



Get Results: No Blame Problem Solving Guide

10 KEY STEPS

STEP 1: IDENTIFY YOUR ISSUE FOCUS

- Engage in bottom-up conversation within your Issue Committee to identify consensus passions.
- Drill down the issue(s) to a discernable problem that you believe you can tackle with a doable solution.
- Prioritize issues identified; considerations may include internal support (within the group), expected external support (from community and/or administration), timing, difficulty of the problem, scope of problem etc.

STEP 2: SUBMIT AN OPRA REQUEST

- First, investigate what your City is currently doing to address your priority issue by exploring the City's website, media coverage, or making phone calls to the City Clerk's office.
- Dig deeper by preparing an OPRA (Open Public Records Act) Request either to the City Clerk, or to the Secretary of the School Board; remember that you are requesting *copies of existing records* (e.g. resolutions, ordinances, written policies) so be as specific as possible.
- Find and submit the OPRA Request Form. Forms should be found on City websites; if not, call the City Clerk and have them email you a blank request form.

STEP 3: CONDUCT EVIDENCE-BASED RESEARCH

- An internet search is the best place to start! Look up your priority issue to get an idea of how the problem is being addressed in similar communities; look for news articles, policy papers, or websites on the topic.
- Dig deeper, look into academic institutions including university departments and centers that specialize in the area. Call or check websites of associations whose focus is local government (e.g. Urban Mayors Association) or who deal with your issues (e.g. The New Jersey Association of Environmental Commissions).
- Review The Citizens Campaign's Menu of Solutions which contains evidence-based solutions previously developed by other Citizens Campaign participants and Law & Policy Task Force experts.
- Be sure the solution you choose has been successful in addressing the issue in cities similar to yours.

STEP 4: SHAPE YOUR SOLUTION

- Use information gathered from the OPRA Request and your Evidence-Based Research to determine which measure may be the best fit for where your City currently is and where you want it to be.
- Follow-up with appropriate parties (e.g. city clerks and academic institutions) on your identified solutions to get more information on policy implementation, cost of program, challenges, evidence of success etc.
- Find out what new staff were required in the solution you identified. Also check out how long it took to successfully implement. Then tailor the solution to fit your city.

STEP 5: MAKE SURE IT IS COST-EFFECTIVE

- From evidence you gathered in your research, determine whether there will be costs involved in implementing your solution such as administrative costs, staff time, etc., or whether it will be cost-neutral or better yet, cost saving.
- If there are costs involved, look at your City's budget to determine whether your solution would be covered by a particular line item, and if not, whether there are any other areas from which savings could be sufficient to offset the costs of your solution.
- If the solution is not covered or partially covered by the City's budget, come up with a list of alternative funding sources. Look for grants, consider crowd funding, etc.

STEP 6: DO THE DOABLE

- It's often better to start smaller and gain traction in order to build support and find funds for the overall solution.
- "Phasing" is a good tactic, especially when full funding is not available.
- "Pilot" projects are also useful when there is skepticism about your solution.

STEP 7: GET EXPERT SUPPORT AND ADVICE

- Submit your research to The Citizens Campaign in a brief report on (1) the response to your OPRA request, (2) your proposed solution, evidence of its success, and how you think it can fit in your city, (3) your cost analysis.
- After completing the above research report, consult with The Citizens Campaign and our Law & Policy Task Force to assist with your analysis and the development of your proposal.
- Incorporate changes suggested by the expert, and conduct any necessary additional research.

STEP 8: DRAFT A READY-TO-ADOPT SOLUTION

- Ask the Law & Policy Task Force which policy format to choose for your solution, e.g. resolution, ordinance, executive order, etc.
- Work with support from The Law & Policy Task Force to incorporate the solution you developed into the chosen legal format.
- Make sure the legal form of your solution includes recognition of the positive aspects of the existing policy and any related governmental initiatives.

STEP 9: MAKE A RESPECTFUL PRESENTATION

- With assistance from The Citizens Campaign staff and the Law & Policy Task Force, identify the parties you should engage to help get your policy adopted.
- Review the current policy you found using OPRA and your personal inquiries. Then find what part you agree with, come in complimenting the officials on that part of the current policy and offer to build upon it.
- When presenting to the public body, compliment them on the progress they've made so far in your issue area.
- Dress respectfully and address officials respectfully. If you give respect, you can command respect.
- When speaking to the media, do not criticize public officials who disagree with your proposal. Be understanding of their positions and express confidence that you can work things out.

STEP 10: RESPECTFUL PURSUIT

- If your solution is deferred for further discussion or review by government committees or experts, say, "Please, may I ask to whom is this proposal being referred and when can we expect a response from this public body."
- When meeting with an official who makes a commitment to do something, always ask what timeframe they feel comfortable with for fulfilling the commitment.
- When meeting with an elected official, follow up with a written thank you mentioning the commitments made by the official, the time frame they indicated they were comfortable with for fulfilling the commitment, and if it's an elected official who indicates that a department head or other staff person will act on the commitment, then copy the person on the thank you note.
- Offer a compromise, if possible, such as a pilot or phased in approach.
- Ask the Law and Policy Task Force if there is a way to implement the solution without governmental approval.
- Keep your solution in the picture by using social media and conventional media and keep it "no blame".

- Ask for help from a person of influence in your community.
- Seek support from a government employees' union.
- Seek a resolution or other support recommending your solution from an appropriate board or commission.
- Try an Executive Order (if the Law and Policy Task Force decides it's legal) if there aren't enough votes for adopting an Ordinance.
- Wait until election time and seek sponsorship from an incumbent who is a candidate (presidential and gubernatorial election times are preferable)
- Use Initiative and Referendum if the solution does not require a change to the zoning ordinance or an appropriation of funds. (I and R should only be used as a last resort)