

3 Where do I start?

Chances are, you opened up this Toolkit because you're fired up about a particular issue. You want to do something. That is great! But before you get started, take time to reflect and prepare. We suggest you consider the following steps — not necessarily in the order given — to help you get ready.

Listen to the people. Ultimately, advocacy is about helping to make things right for people. Listen directly to those who are affected by a particular problem. Ask them how you might help to “amplify” their voice. Be guided by their counsel. If it's you who is directly affected, talk to others around you who might be affected.

Do your research. Make sure that you know the issue well. Talk to others. Read about the issue carefully and critically. Expose yourself to different viewpoints. Look to reputable organizations and institutions for analysis and reflection. Get the best information you can.

Learn the system. Make sure you understand the political, economic, or social systems that can be used to make change. See the next section in this Toolkit for some basics on parliamentary government and the legislative process. Understand how to act strategically within those systems.

Work with others. It is fine to advocate on your own, but it is even better to do it with others. Gather a group of people that shares your concerns and seeks to act on them. Discern together what you are hoping to achieve. Share responsibilities.

Pray. If you are a person (or people) of faith, spend time in prayer, seeking divine wisdom and guidance as you accompany those who are asking for advocacy. Pray for strength, courage and perseverance to face disappointment and discouragement and to persist for the long haul. Consider embracing a “spirituality” of advocacy. See Section 7.

“We are not ‘a voice for the voiceless;’ we lend our privilege as a megaphone.”

Samantha Baker Evens

“If you want to go fast, go alone.
If you want to go far, go together.”

African proverb

Plan carefully. Take care in planning your advocacy strategy. While there are moments for spontaneous action, your advocacy is likely to be more successful if it is carefully planned. Be clear on your objectives and what you hope to achieve. Anticipate the resistance you may encounter.

Reflect. After each step, spend time reflecting on what you've learned so far and how that might change your goals or plans. Consider the ways that you, your group or your community may be contributing to the problem you are seeking to resolve. Ask yourselves how you might personally address the privileges, prejudices and policies that stand in the way of the flourishing of others. Listen again to the people affected.

story

IN THE LATE 1980s several people at Stirling Avenue Mennonite church in Kitchener, Ontario came together to form a peace and justice working group. They were energized by movements calling for nuclear disarmament, for an end to wars in Latin America, and for a stop to low-level flying by NATO fighter jets over Innu lands in Labrador. They felt their Christian faith called them to actively witness for peace and justice in these contexts. They received support from the congregation in the way of space for a small Peace and Justice Centre and a part-time staff position. Along with an “inner journey” of prayer and spiritual discernment, the group pursued an “outer journey” of advocacy, education and public witness. They held workshops and seminars, organized vigils and prayer services, signed petitions and wrote letters to government officials. A quarter century later, the group continues to exist, but the ministry of peace and justice witness is more integrated with the life of the congregation as a whole. In more recent years, the members of Stirling Avenue have advocated on behalf of refugee claimants, a sister church in Colombia threatened by resource extraction, and low income people needing housing. According to Josie Winterfeld, Missions, Peace & Justice worker at Stirling, the ministry of peace and justice is core to the congregation's identity and advocacy is an important part of that.