status.

c. Designated Leaders or Facilitators

Depending on what type of organizational structure, groups always benefit from acknowledging their leaders and defining the roles their leaders take. From chairing or facilitating meetings to being the go between with the sponsors and lobbyists for the bill, it is important to have leadership and to know what role they are responsible for and whether leadership is shared by more than one person and how that is carried out. This will help for a smooth running team and will also help the general public know who to contact and how they can get their questions answered. Especially for Sponsors and Lobbyists it is good to designate a person they can always be in touch with from the health freedom group.

d. Volunteer Coordinator

One of the strengths of any advocacy group is their volunteer helpers. Keeping track of volunteers and giving them tasks and following up with them is a big job. Sometimes volunteer lists are accumulated so they can be on stand-by and be ready to go into action as needed. Other times there are day-to-day tasks that they can help with that takes the pressure off other leaders like setting up meeting venues. The important thing about volunteers is to have someone they can

contact to check in to see how things are going and if there is anything that needs to be done.

e. Database management for mobilizing grassroots supporters.

Depending on the legal structure a group takes on there will be one or more databases at the state level interested consumers and citizens. No matter which structure is chosen it is important for the group to know how many is in their cumulative databases and how to reach people quickly and who is responsible for communicating with persons in the databases. Mobilizing the grassroots is a key component to being successful at passing legislation. When legislators see that their constituents are serious about an issue they generally listen up and learn about the issue.

f. Public Speaking, Publications, Newsletter, Press Release, Media Liaison, and Writers.

Media and public speaking are important factors in health freedom campaigns. Publications and Newsletters can impact ordinary people and legislators easily. Having public speakers ready to address people at local meetings, radio sessions, and gatherings is very powerful. In addition, often grass roots activists are surprised at how hostile the conventional media will be towards their bills or if not hostile, then silent. But alternative media is beginning to do a good job at promoting many health freedom efforts and are growing in popularity. A media liaison and a writer is a great asset to your movement.

g. Manager of Legislative Districting to target districts.

It is very helpful to have persons on the team who are familiar with political campaigns and how districting works and how to target particular legislators.

h. Fundraising

Costs of passing a bill vary depending on many things, especially on whether professional services are provided by volunteers or paid contractors. Potential costs are for example, legal research, lobbying, accounting and checking accounts, incorporation (if needed), publications and printing of materials, website, public meeting arrangements, and many more. If a group is utilizing more than volunteer services then fundraising is a very necessary part of a group plan. Some people are natural at raising money.

i. Lobbyist

A lobbyist is a person who is responsible for tracking a piece of legislation every minute and spending much time in and outside of the capitol convincing the legislators to vote for or against a bill and helping the sponsoring legislators get supportive or opposing votes for the bill through committees and on the floor of the legislature and all the way to the Governor's office

j. A Local Legal Researcher:

A researcher is important to understand the legal problem in its entirety. Local citizens are often great legal researchers, or national leaders can do legal research or they can look over research that is done by local people and give feedback on health freedom issues. A local attorney working pro bono on research is great too. A local state licensed attorney is needed if legal opinions and advice are needed.

k. Drafter of potential solutions:

Anyone can draft legislation or amendments to legislative bills. The legislature itself has attorneys that also draft solutions based on ideas that are given them. However in the case of health freedom, it is very important to complete the drafting just how the group wants it. That way the bill or amendment will be as close as possible to what you envision. It is a good idea to run a bill or an amendment past national groups at the drafting stage to receive feedback from people who have extensive experience in this area. If the legislature drafts a bill from scratch often times it is not what you are expecting and may be difficult to change. A citizen drafter or a drafting committee that gets extensive feedback is very helpful.

l. Attorney Legal consultant to discuss changes

Bills often get amended in the legislature by other parties and things happen quite quickly at the legislature. It is always good to have someone on call to give an analysis of an amendment or to make comments or draft emergency amendments while the bill is traveling through the legislature. Interpretations of laws can be given by local attorneys.

m. Grassroots Trainer for Consumer Lobbying Efforts

Citizens are great natural lobbyists. However they can be even better if they are provided guidance and mentoring. Often this can be done by a citizen-lobbying day at the capitol. Volunteers who have previous background in lobbying are great at helping citizens be effective grassroots advocates at the capitol and to provide guidance to citizens when they come to hearings.

n. Community outreach net worker and coalition builder with other organizations

Some people are natural net worker and can set up meetings with diverse groups to get the word out. There are broad range of options for meetings with other groups ranging from meetings with potential opposing groups, to setting up constituent meeting of a particular legislator in their districts, to having speakers come in for a rally for health freedom supporters. Movements are built by building bridges in multiple sectors and different types of meetings and outreach can really strengthen the movement.