



CHAPTER 1:

INTRODUCTION

Best Friends Animal Society's advocacy department constructs and executes strategic advocacy campaigns that enact or remove policies to bring about sustainable lifesaving in a community. The advocacy department is comprised of grassroots advocacy campaign master architects, expert digital organizers, political strategy specialists, and legislative attorneys who work closely together to craft comprehensive policy campaigns that result in sustainable lifesaving change in communities. Where the advocacy team focuses is in direct response to the dynamic real-time data Best Friends receives from shelters.

This playbook is a reflection of the intentional research, information gathering, relationship building, and connection making that each member of the advocacy team goes through before building an advocacy campaign and making asks of decision-makers. This document is your inside look into how we conduct our due diligence to Save Them All®.

What is due diligence and who should do it?

Due diligence is reasonable care before, during, and after an action. Due diligence should reduce risks, maximize benefits and opportunities, strengthen weaknesses, build on prior accomplishments, allow for the discovery of information, and identify resource overlap or shortfalls.

Successful advocacy campaigns require familiarity with your area's lifesaving needs, collaboration with local shelters and community members, creativity, and thoughtfulness. After that, you can tackle some of the big-picture concerns that are crucial to dog and cat lifesaving.

Your "ask" will be contextualized by considering the issue's and cause's local history and the community's relevance. Looking at the issue/policy's background and history will help estimate your chance of success. This due diligence will suggest identifying issues and linking them to solutions. Due diligence helps you relate your ask's answers and efforts to the solutions you propose.

"Advocacy" is public support for or recommendation of a particular cause or policy; is the act of building public support for a certain cause or policy.

"Advocacy campaign" the activities supporting making an ask and making sure action is taken to solve a problem.

"Advocacy due diligence" is information gathering to help assess the community's policy environment that decisions are made in.

"Ask" is the specific request or action to be taken that an organized body of people makes to a decision-maker. Sometimes referred to as a request.

"Decision-maker" the person or entity responsible for making strategically important decisions based on several variables, including time constraints, resources available, the amount and type of information available and the number of stakeholders involved (such as an elected official or department head.)

"Due diligence" is the exercise of reasonable care before, during and after an action made.



How this playbook helps you:

This playbook provides tables and sections to help you and others understand the problems and challenges you identified and produce ideas, alternatives, and outcomes to ask a decision-maker or elected official to act upon.

This playbook's many tables and questions shouldn't overwhelm you. They are to aid your advocacy campaign development.

Important: Not all the sections or tables in this playbook may apply to your problem and community, but they may reveal a connection or resource you missed. Always start by defining your problem/issue. After defining your problem/issue, analyze its fundamental causes before proposing solutions and other possibilities to boost your advocacy campaign and ask/request.

When do you have enough information to launch your campaign? While you can always add more information later, it's vital to start with enough information or leads to understand the situation and predict your potential success.

Why should you do due diligence?

Politics, whether in a back room or in a government, corporation, or community, affects all policy. You must build support and eliminate opposition. To be able to do that, you must exercise due diligence. Advocacy is less of a mystery when you know the people, policies, connections, and processes that impact decision-makers.

Advocacy efforts and campaigns should be tailored to the topic and community. Your organization's success depends on understanding the community's political, social, and economic background. A due diligence report helps you, your team, and other organizations/departments work together to solve the community's problem. By analyzing your community's data you are putting together the puzzle pieces to understand it better.

Due diligence helps you understand your community, but you must confront any opposition, counterarguments, counter asks/requests, and hazards too. You don't want to accidentally harm relationships, animals, or the shelter. Gathering crucial facts to identify where your community is now will set your baseline to gauge your advocacy campaign or ask and establish a goal line.

When to do due diligence?

Here are some examples of when you should do due diligence:

- You've established CCP (community cat program) in multiple towns, but the current community you are in won't accept CCP's demonstrated benefits, and you don't know why.
- Your community's animal control program has a new issue and you've never worked with oversight.
- You won an advocacy triumph in this community earlier, but it was hard and rocky.
- You've tried to modify legislation or policy multiple times but failed.
- You want your organization or others to help with an advocacy campaign, but you need to show your campaign's viability.
- You're unsure how to change policy or practice.

By researching your community's demographics, political climate, decision-making process, your organization's relationships, and more, you are doing the due diligence that will help you formulate your ask and campaign.

Due diligence will help you see if there are misconnections holding your campaign or ask back, provide you with more insight into unfamiliar departments or organizations, help you figure out why a win was hard in the past and identify ways to make it easier this time, prove to others that you have the right pieces in place to succeed, or just help you identify the steps you need to take.



Where to start, how to start (best practices):

Start with what you already know. Brainstorm, stream of consciousness, doodling, whatever feels natural. Start by jotting down information you already know. This playbook will help guide you through the rest but this initial memo to yourself will help you from feeling overwhelmed later. Other information you will need to gather will come from people, documents, news articles, etc.

A mental strategy or due diligence information will not help in a crisis or generate credibility. Writing down all this material will minimize generalities and guesses that derail advocacy campaigns. As you write it down, you may be surprised at how much you and your team already know, revealing new connections and a vision or path forward. Without a written plan and due diligence report, your organization and partners cannot use your vital information or see how your ask matches with your organization's purpose to save the lives of shelter animals and end homelessness for pets. A written plan provides focus and context. It allows for everyone involved to know the players, issues, timelines/ deadlines, and strategies. A plan is not a plan and a report is not a report if it is not written down!

A word of caution: While this report must be written down, it is not set in stone. Shelter employees, elected officials, coalitions, and resources turn over and change. This should be reviewed and updated as community and political conditions change. Your plans and due diligence report must be reviewed, appraised, and updated frequently to stay relevant.

While updating or reevaluating your analysis with the latest information is flexible, being objective in your information gathering and analysis is not. Even if some questions require judgment, don't include or allow your biases, politics, sense of humor, or values to influence your report. Your interpretation may not be understood by others.

Need a starting point? A few sources to find information:

- Official government sites
- Social media
- Newspaper archives
- Policy papers
- Community members
- Shelter staff
- Government staff

