

Creating a Policy Platform

A policy platform is a powerful document that outlines a community's top priorities that are most in need of high-level government support. Advocacy groups, including disability rights communities, can use a policy platform document as a way to approach government representatives and request their support to fix key problem areas.

Why is a policy platform helpful?

There are two main reasons that a policy platform can be very helpful for a disability rights community.

- **A policy platform creates a united voice.**

When writing a policy platform, the disability rights community comes together to agree on the most important issues they would like the government to address. Though there will be a lead author, the entire community will have an equal opportunity to participate and make revisions or suggestions, and to support the final product.

- **A policy platform helps politicians and government officials understand what is needed.**

If politicians and government officials are approached by many different disability rights organizations, each with their own requests for action, government representatives may become very confused about what is needed. If they are too confused, they may decide not to take any action at all.

It is much easier for politicians and government officials to understand the needs of the disability rights community if they have one document they can look at and use to decide on future actions.



DPO representatives in the Dominican Republic shake hands with a candidate for President after advocating for a new policy platform.

Source: International Foundation for Electoral Systems

When should a policy platform be used?

The best time to approach politicians and elected government officials is during election time, before Election Day. This is the time when they are looking for strong support from voters, so it's a great opportunity to raise any issues that the community would like them to take action on if they enter office.

Politicians and election candidates can sign a copy of the policy platform to show their support. Consider making this a public event and inviting the media, if possible. This will

create good publicity for the candidates (so they will be more interested in attending) and also helps to create a public record that the candidates promised support.

Since election outcomes are not a guarantee, it is a good idea to approach all political parties and candidates to ask for their support. This way, whoever wins will have already promised to support the disability community.

A policy platform can be used at other times, but a government official who is already elected may not be as worried about voters' support, so may be less likely to sign. However, if the next election is not coming up soon, it is still worth approaching elected government officials to have a conversation and ask for support.

How is a policy platform created?

Below is a list of basic steps in creating a policy platform.

1. Host a workshop of disability rights representatives to create a first draft

- a. Select a date, time and accessible location to host a workshop
- b. Invite different disability rights representatives to attend, including:
 - i. Persons with disabilities from different disability rights organizations
 - ii. Persons with different types of disabilities
 - iii. Women with disabilities (they should be about half of attendees)
 - iv. If possible, persons with disabilities from urban and rural parts of the country
- c. At the workshop, do the following:
 - i. Brainstorm different topics that are important to the disability community
 1. Wait for participants to come up with their own topics
 2. If they seem like they might need a suggestion or two, broad topics such as "education" or "transportation" are good starting places
 - ii. Vote on the top categories that should be included in the platform
 - iii. Create a list of possible action items for each category



Disability rights representatives in Myanmar meet at a workshop to create the first draft of a new policy platform.

Source: International Foundation for Electoral Systems

1. Think about using the SMART approach to help create and prioritize action items
 2. SMART means developing action items that are:
 - S**pecific
 - M**easureable
 - A**chievable
 - R**esource
 - T**ime-bound
2. **Share a draft of the policy platform with other members of the disability community**
 - a. Share the draft with others (in person, by email, or by fax) and ask for their feedback
 - b. Make sure people from different backgrounds have a chance to give feedback, including:
 - i. Different disability rights organizations
 - ii. Persons with different types of disabilities, including persons with a visual, hearing, physical, intellectual, or psychosocial disability
 - iii. Women with disabilities
 - iv. Persons with disabilities from different parts of the country
3. **Revise the policy platform based on feedback**
4. **Create a final draft of the policy platform**
 - a. When the final draft of the policy platform is ready, send it out again to disability rights groups in your country to ask for their support and signature
 - b. After collecting signatures, make sure every organization and representative that signed has a copy of the final policy platform with signatures

Dominican Republic

In 2012, there were several active disability rights organizations in the Dominican Republic. Government officials had heard from many of them, but the requests became so numerous it was difficult for them to take any action.

Before elections took place in 2012, the International Foundation for Electoral Systems brought the disability rights organizations together to create one unified policy platform. This became the basis for all of their advocacy work during the 2012 elections.

After the elections were over, the Dominican Republic disability rights organizations were able to successfully remind the elected government officials of their promises on the policy platform, and gained curb cuts for sidewalks (so that persons using wheelchairs or scooters could get onto sidewalks easily), as well as a literacy program that was inclusive of children with disabilities.

This is an example of the impact that a well-written policy platform and advocacy campaign can have if used by disability rights advocates.

5. Approach an election candidate or government official

- a. For tips on contacting and communicating with an elected government official, please see the *RightsNow* tool titled “Communicating with elected officials”

6. Organize a meeting for candidates to sign and agree to the policy platform

- a. When a candidate (or several candidates) have agreed to sign the policy platform, consider arranging a public meeting or event so that they are able to generate positive publicity for both the candidate and the policy platform
- b. Invite the media to attend the public meeting so that there is a public record of the event
- c. Develop a one-page factsheet for journalists about the policy platform and why it is important, to make it easier for them to report on the event

7. After elections, follow up with the winning candidates and appropriate Ministries for action