**How to…. build strong advocate partnerships**

# **Why work with others?**

No man is an island. Making connections, finding allies, and building supports are all part of advocacy. Although some problems can be solved on an individual, case-by-case basis, many advocacy issues are often part of a wider systemic problem.

If you’re experiencing an individual issue, chances are someone else has experienced the same issue. Your advocacy efforts may result in positive changes for other people with sight loss. Even if the problem is personal to an individual with sight loss, other groups may want to offer support because of their concern for disability issues or their interests in fairness and equality.

There are so many benefits to working with others, such as learning from their experience, increasing support for your issue, and having a group of people to share in the efforts. There is strength in numbers, and the momentum from others can help keep a campaign going when all seems lost.

# **Who could I partner with?**

The answer to this question relies heavily on what the issue is. Potential allies to consider are:

* Consumer groups (if your issue is a consumer issue like transportation, access to public spaces, or access to media)
* Local groups for people with sight loss including recreation or peer support groups
* CNIB Community Engagement Volunteers across Canada (either locally or nationally)
* Your elected officials
* Municipal accessibility committees
* Medical professionals like optometrists and ophthalmologists (if eye health related)
* Members of the wider disability community (for example: accessible information can affect people with hearing loss, people with dyslexia, those with learning disabilities, etc.)
* Journalist or media contact (if you think you have an 'exclusive' story their readership will be genuinely interested in)

**Remember**: if you are advocating on behalf of another person who has sight loss, it is their decision if they want to involve other people.

# **How do I get started?**

You never know if someone is able or willing to help you unless you ask. Keep your request for support simple by including just a few sentences outlining what the issue is, and how you think that the group might be able to help or why they'd be interested. Try and be as specific as you can about what you'd like them to do, such as sign a petition or attend an event. If someone responds to you to say that they cannot help, don't be afraid to ask if they have any ideas of other groups that can assist. If they are interested, at this point you can send over more detailed information on the issue.

**Remember**: Relationships are a two-way street and need to be nurtured. Keep in mind that your allies might want your support on their own issues in the future. You also never know when you might also need to call on them again for a shared issue. Once the relationships are built, they need to be maintained.

# **Initial points to consider:**

* Does the person with sight loss (if it's not you) want to involve others in the issue? If so, who?
* Who else might be experiencing the same problem? Other members of the CNIB community who are blind or partially sighted? CNIB advocates who are blind or partially sighted in other parts of the country? For example, access to automated teller machines is a problem everywhere. The installation of an accessible pedestrian signal is relevant to people who use the crossing. Does it make sense to try to find other people with the same problem to work together on a solution?
* Are there other local organizations that might have an interest in or be able to help with this situation? For example, if a person who is blind or partially sighted is having trouble with the landlord of geared-to-income housing unit, a group that represents low-income tenants might be interested and help. Or a group advocating for more support for special needs children in the school system might be helpful if a student with sight loss is receiving inadequate classroom support.
* Does this issue relate to an issue of national concern? For example, getting a tax break for talking books is not only relevant to people who are blind or partially sighted but also to people with learning disabilities. Changes to the federal *Income Tax Act* would affect many people across the country. Working together with other groups is more effective than working alone.
* What is the best way to approach each organization or individual? Is it in person at a public meeting, on social media, or direct contact via phone or email?
* Why should they care about the issue and how does it affect them? How can I summarize the issue in a few sentences and be specific about how they can help me? Do they know of anyone else I haven't already considered?
* What is my plan to keep them informed as the advocacy issue progresses, and how will I follow up to ensure that I maintain a good relationship with them?