



## **PART IV: CHOOSING AN ISSUE**



After your group has met several times and knows how to run a meeting, members will probably bring up some issues which concern them.

An issue is: a topic, point, or problem that affects members of your group.

*Issues are important to self-advocacy groups because:*

- Working on issues motivates members to stay involved.
- Working on issues keeps members informed about things that affect their lives.
- Working on issues gives the members hope that change can happen and that they can help make change happen.
- Self-advocates learn how to work as a team to solve problems and tackle issues.
- Making a difference about certain issues shows self-advocates that they have power in their lives.



## What Types of Issues Do Self-Advocates Tackle?

### Ways To Make Your Group Stronger:

- Increasing membership
- Raising money
- Planning a conference, event, or social gathering
- Getting the community involved



### Other Issues Which Affect Members:

- Closing institutions
- Finding transportation
- Finding jobs
- Independent living
- Improving accessibility
- Learning about rights
- Self-determination
- Ending abuse and violence



- Rights to have relationships and discussion about sexuality
- Getting people with disabilities to vote
- Getting people out of nursing homes
- Affordable health care
- Special education, higher education, transition to job opportunities
- Mental health



*What makes a “Good” Issue:*

Reasons that members may decide on a particular issue are:

- People care about it
- It has a solution
- It is a current problem
- It can be solved in the near future
- It is simple and specific
- It involves most people in the group, it will draw attention to the group, it will help recruit members, it will help build the group.



*Self-advocates have thought about a good issue because:*

1. **A good issue involves a lot of people:** The fact that Jack is unable to get into City Hall in his wheelchair is a problem that affects only him. The fact that Jack and others cannot enter City Hall for a hearing on accessible parking is a good issue which affects a number of people in the group.



2. **A good issue has a feeling of now:** The fact that architects should be more aware of accessibility issues is a broad concept which the group may not be able to change. However, wheelchair access to City Hall for the hearing on accessible parking is a “now” issue. It involves an immediate goal so that success can probably be achieved in the foreseeable future.

3. **A good issue easily involves willing workers:** The fact that Jack and others cannot get into City Hall will need to be tackled by several people. The group members will understand why they need to raise this issue, because both accessible parking and accessible buildings are a problem for group members. The issue will involve many group members getting down to

business on different tasks: telephoning, letter writing, library researching, interviewing, petitioning. A good issue will keep lots of people working together.

## Steps to Choosing Your Issue

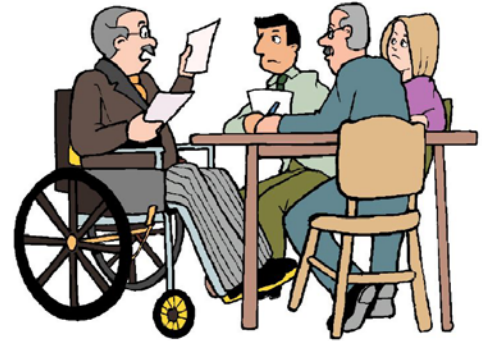
1. Brainstorm issues: Give everyone in the room a chance to speak. Issues can be personal or even about other people. It may be helpful to dedicate a whole meeting to letting people tell their stories and let them discuss what bothers them. Have a member or an advisor write down the main points from what the members bring up on chart paper so that everyone can see.
2. Discuss issues: Discuss each issue that is written down. Determine whether it is an issue that is important to a lot of people, can be tackled in a short amount of time, and will involve many group members.
3. Voting on issues: Group members should understand what each issue is, and if it seems like a good issue. Then the members should follow the voting procedure to select which issue or issues they feel are the most important to start with.



## Information for Working on Issues

### Groups Should Learn:

- How to work as a team with each other, and with other organizations that may be able to help.
- How to collect information about your topic
- How to organize around an issue (this can include writing down what you do in notebooks, or steps you can take to tackle the issue)
- Learning when and how to speak up
- What kinds of actions are appropriate (is crying or arguing with an official ok?)



*Your group will need to do **RESEARCH** so you can understand more about the problem. You will want to learn who has the power to make changes, and how you can convince them to make changes. Some **STRATEGIES** for tackling issues are:*

- Letter-writing campaigns
- Meeting with public officials

- Rallies and demonstrations
- Civil disobedience (risking arrest by disobeying a law together)
- Getting the media involved
- Holding a public forum on an issue
- Having workshops or luncheons where people can learn about an issue
- Sending out information and your views about an issue to lots of people



## **Steps to Planning How to Tackle your Issue**

1. Define the problem: This will be the issue your group has selected. For example, city hall is inaccessible.
2. Show the research: If officers, advisors, or other group members have conducted research on the issue this is a good time to show the group what they have learned.



3. Discuss possible strategies/actions: Options include: write letters to city officials, set up meetings with city officials, hold a press conference, write a letter to the editor, start a petition, hold a rally, hire a lawyer.
4. Discuss pros and cons to different strategies/actions: Holding a rally or hiring a lawyer may not be a very good way to start tackling an issue. The group may want to start by writing letters, or meeting with city officials. The group should discuss how to prioritize ways of tackling the issue. If some of the tactics do not work, then the group can go on to other strategies.
5. Decide on what steps will be taken to tackle your issue: This can be done by taking a vote. Let members write down the order of steps they want to use to tackle the issue. Vote on what the group will do first. Then have members sign up for what part they want to play in tackling the issue. The group may also want to put each step onto a timeline.

