Ten Key Strategies for Success

When undertaking any legislative project, take advantage of opportunities to learn from others’ experiences, summarized in the following points.

1. **Do not assume anything.** Don’t assume others will know your intent. Make the policy goal of the bill as clear as possible. You cannot know all of others’ concerns about the bill, but clarity will help allay them. Also, do not assume you have the votes you need until the bill is signed into law.

2. **Listen not only to what others say, but to what they do not say.** Sometimes, the things people do not share reveal their true feelings, objectives, or motives. These things may be difficult to observe or find out, so active listening and paying close attention are required. Above all, do not lose sight of the original intent of the proposed bill, and be ready to compromise on noncritical issues.

3. **Know the legislative environment.** Get to know and understand the other issues currently percolating through the legislative process. These issues almost certainly will affect the nursing board’s bill, either directly or indirectly. Ignoring the legislative environment could undermine your efforts.

4. **Remember that everything is connected.** Connections exist among many issues, and others’ policy goals may coincide or collide with the board’s goals. Being aware of other issues going through the legislative process can help you avoid pitfalls or strike strategic alliances. The figure below illustrates the connections and overlap among the four spheres that influence public policy changes and legislation. Political effectiveness in one sphere is influenced by nurses’ involvement in other spheres; interaction and interdependence among the spheres occur throughout (Mason, Leavitt, & Chaffee, 2007).

5. **Be aware that it is not your bill.** Only legislators introduce bills and only legislators vote on them. Speak with the bill’s sponsors about amendments that have been discussed, amendments under consideration, and opposition that may be forming. If you allow the bill’s sponsors to be surprised or ambushed about the bill, they may stop all work on your effort.

6. **Keep the governor’s office informed.** The nursing board must communicate with the governor’s office about the policy goals and the reason for seeking the legislation. Help the governor’s staff prepare for questions that are likely to be raised about the board’s efforts.

7. **Keep the coalition informed.** During the advance work on the bill, spend a great deal of time working on the bill with other interested parties or stakeholders. If changes to the measure become necessary, ensure that the coalition learns of this. The coalition’s support will be needed throughout the process; therefore, its members need to know of any new support earned or opposition avoided. Continued negotiation on the bill may cost support from somebody who had previously agreed to promote the legislation. Assume all supporters will want to know about the agreed-upon changes supported or drafted for the measure. Skipping this step risks losing coalition members.

8. **Be patient.** The legislative process offers many opportunities for both quick action and long periods of inaction. The bill will move at a pace that falls largely outside the board’s control. This means that in addition to being patient, you must be prepared for new questions and for the bill to resume its movement through the legislature at any time.

9. **Do the necessary; avoid the unnecessary.** Accomplish the steps identified for the legislation to pass. Along the way, other opportunities will develop for unnecessary, gratuitous, or counterproductive steps. Avoid settling grudges or being punitive, disrespectful, or rude. No matter how tempting these behaviors might seem, they will almost certainly come back to haunt the effort. Also, they may become a distraction.

10. **Do not lose sight of the goal.** The legislative effort should be about getting things right, not simply about “winning.” Sometimes, the goal may be reached without a legislative solution. If so, be satisfied. Simply having a bill move through the process is no guarantee of success and may even do more harm than good to your mission of protecting the public.

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**After the Hearing**

Once the proposed bill clears its first committee, prepare for additional hearings. Use the experience gained in front of each committee to prepare and improve presentations to subsequent committees.

Legislative staff may require more information to brief legislators who did not participate in the hearing for the bill. Issues may be identified that require amendments to be offered when the entire legislative body debates the bill; this will entail drafting amendments and understanding their meaning. Maintain and con-