

Justice Studies 384 / Nonprofit Sector Leadership & Innovation 320:

Advocacy

**Problem-Based Learning Case #2: Public transportation
between communities and the closure of STC**

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Submitted to
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PBL Case #2 - Public transportation between communities and the closure of STC: "Since the Saskatchewan Transportation Company (STC) was closed in 2017, many older adults who relied on the STC to get between urban and rural communities for medical appointments, to visit family members, to get groceries and other household items, etc., have encountered serious difficulties. We need to better understand what are viable options and how to fix this situation before people are forced to move." (This assignment was co-created by Gloria, Holly and the SSM Issues Committee during the Fall of 2017.)

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Since 1946, the Government of Saskatchewan funded the Saskatchewan Transportation Company, a crown corporation which transported goods and passengers throughout the province. This changed abruptly with the closure of all STC services on May 31, 2017. The closure was decided on by the Government of Saskatchewan as an effort in tackling the \$1.3 billion deficit within the province, saving approximately \$85 million over the next five years (Giles, 2017). Although only two routes were profitable out of the 27 which ran across the province, the service was crucial to many rural communities and the closure left gaps in services that were key to many groups within Saskatchewan.

The Saskatchewan Seniors Mechanism (SSM) is a membership-benefit non-profit organization, characterized by its existence to serve its members – other seniors organizations (Murray & Seel, 2014). Operating for nearly 28 years, SSM's mission is to bring together "Saskatchewan seniors organizations for the purpose of contributing to a better quality of life for older adults" (SSM, 2018a). One priority of the organization is working to create Age Friendly Communities across the province (SSM, 2018b). Community support and health services and transportation for seniors are major elements of Age Friendly Communities, both which are heavily affected by the closure of the Saskatchewan Transportation Company. Many older residents relied on the STC buses to attend medical appointments and to travel to see family, but they are now isolated with few other options for transportation.

Purpose

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This plan will provide an outline to begin advocating for a sustainable system of transportation throughout Saskatchewan to alleviate the gap in services which resulted from the closure of the STC and has affected seniors and several other demographics within the province.

Goals and Objectives

<p>Goal 1: Increase public support for a provincial transportation system.</p>	<p>Goal 2: Establish a coalition which focuses specifically on provincial transportation in Saskatchewan</p>	<p>Goal 3: Have the Government of Saskatchewan provide a tax abatement for a corporation to run a provincial transportation system.</p>
<p>Objective 1: Increase public awareness of the need for a provincial transportation system by 25% by June 1, 2019.</p> <p>Objective 2: Increase public support for a provincial transportation system by 20% by June 1, 2019.</p>	<p>Objective 1: Have at least 5 organizations join in a coalition for transportation reform by June 1, 2019.</p>	<p>Objective 1: Propose a corporation-run transportation plan, with a government tax abatement, to the provincial government by January 1, 2020.</p> <p>Objective 2: Have two provincial politicians showing public support for plans to instate a new/improved transportation system by June 1, 2020.</p> <p>Objective 3: Have the Government of Saskatchewan agree to provide a tax abatement to a corporation that will run a provincial transportation system by December 1, 2020.</p>

These goals aim to progressively attain power for the advocacy effort. Initially, the focus will be on encouraging the public to take interest in the issue, allowing a growth in citizen power with large numbers of people come together to target the Government of Saskatchewan (DeSantis, 2018). Further, power of networking by intentionally connecting with other groups on

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the issue, and political power by earning support of provincial politicians, will be focused on through goals two and three.

It is important to note that the final objective of goal three is specifically to gain agreement to providing the abatement. Following this agreement, the process will begin to officially approve and instate the abatement into the following budget year. Dates and timelines for this have been excluded to recognize the variability of speed of such processes within the government. These objectives have been created with intentional deadlines, however, it can be noted that these target dates may shift throughout the advocacy campaign because of the ongoing evaluation of the efforts as well as to respond to any unforeseen circumstances that arise.

Target Audiences

Three target audiences have been selected for the advocacy work. Each audience is unique and plays an important role in achieving the specific goals of this campaign.

Intergenerational adult population. The group includes all individuals in Saskatchewan age 18+. This audience has been further segmented to improve the ability to tailor strategies and tactics based on the characteristics of each subgroup (DeSantis, 2018). However, with such a variety of ages, ethnicities, socioeconomic statuses, and levels of ability within these ranges, it will increase the difficulty of communicating with them in the most effective way possible because it will be more general.

The three subgroups within the intergenerational adult audience are separated into three age categories: seniors (65+), middle aged adults (31-65), and young adults (18-30). Each group is significant in size within Saskatchewan with over 170,000 individuals aged 65+, over 496,500 ages 31-65, and over 147,500 ages 18-30 (Statistics Canada, 2017). Although this segmentation

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has been done, there are still barriers to having a target audience that is very generalized. These large populations provide a strong opportunity to foster citizen power.

Potential partner organizations. To achieve goal two of creating a coalition, SSM will need to connect with other organizations who are also interested in reforming the current state of provincial transportation. These organizations will include both corporations and non-profit organizations. Not only will these groups provide power of networking, but they may also build in other form of power such as experience, systems, money, and media, as well as legal power. A broad range of groups will additionally provide a mixture of experiences and perspectives (Whitmore, Wilson & Calhoun, 2011) which would not be achievable by SSM individually. Further research on each potential partner will be required during the remaining pre-advocacy work of this campaign. Any potential partner organizations that are registered charities must be aware of restrictions on their participation in advocacy campaigns

Potential Partner Organization examples

- Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations
- Stop the Cuts -SaveSTC
- Reducing Isolation of Seniors Collective
- Inmate Advocacy Groups and Women's Advocacy Groups
- Greyhound Lines
- Rider Express Transportation
- Canada Post
- SSM Member Organizations
- SSM Supporter Organizations
- Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association

It should be noted that the Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations is a provincial political entity (DeSantis, 2018). In this campaign, they have been included as a potential partner because of the group's ability to speak as a collective voice for First Nations in Saskatchewan to advocate at all levels of government (DeSantis, 2018).

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Government of Saskatchewan. The provincial government has been identified because it is the key formal authority to deliver goal three of this advocacy plan (DeSantis, 2018). This audience will be monitored throughout the initial stages of the campaign and then utilized as a target of communication with the intention to create change. The advocacy campaign will aim to gain political power by connecting with elected members of political office (DeSantis, 2018).

Messaging

The messaging for each target audience must be unique and suited to their interests. The communication to the various audiences will attempt to reframe the transportation issue by demonstrating how everyone is affected. It must make the invisible become visible (Boyd & Mitchel, 2012) and have the situation recognized as more than ‘just a senior’s issue.’

Audience	Messages	Messengers
Seniors	Importance of advocating for transportation because it has major effects on quality of life (commuting for medical and family reasons)	SSM, other Seniors Advocacy Organizations, Health Care representatives
Middle Aged Adults	Focus on role of STC in public – transportation of chemotherapy drugs, blood supplies, lab materials, parcel delivery, and safe rides for at-risk populations.	Government representatives, SSM Executive Director, Prominent community representatives
Young Adults	You can help make the lives of others easier and more accessible. STC provides affordable transportation for you. Your voice is important to maintain transportation of chemotherapy drugs, blood supplies, lab materials, parcel delivery, and having a system that allows safe rides for at-risk populations.	Peers, professionals, leaders within their communities
Potential Partners	The province needs a new system, we can be the difference. Transportation affects us all and together we can reform the service to benefit everyone.	SSM
Government of Saskatchewan	The public needs a system. We are ready to take on this role. We need your support.	Transportation Coalition, SSM,

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Strategic Considerations

Current outreach. The Saskatchewan Seniors' Mechanism has a solid foundation of support from its 18 member-organizations, several supporter organizations, and its partner organization, the Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association. Within these relationships, SSM is currently connected to over 100,000 adults throughout Saskatchewan. This established relationship will be strength for SSM in the initial outreach to both the intergenerational adult population, specifically the seniors segment, as well as to organizations for potential partnership on issues of transportation throughout the province.

Resource availability. As a non-profit organization, SSM faces potential challenges in maintaining consistent funding sources for its operation. As a membership-benefit organization, SSM receives financial support from its member organizations and it must ensure that the efforts it takes support the needs and interest of those organizations (Murray & Seel, 2014). This may limit how the financial support is used regarding advocacy around public transportation. SSM itself cannot tackle this advocacy effort on its own because they operate with a small group of volunteers and employees in the organization.

Diversity. This consideration is both a weakness and opportunity for the Saskatchewan Seniors Mechanism. The board of directors of SSM has little ethnic diversity as it is predominantly Caucasian, middle-class men and women. This limits the perspectives that are recognized and voices that are heard within the organization. Diversity exists as an opportunity for SSM because the population of Saskatchewan is diverse. There are many different groups, organizations, communities, and individuals who have unique reasons to be involved in advocacy for provincial transportation. This provides a wide range of potential partners in the

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advocacy efforts. It may also pose challenges for a potential coalition to be able to achieve its purpose of speaking as a unified voice (DeSanits & Mule, 2017). With many worldviews coming together, it can be challenging to stay united in an advocacy initiative.

Media presence. SSM has established a consistent presence in the media through both controlled and uncontrolled channels. There is opportunity to expand the reach of SSM through these channels and to engage more actively with their intended audiences. The organization maintains its own website, Facebook page, and its Grey Matters Newsletter. SSM has also had a presence in uncontrolled media such as newspapers, television, and radio at both a local level within Regina, and a provincial level. These forms of traditional media can have great reach and efficiency but can also have negative effects if advocacy messages and groups become misrepresented (Dobson, 2003).

Strategy and Tactics

This advocacy campaign will operate in two phases. This has been selected to focus on specific strategies and tactics that will be most effective in reaching the advocacy goals in the specified order. Prior to commencing phase one, the pre-advocacy work will continue. This includes research on potential partners, current government position on public transportation, public levels of awareness and support, and skills yet needed to foster this advocacy campaign, among other areas.

Research is to be done before the campaign but also throughout. Advocacy work must be “based on accurate, reliable, and sufficient information” (Gordon, 2002, p. 21), which requires ongoing curiosity and effortful investigation. The advocacy environment will be continually changing, especially as it runs for increasing lengths of time. Failing to continue to do research

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may result in an advocacy effort being inefficient with resources or actions due to lack of knowledge. Ongoing research can be done through conversations with experts, collaboration with allies, dialogue with governments, and consumption of literature and media (DeSantis, 2018).

Phase one – June 1, 2018 to May 31, 2019

Strategy 1: Network with other groups	Strategy 2: Work through the media to generate public awareness
<p>Tactic 1: Direct communication with potential partner organizations via email, telephone, and face-to-face interaction</p> <p>Tactic 2: Organized meetings of potential partner organizations</p>	<p>Tactic 1: Written articles and advertisements on the SSM website</p> <p>Tactic 2: Creation of a website for the newly founded coalition</p> <p>Tactic 3: Social media posts and advertisements on transportation issues in Saskatchewan</p> <p>Tactic 4: Traditional media publications including radio, television, and newspaper advertisements</p>

Phase two – commencing June 1, 2019

Strategy 1: Direct conversations with policy-makers and decision-makers	Strategy 2: Engage community residents in public discussions
<p>Tactic 1: Phone calls with government members</p> <p>Tactic 2: Meetings with provincial staff in government</p> <p>Tactic 3: One-on-one meetings with key decision makers and provincial politicians</p> <p>Tactic 4: Presentation to government committees</p>	<p>Tactic 1: Community meetings/town halls</p> <p>Tactic 2: Housing public forums to facilitate public discussion</p> <p>Tactic 3: Presentations to community members</p> <p>Tactic 4: Continued use of media to update public on the ongoing efforts and to encourage public engagement in advocacy</p>

As it approaches the one-year mark of the STC closure, there have been shifts that present a slight window of opportunity for advocacy on the issue which influences the timeline, strategies, and tactics for this campaign. In the political stream, Saskatchewan has a new leader with Scott Moe. While his position on transportation is currently unknown, this may provide a new opportunity for discussions with the provincial government. The government has provided

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tax abatements for organizations who are willing to step in to cover areas where the government has backed out, providing precedent and technical feasibility in the policy stream (Elson, 2004). Regarding the problem stream, this issue is not the same for everyone. This provides opportunity to unite on the advocacy issue with the understanding that everyone is affected in some way by the closure.

Evaluation – Indicators of Success

The idea that advocacy is “too hard to measure” has shifted (Whitmore et al., 2011). Evaluation should be an ongoing process that allows for improvement of the advocacy campaign and potential redirection of the efforts while it is in process (DeSantis, 2018). This outline provides suggested evaluation points within the campaign however, there is flexibility to adjust these, or to do more thorough evaluation, at different stages in the campaign. At each point of evaluation, the group should assess and adjust as needed to maintain the path towards the advocacy goals. This time to reflect is integral to maintaining effectiveness (Whitmore et al., 2011).

Timeline of Evaluation

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - October 1, 2018 - February 1, 2019 - May 15, 2019 - October 1, 2019 - February 1, 2020 - May 15, 2020
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Indicators of Success

Goal 1, Objective 1	- Survey results
Goal 1, Objective 2	- Survey results - Increased amounts of community members reaching out to assist SSM/coalition on the issue
Goal 2, Objective 1	- Number of organizations committing to advocacy efforts

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	- Number of organizations joining a coalition
Goal 3, Objective 1	- Meeting with Government of Saskatchewan regarding transportation reform
Goal 3, Objective 2	- Public statements of support made by provincial politicians
Goal 3, Objective 3	- Verbal and written agreement

Conclusion

The closure of the STC routes impacts many individuals and groups within Saskatchewan. Some groups are unaware of the services that the company had provided which they benefitted from. This advocacy plan aims to improve the public awareness of the importance of a provincial transportation service. Further, through networking and partnering with other corporations and non-profit organizations, and engaging with the provincial government, this advocacy effort prioritizes the long-term goal of reforming the transportation system throughout Saskatchewan. While this plan outlines many specific timelines, strategies, and tactics, it is important to note that there is flexibility within the plan to make mid-course correction to ensure the efforts can adjust to unforeseen circumstances along the way. This plan is a key first step in the pre-advocacy stage. Although much further work is required, SSM can begin to work towards meaningful change for the public benefit with this plan as an initial guide along the way.

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