

APN Legislative Advocacy Tool Kit

The following is a “Tool Kit” intended to assist individuals in the advocacy process. We provide a simple, easy to follow 6 step method for meeting with your legislator to advocate for the “FY05 People’s Budget”. From setting up the meeting to following-up with your legislator, we have provided some guides to assist you in this process. Please feel free to contact the APN for additional information and/or support in your advocacy efforts.

Six Step Tool Kit:

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Step One: The Letter

May 18, 2004

The Honorable _____
New Jersey State Senate/Assembly
Trenton, N.J. 08608

Dear (Assemblyman, Senator, Governor, etc.) <last name>

I would like to introduce myself since you are my legislator in district <#>. My name is _____ from _____, New Jersey. I am a member of the Anti-Poverty Network of New Jersey and a constituent of yours.

I am writing to ask your support for the Anti-Poverty Network's "People's Budget" for FY05. I have attached a copy of this budget proposal for you to review.

The Anti-Poverty Network created this budget through a consensus based process that took place last fall. We held 10 regional forums throughout the state, heard from over 1,100 NJ constituents and surveyed the perceived need of the people in our state. Incorporating the "People's Budget" into the FY05 budget would have a positive impact on my family, my neighborhood, my community and my home state. It would also be a response to the expressed demands of the citizens of New Jersey.

I respectfully request that you take this opportunity to hear our position and, as one of your loyal supporters, urge you to support our 5 key issues for this year's budget.

A group of concerned constituents, including myself, would like to set up a meeting with you at your earliest convenience to discuss this budget proposal. I look forward to meeting with you. I will call your office to schedule a meeting. Thank you for the ongoing service and support you give to our community.

Sincerely,

(signature & address)

(Attach "People's Budget"... p.9-10)

Step Two: The Phone Call

Politicians may have their staff answer their phones and the staff member may be the individual you must be prepared to speak with about the issue. Don't worry – sometimes the staffer you speak with is the very one in charge of your particular issue and, ultimately has some influence on policy AND the politician. This person may also be responsible for scheduling meetings for your legislator, and that is exactly what we want to do!

TIPS ON PHONE CALLING

Be prepared ~ know about the "APN FY05 People's Budget" you are setting up a meeting about. The Five issues are Housing, Health Care, Safety Net (assistance for NJ's most vulnerable), Child Care and Child Welfare. Indicate that the meeting will last about 30 minutes.

Identify yourself ~ by name, location and as a member of the Anti-Poverty Network. Tell them you are calling to follow up on the letter you sent your legislator on (date) regarding a meeting with him/her.

Stay brief and simple ~ State that, as you mentioned in your letter, you have a group (the number of people if you know) that would like to meet with him/her to discuss the "APN FY05 People's Budget". Give some times/dates that you would be able to come into the office.

Leave a message ~ if you get a voice mail. Be sure to leave your name, the date/time of your call, the reason for your call and your telephone number including a request for response.

Encourage others to call ~ there is impact in numbers. Your legislator tracks the volume of calls that come into the office. Let them know you are serious about meeting.

Persistence ~ if you do not get a date/time for your meeting after a reasonable time, call back!

Caller: Hello, I would like to make an appointment to meet briefly with Senator _____ about the "APN FY05 People's Budget" that I sent to him last week.

Staffer: I'm sorry. Senator _____ is in a committee meeting right now. May I take a message for her?

Caller: Yes. My name is _____ and I am a member of the Anti-Poverty Network of NJ and a constituent in her district. I would like to meet with Senator _____ at some point next week for about 30 minutes to discuss the letter I sent her. I can fax or e-mail a copy of the letter and the "People's Budget" again if you would like. Please ask her to contact me about meeting on this issue. I have a group of people from this district that would like to discuss this budget as soon as possible. Again, my name is _____ and my address is _____ (**speak slowly to be sure the staffer is taking down the information**). I hope she will be able to meet with us soon and I'll be anxiously waiting to hear from her. May I ask your name? Thank you so much for your time, <**staffer's name**>

Staffer: You're welcome and thank you for calling.

Step Three: Organizing people for the Visit

Remember, politicians listen to constituents. It is vital to have a group of people from your district accompany you on your visit with your legislator. Most likely, you have already been involved with some people from your areas through local APN activities, meetings and forums. Once you have sent the letter and made your phone call to set up your visit, reconnect with individuals in your area to let them know about the progress you've made and possible dates/times for your visit. Try to coordinate your schedule with the availability of those in your group and that of your legislator.

TIPS ON ORGANIZING PEOPLE FOR THE VISIT

Have at least three people ~ we recommend that you go with a small group of constituents, anywhere from 3 to 6 people would be sufficient. This way, you are enough to make a presence but also small enough for each person to get an opportunity to speak.

Have Alternatives ~ if at all possible, get at few different dates and times that your legislator is available to meet with your group. Call or e-mail your group members to determine which of these options works best for your group.

Help identifying people ~ if you are unable to identify people on your own, please contact the Anti-Poverty Network at info@antipovertynetwork.org we can locate APN participants in your legislative district that may be willing participate in this visit.

Practice ahead of time ~ it would be a good idea to meet up briefly as a group to go over what each person will say. A short role play for practice is ideal. Try to have one person lead the discussion and allow each person a few minutes to address the "People's Budget" and how supporting this proposal will effect their personal situation. Community organizations, service providers, advocates and consumers all benefit from this type of preparation.

Confirm your meeting ~ once you have determined which meeting time works best for your group, call up your legislator to confirm. When you get confirmation from your legislator, you should contact group members again to confirm that the meeting has been set.

Step Four: The Visit

A face-to-face meeting is the MOST EFFECTIVE means of communicating your concerns and views to your targeted legislator, but it can also be the most difficult to accomplish. Scheduling a meeting, your availability, your group's availability, your legislator's schedule are just a few of the factors to consider when planning this strategy. Be persistent and prepared, don't give up!

Be sure you know the issues laid out in "The People's Budget" before the meeting and be prepared to answer any question or deal with any objections in a calm and courteous manner. Also, know something about your legislator (i.e. how he has voted in the past, committees on which he/she serves). Refer to the NJ Legislative website at www.njleg.state.nj.us to find legislator information or contact the Anti-Poverty Network though at info@antipovertynetwork.org for assistance.

Present your case as simply as possible without exaggeration. Let him/her know that this budget is the voice of the people in NJ and that the five budget items are the top concern for you and your group as constituents. Leave a copy of your original letter and the "People's Budget" for him/her to refer to after you leave. Make sure to provide your contact information and the APN website (www.antipovertynetwork.org) before leaving.

TIPS ON PERSONAL MEETINGS

Be punctual, patient and flexible ~ the legislator may be late or even be interrupted during your meeting, be prepared for this.

Be prepared ~ bring copies of your original letter and the "People's Budget". Present your facts in an orderly and positive way. Have the knowledge to be able to respond to any questions or objections your legislator may pose.

Be political ~ legislators want to be re-elected. Show how your request, and his support of that request, could best serve his constituency.

Be polite ~ you have every right to ask your legislator to consider your position and to ask how he will vote on the particular bill. Express thanks for his/her valuable time and the courtesy of meeting with you.

The Actual Visit:

Introduce yourself and the members of your group ~ I would like to introduce myself, my name is _____ from _____, New Jersey. I am a member of the Anti-Poverty Network of New Jersey and a constituent of yours. Let me introduce you to the people in my group, (go through each person by first and last name, and the town they live in). We would like to thank you for meeting with us today to discuss our concerns.

State why you are there ~ as I stated in my letter to you on (date), we are here today to ask your support for the Anti-Poverty Network's "People's Budget" for FY05. (Hand him/her a copy of the "People's Budget." The Anti-Poverty Network created this budget though a consensus based process that took place last fall. We held 10 regional forums throughout the state, heard from over 1,100 NJ constituents and surveyed the perceived need of the people in our state.

Incorporating the “People’s Budget” into the NJ FY05 budget would have a positive impact on my family, my neighborhood, my community and my home state.

Read through “The APN FY05 People’s Budget” ~ Go through the five sections of the “People’s Budget” briefly as he/she follows on their copy. Then go on to introduce the first speaker from your group.

Let others speak briefly ~ Make sure the people in your group know what they want to say about the “People’s Budget”. Decide which of the five issues each person wants to address and how much time they have to do it. Provide them with talking points that will help them to prepare statements. If you have time, hold a rehearsal and have your participants practice what they want to say.

Ask for your Legislator’s support ~ After everyone has had a chance to speak, ask the legislator if you can count on his/her support on the “People’s Budget”, you can even ask how he/she will support the issues outlined here by and for his constituency.

Thank legislator for his/her time and support ~ remember to be polite, thank your legislator for meeting with you. Let him/her know that you appreciate his/her time and support on this budget proposal. Provide your contact information and offer your assistance in answering questions and obtaining any needed additional information in reference to the “APN People’s Budget”

Let legislator know you will be following-up~ Let him/her know that you will call (or write) him/her to follow-up on this budget proposal.

Step Five: The Follow-Up

Now that you have successfully met with your legislator and presented your concerns, it is essential that you follow-up with him/her. Send a thank you card to your legislator. This card should thank him/her again for meeting with you and your group on (date). Let your legislator know that you appreciate the attention and support they have given to the “APN FY05 People’s Budget”. Try to personalize the card with any comments and interaction that occurred during the meeting. For example, “Thank you for saying you would ‘support this budget proposal’ and for being so responsive to the needs of your constituency.” Ask your legislator to keep you up to date on any progress related to our budget proposal. Encourage other members of your group to send similar thank you cards as a follow-up.

Congratulations on your advocacy efforts! You’re opinion matters, your vote counts and your voice has been heard. With continued perseverance and determination we can help to make a difference in NJ, ensure the safety and secure the basic needs of the citizens in our state.

In order to track the progress of these visits and assist in follow-up efforts, we ask that you tell us a bit about your visit with your legislator. Please fill out the enclosed “Legislative Visit Form” and send it back to us at our mailing address at: PO Box 1404 Edison, NJ 08818-1404.

Don’t give up now! Keep the pressure on our legislators. Don’t be afraid to call, write, e-mail & fax them. Now that you are a legislative advocate, share these tools with your friends, family and community.

For information on future APN efforts visit our website at www.antipovertynetwork.org and please join us at our next general APN meeting. For future assistance or questions about this “Tool Kit” please contact the Anti-Poverty Network at info@antipovertynetwork.org.

Step Six: Legislative Visit Form

(Please fill out and return to the Anti-Poverty Network)

1) Your Name: _____
2) Your Address: _____

3) Your e-mail address: _____

4) Your Phone number: _(_)_ _____

5) Legislative District: _____

6) Legislator you met with: _____

7) Date of Meeting: _____

8) Time of Meeting: _____

9) People that went with you:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

10) Response/Commitments from Legislator: Please provide information on any response or commitment to take action from the legislator you meet with. _____

11) Follow-up action plan: What specific follow-up plan do you and your group have planned now that you have successfully met with your legislator? _____

THE ANTI-POVERTY NETWORK OF NEW JERSEY

The FY 2005 People's Budget

For the first time, the Anti-Poverty Network of New Jersey (APN) is launching a campaign to insert several key measures into the New Jersey Fiscal Year 2005 budget. We have compiled our recommendations into a single document titled "The People's Budget". We believe these recommendations will directly benefit New Jersey residents, especially those living in poverty and with low-wage jobs.

"The People's Budget" reflects issues and concerns raised during 10 regional forums sponsored in the fall of 2003 by the APN which drew more than 1,100 participants from throughout New Jersey. People struggling against poverty, low-wage workers, advocates and human service providers and public officials all played important role in writing The People's Budget, which also was ratified by more than 400 people attending the APN Statewide Conference held in December 2003.

APN applauds Governor James McGreevey for including several dozen budget initiatives in his proposed budget that are consistent with the APN "Blueprint to End Poverty in New Jersey." We appreciate the Governor's commitment to maintaining many existing programs serving people in need.

However, APN contends that funding for *new and expanded* efforts to lift people out of poverty is long overdue. Therefore, for FY 2005, the APN will strongly advocate for the items listed below. These proposals represent additions to the budget, and should not be funded by redirecting money from existing programs already included in the state budget.

The Anti-Poverty Network of New Jersey calls for the following proposals to be included in the FY 2005 Budget for New Jersey as a step forward in meeting the basic human needs of low-wage and other vulnerable people:

1. **HOUSING (allocate an additional \$80 million)**

- a) Develop a state rental assistance program with an initial appropriation of \$50 million and an identified source of ongoing funding. This program would fund approximately 8,000 rental assistance vouchers each year.
- b) Allocate an additional \$15 million to the Balanced housing Program to target rental housing for very low-income households (households earning under 30% of the region's median income, or about \$25,000 per year for a family of four)
- c) Allocate \$15 million a year to promote the state's Section 8 Homeownership program.

2. **HEALTH CARE: (Allocate an additional \$100 million)**

Begin a multi-year process of restoring and then extending New Jersey FamilyCare to all who were originally covered and those who were intended to be covered (parents and other adults without children who have no health insurance and whose incomes are less than 200% of the federal poverty line).

3. “SAFETY NET” AND ADDITIONAL ASSISTANCE FOR THE MOST VULNERABLE POPULATIONS: (Allocate an additional \$100 million)

- a) Appropriate an additional \$100 million as the first of three annual steps to lift cash assistance grants for Temporary Assistance for needy Families (TANF), General Assistance (GA), and State Supplemental SSI – the first two of which have not been increased since 1987 – to the following target levels:
- i. 70% of the state Standard of Need for all those who have not reached the five-year time limit
 - ii. 85% of the Standard of Need for those who have been continued past the five-year point as part of the Support Assistance to Individuals and Families (SAIF) program.
 - iii. 100% of the state Standard of Need for those categorized as exempt because they are unable to work for physical or other reasons
- b) Retain the Governor’s proposed funding level for employment training and ensure that such training focuses on *real* job positions that exist and *pay a living wage*.

4. CHILD CARE: (Appropriate an additional \$50 million)

Appropriate an additional \$50 million for the NJ CARE for Kids program, targeted and limited to families making less than 200% of the federal poverty line, to accommodate over 8,000 more child care slots, as the first of three annual steps to eliminate the waiting list and meet the need.

5. CHILD WELFARE:

We urge the legislature to support and fully fund at \$125 million the Governor’s reform proposals for the Division for Youth and Family Services.