A Case Study in Executive Branch Advocacy: Families for Kids Grantees Visit the White House and the Department of Health and Human Services

Relevant Federal Lobbying Regulations:

Advocacy—identify, embrace, and promote a cause. It is an effort to shape public perception to effect change that may or may not require changes in the law. Advocacy is about using effective tools to create social change. Lobbying is only one of these activities.

The Public Policy Problem and Advocacy Goal: Between 1993 and 1999, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation mounted an extensive foster care and adoption reform initiative to help kids stuck for years in foster care find loving permanent homes. The same five desired outcomes guided reforms in all 11 Families for Kids implementation sites: one year to permanency for every “waiting” child, one stable foster care placement, one family-friendly assessment, one caseworker or casework team, and comprehensive support for families. Just as many Families for Kids grantees were seeing significant adoption reform results in their states, President Bill Clinton and First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton were beginning to make national pronouncements on the importance of speeding permanency for children in foster care. Families for Kids grantees and their innovations were to have a significant influence on the administration’s emerging foster care reform efforts.

Principal Advocacy Strategy: Visits to the White House, appearances at official events, discussions with staff at the Department of Health and Human Services, participation in two Washington press conferences.

Case Study Vignette: Throughout much of the mid-to-late 1990s, Kellogg Foundation program directors representing Families for Kids were visiting the White House on a regular basis, bringing with them a broad range of communication products. Families for Kids grantees, together with recently adopted children and their adoptive parents, were also visiting the White House and, in fact, appeared with the President and First Lady in a lengthy public service announcement to demonstrate the importance of adoption and publicize Families for Kids nationally. Families for Kids grantees were also speaking formally and informally with staff from the Department of Health and Human Services who were working on the substance of a presidential executive order that would urge and offer incentives to increase permanency placements in all 50 states.

Public Policy Outcomes: These executive advocacy initiatives helped shape President Clinton’s “Adoption 2002 Initiative” that sought to double the number of adoptions and other permanency placements for children (to a total of 54,000) by 2002. At a Families for Kids press conference in 1997, keynote speaker Hillary Rodham Clinton publicly thanked grantees for their commitment and work in the “vineyards” of child welfare reform.

Executive Branch Advocacy Lessons for the Future: Families for Kids grantees were able to capitalize on coincidence and synergy, noting federal policy leaders’ emerging interest in promoting child welfare reform and stepping forward assertively with successful change models and communication products that helped shape presidential rhetoric and executive policy.
**Definitions**

**Arenas of Executive Influence**—Policy Instruments: Advocates targeting the executive branch typically seek to influence the substance of one or more of these policy instruments: executive orders, rules, regulations, vetoes, proposed budgets, official standards.

**Arenas of Executive Influence**—Policy Leaders and Entities: Key executive branch leaders and entities are: mayors, county executives, governors, presidents, cabinet secretaries, leaders in departments of governments (e.g., health and human service departments).

**Executive Branch Advocacy and Lobbying Regulations:**
- Not Lobbying: Advocacy focused on rules and regulations in the executive arena is **not** considered lobbying.
- Lobbying: Advocacy that seeks to influence an executive branch official’s position on a specific piece of legislation is lobbying.