



Policy & Advocacy to Advance Mental Health and Wellbeing

**PREVENTION
INSTITUTE**



Advocacy is public support for or recommendation of a particular cause or policy

Definition as shared and used by Alliance for Justice, Bolder Advocacy



Why Advocate?

- Advocacy shapes the public debate and understanding about mental health & wellbeing (refer to ***Changing the Narrative*** module for messaging guidance).
- Advocacy influences public policies and organizational practices that impact mental health & wellbeing.
- Advocacy shines a spotlight on community power, voice, and leadership in shaping strategies and approaches that impact mental health & wellbeing.

Advocacy can take different forms



What is Lobbying?

- **Lobbying is one form of advocacy:** While all lobbying activities are advocacy, ***most advocacy activities are not lobbying*** (refer to previous slide for examples).
- **There are 2 types of lobbying:**
 - **DIRECT** lobbying is a communication to a legislator (or their staff) that expresses a view about specific legislation.
 - **GRASSROOTS** lobbying is a communication to the general public that expresses a view about specific legislation and includes a call to action.

Understanding Lobbying

- **Non-profits can engage in limited amounts of lobbying.** However, it is important to understand which of your funding sources expressly prohibit the use of their funds for lobbying. Any lobbying should be done with unrestricted funds.
- **It is very important to get expert lobbying advice to understand your own organizational situation.**
- **Alliance for Justice's Bolder Advocacy website offers great resources** and their attorney coaches provide free technical assistance:
www.bolderadvocacy.org or **1-866-NP-LOBBY**

Taking a Closer Look at Policy

- One goal of advocacy activities is to influence and strengthen policy.
- Policies are the rules and principles that guide the activities of government, businesses and institutions, and that determine the allocation of resources.
- There are different types of policy:
 - **Organizational**—e.g. Policy manuals and standards
 - **Regulatory**—e.g. Administrative rules; regulations; Executive Orders;
 - **Fiscal**—e.g. Annual budgets acts; appropriations
 - **Legislative**—e.g. Bills; laws/referenda; ballot propositions
 - **Legal**—e.g. Court decisions

Examples of Making Connections Policy Wins

- Advocating for local transit policy change
- Improving organizational practices to support young men
- Changing local health department policies and practices
- Engaging in community participatory budgeting

Policy example: Albuquerque, NM



- At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, schools in Albuquerque closed for the school year and transitioned to offering hot meals at breakfast and lunch.
- Making Connections: International District worked with partners to advocate that the city provide free bus passes for students without reliable transportation so that they could get to school and access the meals.

Policy example: Chicago, IL



- Sinai Health System's Under the Rainbow program is a trauma-informed sports and play initiative that provides youth a safe space to play and be kids, connect with and develop consistent and healthy relationships with adults, talk about their feelings, and develop leadership skills through a youth board of directors that leads all decision making for the programming.
- The organization has changed its organizational policy to support hiring young men from the community in mentor roles and make hospital vans available to transport them to meetings and events.

Policy example: Nebraska



Photo: Teri Clark, Nebraska Association of Local Health Directors

- The Nebraska Association of Local Health Directors trained staff at 73 local county health departments and other agencies to support veterans in rural Nebraska so that they have the resources they need to successfully reintegrate.
- They have also assisted public agencies to improve their veterans' policies, positioning Nebraska communities to be there when their veterans need them.

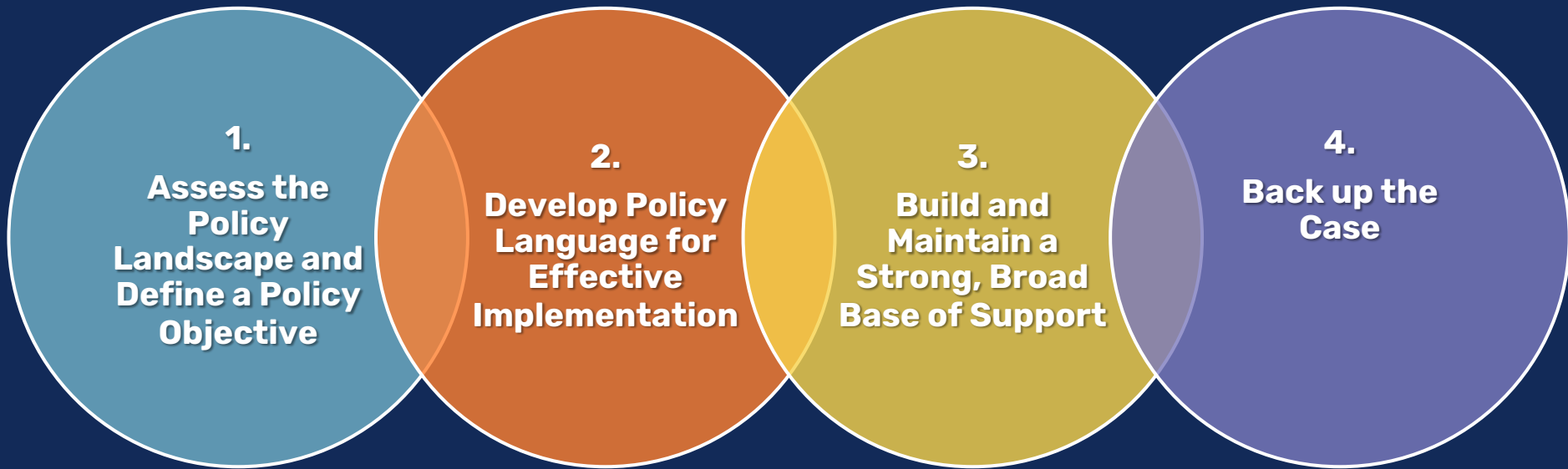
Policy example: Tacoma, WA



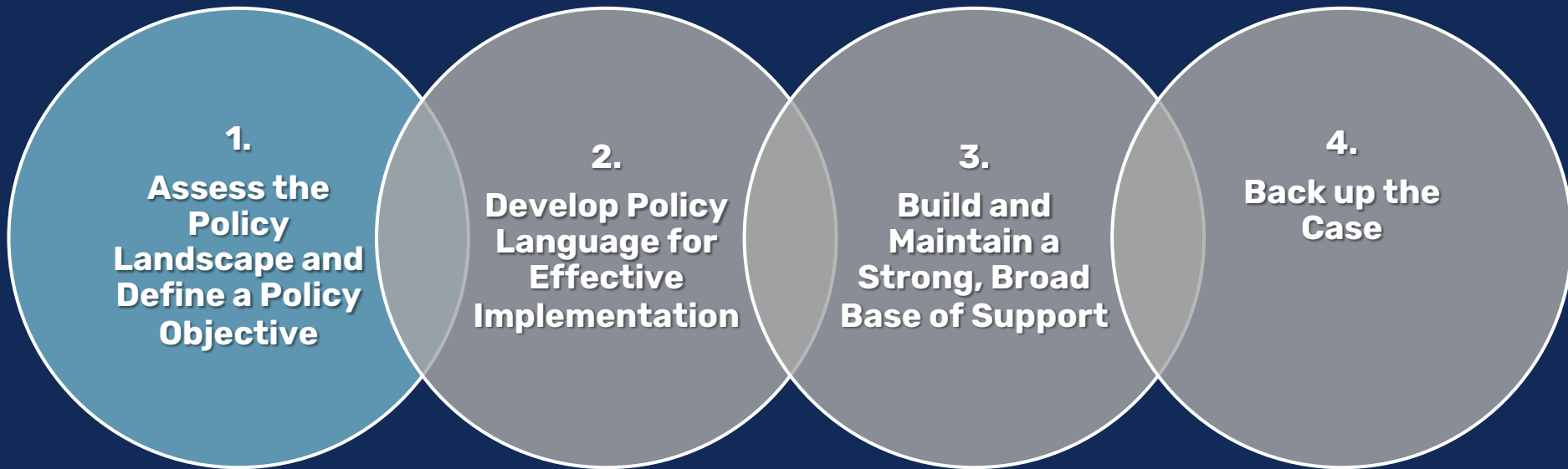
Photo: Nikki Weldon

- Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department engages community members in community participatory budgeting to make decisions about how to allocate public resources.
- Through participatory budgeting, seven local grassroots organizations serving communities of color vote every year on how to allocate \$100,000 to advance community wellbeing.
- Using its institutional power to pool resources and its legitimacy in the public eye, TPCHD funds community projects that address mental wellbeing in upstream and culturally-relevant ways.

Four Elements of a Successful Policy Strategy



Four Elements of a Successful Policy Initiative



Assess the Policy Landscape

- Identify a specific policy objective.
- Determine if a new policy is needed.
- Determine level/jurisdiction for change.
- Identify key decision makers.
- Assess parameters of advocacy activities.

Assess the Policy Landscape

Identify a specific policy objective

- Consider community strengths, assets, interests and needs of those most impacted.
- Identify opportunities to advance health equity and racial justice.
- Craft policy objectives as part of a broader agenda.
- Consider feasibility and 'win-ability'.
- Assess the policy context- consider trending local, state, regional and national issues that are shaping the debate.

Assess the Policy Landscape

Assess if a new policy is needed:

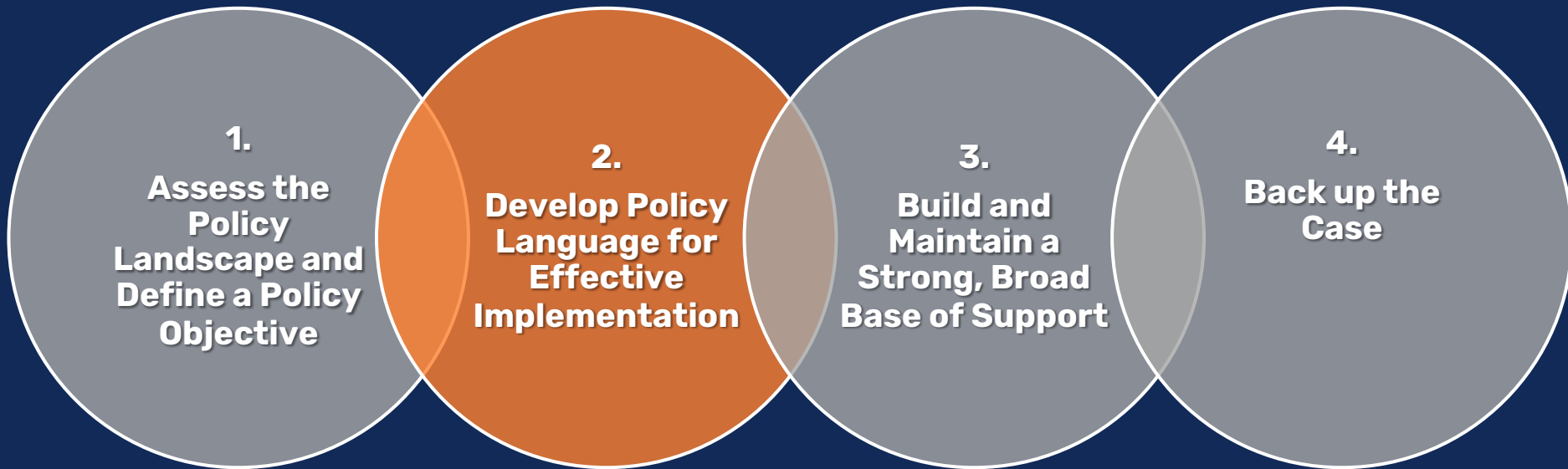
- Investigate current and past policy initiatives.
- Connect with government officials, policy makers and key players to assess what's worked.
- Review existing data.
- Conduct a community assessment to inventory strengths, assets and potential challenges.

Assess the Policy Landscape

Determine the appropriate venue for action and identify key decision makers

- Consider level of policy change needed: organizational/institutional, local, county, state, federal
- Identify the appropriate jurisdiction for local policy changes:
 - City councils
 - County commissions, or boards of supervisors
 - Local boards of health
 - Transportation authorities
 - Planning commissions
 - Park districts
 - Metropolitan planning organizations
 - School districts

Four Elements of a Successful Policy Initiative



Plan for Effective Implementation & Evaluation

- Develop strong policy language and enforcement mechanisms.
- Consider the impact on different communities.
- Ensure that policy is implemented equitably.
- Plan to evaluate policy impact and disseminate results.

Plan for Implementation & Evaluation

Develop strong policy language and enforcement provisions:

- Don't reinvent the wheel!
- Refine model language to be consistent with policy objectives.
- Enlist support of policy experts to review.
- Build mechanisms to maximize compliance.
- Determine agencies to oversee implementation and enforcement.

Plan for Implementation & Evaluation

Health Equity & Racial Justice Matter:

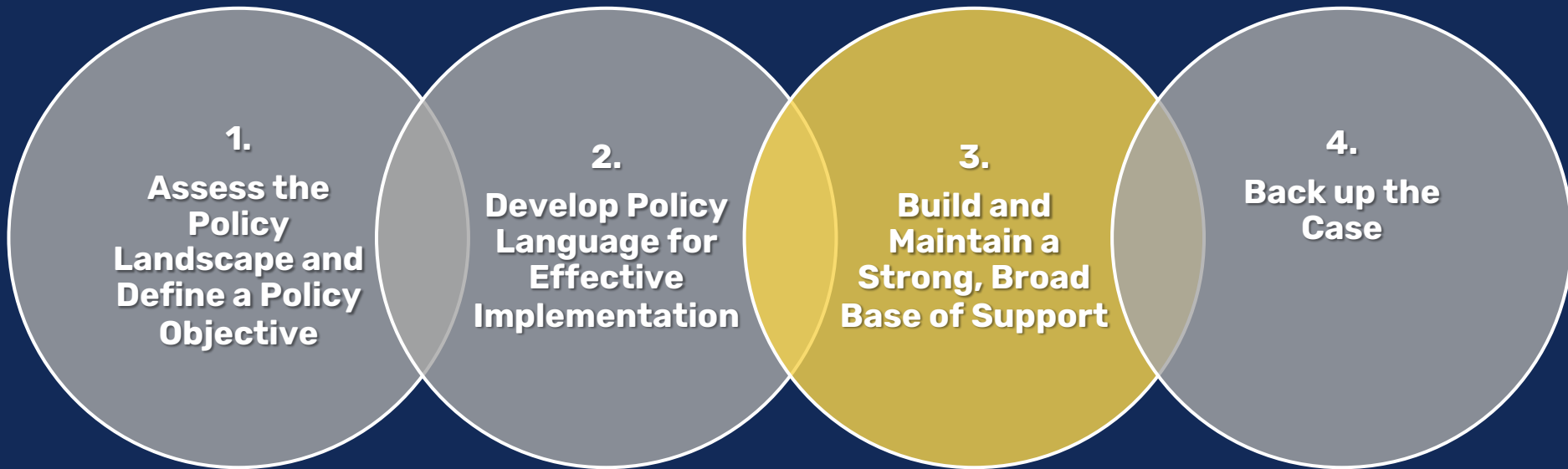
- ***More than just placeholders***—Simply inserting a person of color or a person from a low-income community is not enough.
- ***Diverse and divergent perspectives***—Engage in how perspectives differ and how those differences may influence decisions and solutions.
- ***Honors community leadership & lived experience***—Including community members in policy activities strengthens the process and outcomes.

Plan for Implementation & Evaluation

Planning for equitable policy evaluation and dissemination:

- Identify desired process and outcomes indicators before engaging in advocacy.
- Engage with your partners and population of focus to identify your evaluation metrics.
- Draw on the knowledge of your evaluation partners.
- Communicate and disseminate your outcomes and policy wins to maintain community support.

Four Elements of a Successful Policy Initiative



Develop A Strong Base of Support

- Develop & recruit local partners and supporters.
- Cultivate authentic community engagement.
- Identify & recruit influential champions.
- Understand counter positions.

Policy campaigns are most effective with broad community participation and a mobilized grassroots base.



Build a Strong Base of Support



Benefits of forming a coalition:

- Brings together diverse experience and skills.
- Gathers wide array of perspectives.
- Combines advocacy power.
- Provides access to more constituencies and networks.
- Creates greater focus on common goals.
- Fosters sustainability.

Build a Strong Base of Support

Recruit the right people for your coalition:

- Identify people working on the issue.
- Consider who has influence and who will be supportive.
- Identify who may put obstacles in your path.
- Consider who should be involved: Membership type and size; individuals and organizations



Build a Strong Base of Support

Build rapport with influencers & decisionmakers:

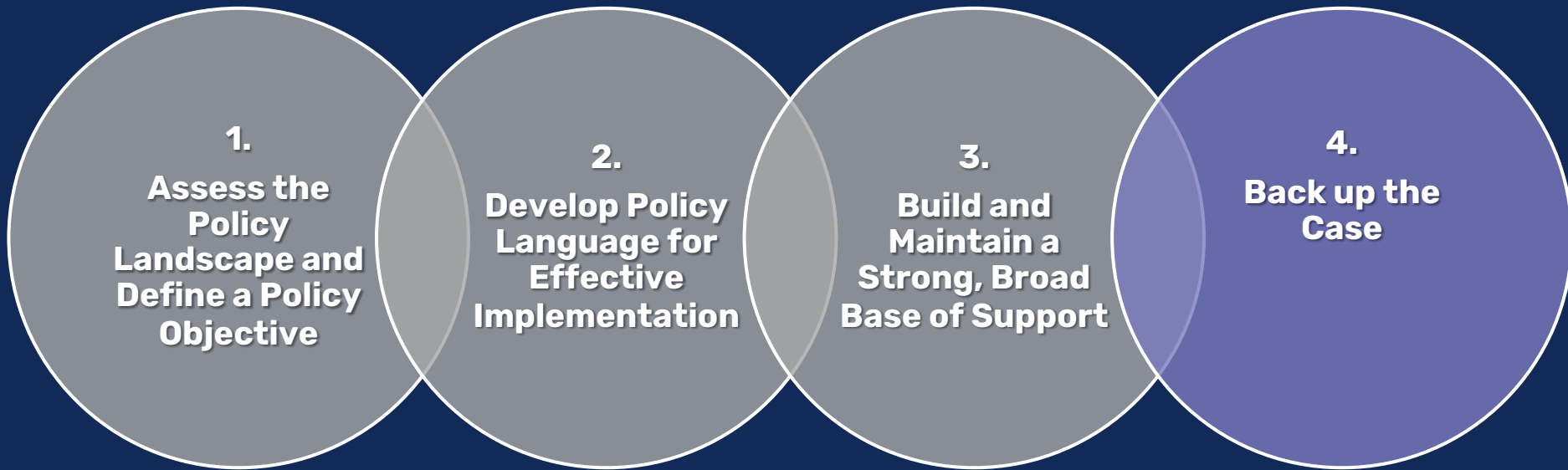
- Recruit and cultivate spokespeople.
- Educate decision making body and staff. NOTE: If you are educating policymakers about an issue, that is not considered “lobbying.” Please see the next two slides for more information.
- Build capacity of community allies and champions.

Build a Strong Base of Support

Strategies for understanding your opposition:

- Identify self interests and motivations.
- Gauge relationships with key influencers.
- Analyze materials and documentation to prepare counter arguments.
- Be prepared to counter the prevailing narrative on mental health to one that focuses on community level prevention and wellbeing.
- Represent your community and their strengths and needs proudly!

Four Elements of a Successful Policy Initiative



Use the Media to Educate the Public & Decision Makers

...click here to learn how!





“MC:ID’s collaborative projects are now addressing advocacy and policy by young men of color and adult allies... to advocate for upstream strategies that change structures and systems impacting young men of color and their families.”

-- MC:ID Lead Partner

