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## **Communication Skills Smooth Way for Advocates**

By Tom Seekins and Fabricio Balcazar  
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The type of projects your advocacy group chooses will contribute to its reputation in the community. Since your group is likely to address many issues over a period of time, its reputation is important for success. The following guidelines have emerged as characteristic of many successful advocacy efforts. This list is by no means complete. But it does serve as a basis for healthy community involvement and debate over strategy.

**Accentuate the positive.** Respond to at least as many positive events as negative ones by complimenting actions and honoring key figures. Keeping positive is easy, and it will win you friends and build your reputation as a responsible group.

Constructive involvement can serve as the basis for many successful projects.

**Begin by assuming the best of others.** Challenging the motivations of others often produces needless resistance. Assume that negative act is the result of ignorance or inattention (especially your own). This creates opportunities to teach and learn. A corollary to this is to give credit freely for well-made decisions. Acknowledging the wisdom and vision of others who support you is likely to increase their commitment to your goals.

**Do your homework and document everything.** If your group takes a position or initiates an action based on an error of fact, you stand a good chance of being very embarrassed. This can damage a hard-won, solid reputation. A significant error in fact can also direct attention away from your issue, no matter how important it is. Thus, the first step in developing a position or starting a project should be confirming your information. In addition, document everything you do and also what other people tell you. Such documentation protects you from denials and countercharges later on.