

# Advocacy to Address Societal and Systemic Barriers to Career Development

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*Advocare* is a Latin word related to advocacy, meaning “to add,” “to voice out,” or “to raise your voice.” The American Counseling Association (2018) outlines the skills, knowledge, and behaviors that counselors need to address systemic barriers and advocate for clients and client groups. These competencies are organized based on the extent of client involvement in advocacy (collaborative vs. on behalf of) and the level of advocacy intervention (individual, school/community, or public arena).

More specifically, in career development practice, Nancy Arthur et al. (2005, 2009, 2013, 2015) state that advocacy entails social justice skills encompassing both attitudinal and knowledge-based components. Attitudinal skills include being nonjudgmental, equitable, and passionate, while knowledge-based skills involve understanding the services available to different groups, the economic forces that affect them, career development practice, counseling, communication, intervention, and evolving competencies such as strong assessment knowledge and skills. With this broad set of social justice competencies, why, as career development practitioners, do we still need to deepen our caring?

Being or becoming an advocate may feel like a speck of dust in everyone’s eyes, a mouse among groups of lions, or a drop of water in the ocean. Nevertheless, more than what we know or are trained to do for this kind of work, it is the heart that recognizes the unmet needs of individuals or groups, that commits to changing the status quo, that pursues causes beyond oneself, that supports those who cannot support themselves, and that takes risks for others. We persist in empowering individuals and groups and fostering systemic change while understanding and respecting each client’s or group’s unique cultural and social context (<https://www.ncda.org/aws/NCDA/>)

Experience tells us that advocacy creates an enabling environment and empowers communities to influence decision-makers in bringing solutions to identified problems. We follow a defined process to address inequity and to denounce legislation, policies, and administrative regulations that result in long-lasting changes in policy, procedures, and practices (<https://prntexas.org/5-elements-of-successful-advocacy/>; <https://www.lillio.com/blog/getting-prepared-and-being-an-effective-advocate>)

We have identified target audiences and allies. As such, we know that our primary target audience—the decision-makers—are those who have the authority to change the desired policy, while our secondary target audiences are those who have access to and can influence our primary audience. Additionally, of course, our allies include civil society groups, other NGOs, and experts/academics

(<https://www.open.edu/openlearncreate/mod/resource/view>; <https://www.linkedin.com/advice/0/how-do-you-identify-targets-allies-your-campaign>).

The good advocacy practices we follow have reflected our professional identity. We have expressed our dispositions through an objective, specific, and well-defined advocacy problem; gathered objective data and information to help define the problem and guide the advocacy process; and identified and used resources that support the process, thereby developing clear and specific plans of action. We have monitored the change processes to ensure that agreed-upon changes are implemented, followed up on changes and solutions to evaluate the effectiveness of advocacy efforts, and empowered those for whom we advocated to become advocates for themselves and others. But wait—this is the most enjoyable part of the advocacy process: celebrating successes and rewarding efforts, so that motivation for future advocacy is encouraged. Have we done this, even in our smaller advocacy efforts? Or are we stuck with the idea that only large-scale advocacy matters? Both small- and large-scale advocacies are equally powerful (<https://pressbooks.atlanticoer-relatlantique.ca/ecerelationships/chapter/the-big-a-and-little-a-of-advocacy>). So, take pride, and let

our advocacy stories linger and continue as we scaffold the next generation.