

Ten skills that you need as an Advocacy Officer.

Advocacy is an integral part of the daily work of many human rights organizations. Advocacy officers bring the aims of a NGO to action. They make its ideas visible at the government level and they form the agenda of positive changes in the society. Advocacy requires immense efforts and the participation of a lot of people. Hence, the persons willing to work in the Advocacy domain should possess different interdisciplinary skills and competencies.

First of all, it is very valuable and important to have in-depth **knowledge of the topic** of your advocacy work. Without that, it will be difficult to understand the current situation and context, and the exact scope of the change that is needed. Of course, if you are going to work on climate change in the context of human rights you do not necessarily need to have a university diploma as an Environmental specialist. However, understanding the processes and context is indispensable.

Moreover, there is a number of soft skills which are very desirable for doing effective advocacy in the human right sphere. You may find them mentioned in the most Advocacy officer's job descriptions and they for sure would be necessary while doing your work. Here is a list of 10 skills you need as Human Rights Advocacy Officer.

#1 Communication skills

Excellent oral and written communication skills are essential for Advocacy officers. It's so important that some NGOs title the job position as Communication and Advocacy Officer. Obviously, a large part of the daily work is constant conversations, meeting and mailing with colleagues, and stakeholders. Thus, it requires to be a savvy interlocutor.

Communication includes also active listening skills, namely the capability to be genuinely involved in the conversation, to provide feedback to the person you talk to and to be able to respond appropriately. Moreover, the communication is about how you make someone feel. The real success is to make someone trust you and feel comfortable with you. Apparently, all this information would be equally applied for oral and written communications.

The way you communicate with people will define your capacity to develop, grow and nurture your connections with different partners and collaborators and build the links with them.

#2 Networking

Advocacy work could not exist without the network of different people and stakeholders. One of the main tasks of Advocacy officers is to consolidate certain groups, parties or organizations for the resolution of a particular problem. Thus, you should have professional and social ties with the diverse specialists in the sphere you are working in and probably neighboring domains as well. You never know which contact will be useful in your advocacy campaign.

Some of the organizations require that you already have the connections with certain people before you will start your work in the organization, others will give you the time to establish the contacts.

Hence, you should try to attend events, seminars and conferences where you could meet with relevant experts, but also remember about digital tools for networking like LinkedIn and Facebook. Moreover, we suggest to try to keep friendly relations with your former colleagues as well as your groupmates from university. You will really appreciate the potency and value of every connection in almost every advocacy assignment.

#3 Presentation skills

For developing efficient network circles, it is important to know how to present yourself, your project and your organization. You need to be clear with suggestions to your partners and concise in what you want them to do.

That includes not only classic presentations during conferences or workshops but also spontaneous presentations during short meetings and small talks. You never know when and for how long you will meet a useful contact so it is better to prepare in advance. Having your key messages ready so you can communicate them effectively in the right moment is important.

#4 Drafting skills

The ability to express your thoughts in a written way is a key competence of Advocacy officers. Apparently, your daily work could not be imagined without answering numerous requests in your mailbox, but also you will have to draft policy documents, and position papers to support and develop your campaign.

Firstly, it requires the strong knowledge of the grammar of the language you use for the drafting. Then, very often you will need to transform difficult technical and professional language into readable messages without losing in connotation and intention of the document.

This concerns also the drafting reports for the donors. Usually, donor organizations do not know in depth the specificity of your work, and your task is to draft an accurate document which fully reflects your contribution and is easily understood.

#5 Research

As we pointed out previously, an Advocacy officer does not need to be an expert in a narrow field, however, they have to possess enough knowledge and capacity to gather and interpret correct information about relevant topics.

During the drafting of the advocacy documents, you may sift through numerous sources, thus, it is important to be attentive, identify relevant information and take correct notes to facilitate further development of the pieces of writing.

#6 Analytical skills

Advocacy work is a lot about finding a timely and efficient solution to a relevant problem. No problem could be addressed without in-depth analysis from different angles. The ability to analyze the data and arrange things on the basis of numerous factors is an integral part of your work. Hence, you need to be able to identify and analyze the deep root causes of the issue, the ways to mitigate its origins, and finally suggest action points.

As working with the information usually means absorbing really a lot of data, you should question all informational flows and provide reasonable judgment on them. Developing analytical and critical thinking is a crucial for this type of job.

#7 Teamwork

Advocacy means teamwork. Advocating for change is normally the result of the work of a group of people. Each of them has its own part in the job, but every contribution is important for the final result. Thus, the task is to organize team and stakeholders effectively and use their capacity in the most compelling way.

Previous skills already discussed as communication and networking skills would be crucial for strong teamwork. People in the team should not be just listened to but also clearly understand their input and the objectives of the advocacy campaign. Hence, the Advocacy officer should also demonstrate leadership skills.

#8 Taking the lead

The advocacy officers often must take initiative in the resolution of an issue. Firstly, the reason is to show stakeholders that your organization

has weight in the relevant scope of activity. Secondly, it will help to better comply with the objectives of your organization.

Apparently, a partner organization could propose to join an already existing advocacy campaign. Then, taking the lead in this context means being capable to bear the responsibility in the work cluster, and do your contribution as potent as possible.

#9 Time management

The law-making champ is always in progress. What can be central today, will be obsolete tomorrow. A lot of advocacy work should be done timely on a tight deadline, otherwise, your inputs could be ineffective or in vain. Moreover, sometimes, the number of events you are recommended to attend is higher than your physical capacity to visit all of them and be productive there.

Therefore, strict planning and prioritization should be your best companions. Plan your day or week in advance, regularly check outcomes of your activities and learn to say no to doubtful opportunities.

Furthermore, keep yourself updated about recent developments in your field of activity.

#10 Creativity

Advocacy work is not limited to drafting policy papers and presentations during events. Peaceful manifestation, publicity, and printing materials for different audiences can be part of advocacy work too. The creative skills will during many tasks of your job, especially while planning and developing your advocacy campaign.

In the human rights sphere, it is important to win the hearts and souls of the audience and partners. A creative approach will assist in creating an effective, empowering and positive message.

Creativity is also about examining an issue in a different and new way. It may seem that there is no place for creativity while amending draft law, however, it will help to look at the problem from multiple angles, ask different types of questions and find the right solution.

Final remarks

Many of the skills we listed would be actively developed during the daily work as an Advocacy Officer. The most important thing is to be open to new people, possibilities and ideas. Of course, all these skills will be useful for every type of human rights professional.

However, taking into account the wide range of different tasks during advocacy work, these core skills will define the outcomes of your work and the success of your advocacy campaigns.

from <https://www.humanrightscareers.com>