



Love Beyond Borders: The Interfaith Movement to End the Pandemic

An Introduction to Advocacy by a Local House of Worship

“How terrible it will be for those who make unfair laws, and those who write laws that make life hard for people. They are not fair to the poor and they rob my people of their rights. They allow people to steal from widows and take from orphans what really belongs to them.”

Isaiah 10:1-2

What is Advocacy?

Advocacy is an action taken by individuals or groups to speak on behalf of others. This most often means speaking for a person or group who has difficulty speaking for themselves in an effort to bring about justice. For example, advocacy may involve representing abused women who fear speaking out, or standing alongside someone in court who does not know how to exercise their rights to equal treatment under the law. In the case of the pandemic, advocacy can mean expressing support for government actions that expand access to vaccines, speaking out on behalf of groups who lack access, or supporting government programs that fund vaccines for poor countries.

Advocacy and Religion

The first amendment to the constitution restricted government action that would impede religious expression, and also established freedom of speech. Freedom of speech includes freedom of expression of religious speech, and freedom to not express religious beliefs. This is interpreted by the supreme court to include active participation in social issues by religious groups.

The Pandemic has led to extreme disparities in access to vaccine, and along with that, disparities in the management of the consequences of Covid infection. Historically, people of faith of run to, not away from, a pandemic as a demonstration of the commandment to love one another and to show compassion. Advocacy is one way that people of faith demonstrate love and compassion.

For example, in Micah Chapter 6, God reminds His people that he brought them out of Egypt and cared for them, therefore they must not fail to respond in the same way to those in need. This is summarized in Micah 6:8

He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

This is repeated in the New Testament where we are called to show compassion, justice, and care and concern for those in need

“Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me” (Matthew 25:40).

Advocacy or Awareness?

Advocacy is acting on behalf of another person or group to a government or other entity with control, influence, or decision-making authority. Advocacy generally seeks to change or support a specific action. Writing your government representative to support funding for Covax is advocacy. *Awareness* is to create or increase consciousness of an issue. It can just be informative and not necessarily seek to

change behavior. Talking with your neighbor about what is Covax and what it does is raising awareness. Awareness can lead to advocacy if you ask your neighbor to sign a petition.

What is an Advocacy Strategy? A sample plan to advocate for Covax.

Before starting a plan, it is important to familiarize yourself with the person, issue or group you are advocating for, in this case Covax. That advocacy can extend to the Covax partners, such as UNICEF-USA. One way to become familiar with Covax is through the Covax [website](#).

1. What Do You Want? (Your Objectives)

Once you have the basics on Covax (or UNICEF), then consider what it is you want to advocate for. In the case of Covax, that can be donations of money, medical supplies, or vaccines. It is also an option to focus your advocacy on a specific country and its vaccine needs. For example, you might have a personal connection to a specific country or you can look online at vaccine rates in different countries and select a focus.

2. Who Can Give It to You? (Audiences)

A common focus for advocacy is the government, state and federal. You might advocate in support of government decisions to support Covax. If you are focusing on a specific country your target audience might be people from that country living in the US or other countries (Diaspora), or groups working in that country. Again, consider what you would ask of them. It might be to support increasing awareness or making donations.

3. What Do They Need to Hear? (Message)

What does your target audience need to hear? There are sample letters online for writing to your government representative.

4. Who Do They Need to Hear It From? (Messengers)

Government leaders are most responsive to their constituents. If you are a constituent you should emphasize that to your representative. If you have a particular view, experience, or concern, then describe that. One way to do advocacy is to engage community leaders who are likely to get attention. A local elected official, clergy, or business leader can be very influential and get more attention. Partnering with people like this can be an effective strategy.

5. Should I advocate locally?

The connection between federal and local policy making is changing, with local leaders becoming more influential. The other significant change is the frequency in which big businesses are engaging in social issues. If there is a large business in your community it would be valuable to look on their website to see if they announce issues they are interested in. In this case, many corporate websites describe their response to Covid. You may see a link between that policy and the importance to the local community that the pandemic end, and it will only end when everyone has access to vaccine.

