

Social Action Guide



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Welcome

Welcome to the Social Action Guide

Social action is a process of joining the voices of people who have like needs, so that their interests and desires for the future can be heard and realized. It is exciting: When many people come together to solve problems collectively, endless possibilities can be created.

Changing the way things are can take a long time and a lot of effort. This is challenging work. How does what you do in your city or town connect to the big picture? How can you plan to bring about change when everything around you seems to be changing all the time? How do you decide what to change when it seems like there is so much to be done?

The Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada created this guide to help you discover what social action is (and is not) and what it might mean for you, your chapter and your community.

This guide is for you. Many people volunteer to gain experience. So if you are new to social action this guide is for you. And if you are an old hand, we hope that you'll find some of your own successful strategies described in these pages as well as new tips to help you do your work. Anyone is welcome to read this guide, but we wrote it with these people in mind:

- Social action directors serving on MS Society chapter boards;
- Volunteers sitting on an MS Society unit/chapter board of directors;
- Other volunteers with an MS Society chapter, unit or group;
- Anyone wanting to learn more about the MS Society and social action.

The *Social Action Guide* offers multiple points of view. From MS Society policies and procedures to real-life tales from the people doing social action, the perspectives offered by this guide vary. We didn't try to blend these voices, as social action often entails working with many different interests and ways of communicating.

The *Social Action Guide* is only one tool in a full tool-box. Please join the MS Society on line at www.mssociety.ca where you'll find a wealth of information about the MS Society.

Your biggest resource is the MS Society community. If you are stumped by a social action question or just want another point of view, contact your division Manager, Government Relations and Social Action. He or she will put you in touch with staff and volunteer support.

What is in the *Social Action Guide*?

The *Social Action Guide* is divided into eight chapters. They are:



1. Tales. These powerful stories tell of real-life social action activities of MS Society volunteers. In them, you might find solutions to challenges you are currently encountering or that you may encounter in the future.



2. Principles. Principles are rules of thumb that help us navigate consistently through complexity. This chapter begins with the mission statement of the MS Society of Canada—the formal statement of our organization's fundamental reasons for existing. The chapter then explains the seven principles of social action. Consider these principles as a general guide to your social action activities. Finally, you'll find in this chapter a note on the *MS Society of Canada Social Action and Advocacy Guidelines*. This document, reprinted in Appendix A, has been approved by the National Board of Directors. It governs how we do social action at the MS Society.



3. Social action at the MS Society. In addition to the seven principles, social action at the MS Society also relies on other policies, regulations and organizational patterns. This chapter is designed to help you understand your local social action in the larger context of the Society. The organizational structure at the MS Society naturally mirrors the political landscape: it is divided into local (chapter), provincial (division) and national arenas.



4. Getting ready. Before you can plan a social action, you must first identify the key issue your action will address.



5. Planning. Chapter five explains how to apply the *MS Society Social Action and Advocacy Guidelines* to your social action planning process. This chapter uses examples of types of social action your group might undertake.

6. Leadership. Social action can be defined as one organized group of people trying to convince another group of people to change their minds or to take action. You will need to work together to make social change happen. This chapter outlines a range of leadership and organizational development techniques designed to make working together more effective.



7. Action Tools. No guide can cover all of the social action situations you'll be facing. Instead, we assembled a package of common social action tools. Some tools might be familiar to you and others may be brand new. Don't be afraid to ask others with more experience for help. If you are comfortable with a tool, be ready to help people who are newer to social action. Review them, apply them, adapt them, and make these tools your own.



8. Evaluation. Even though evaluation is rarely a separate step that comes after you've completely achieved a social action goal, we include it as its own chapter to encourage you to remember to do it. This chapter includes checklists and hints on sharing and comparing your experience with the MS Society community.



Appendices. The following are the *Social Action Guide* appendices:
 Appendix A: The *MS Society Social Action and Advocacy Guidelines*
 Appendix B: Other MS Society policies you should know about
 Appendix C: Other leadership and conflict resolution text resources
 Appendix D: Other community supports for conflict resolution

Navigating the *Social Action Guide*

Throughout the *Social Action Guide* you'll see page references like this: (*see 3*), and icons alongside the text, in the outside margin. You just saw these icons on this page and the previous. The icons represent chapters in the book, and the page numbers take you specific sections. The icons tell you that you can turn to related reading in the guide, if you choose to browse the book's contents by subject. You can also use the Table of Contents, at the beginning of this book, to locate a particular section.

Acknowledgements

The *Social Action Guide* arose out of the need to collect and share materials supporting and enhancing the meaningful participation of people with MS in decisions affecting their lives.

We want to thank the many MS Society volunteers who participated in the 2000 Ontario Division Fall Conference and AGM Social Action Workshop *Social Action Guide* feedback process, those who worked with each draft of this guide, and those who made contributions. We couldn't have written it without your energy and input.

The list of materials used to guide the many discussions and consultations with volunteers and staff that helped the writing of this book is far too long to list here. Our section "Write and present a brief" is adapted from the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women "How to Write and Present a Brief" found in *Sharing the Power*, a workbook no longer in print. Our section "Work with diversity and power" is adapted from "Working with Diversity and Power in Your Organization," a chapter of the *Skills Development Manual for Sustainable Transportation*, similarly no longer in print. Our bibliography on conflict resolution (found in this guide's appendices), and the sections "Recruit volunteers" and "Organize a meeting" also use material from the *Skills Development Manual*. Finally, materials made available by the McGill-McConnell Program for National Voluntary Sector Leaders greatly influenced the design and content of the guide.

This guide was made possible through a donation from the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation under the auspices of the McGill-McConnell Program for National Voluntary Sector Leaders.



1. Tales

Chapter one gives examples of social action:

- **Somebody do something! But what if that “somebody” is me?**
- **Social action: more than just a flash in the pan**
- **Seeing the big picture**
- **Sometimes the simple solution is the most successful**
- **Making the connections**
- **Local activists make provincial change**
- **Success can hide just about anywhere**

This chapter contains powerful stories of real-life social actions of MS Society volunteers. They show what social action looks like in practice.

Somebody do something! But what if that “somebody” is me?

When one MS volunteer with the Ottawa Chapter Social Action Committee recalls how she first came to social action she tells of coming to see an old problem in a new light. After being diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, she began to experience some of the hidden symptoms associated with MS, such as loss of balance. Her symptoms made it increasingly difficult for her to stand for longer periods of time. However, she found it difficult to persuade able-bodied passengers to give up their seats on her bus to work every day. While discussing this situation with a local politician, she demanded that “somebody do something” to address the issue. The politician replied: “You’re someone, aren’t you? If you want to know how, I will help” (*see 35*).



She joined forces with the Ottawa Chapter Social Action Committee and the Disabled Persons Community Resources, a local cross-disability organization. She persuaded her city council to introduce a new law that provided priority seating cards to local transit passengers with disabilities. The municipality received an award for the bylaw. The bylaw has since been adopted by other municipalities in Canada (*see 49*).



Her action follows a successful social action pattern:

- She realized that her own difficulty was something that others must be experiencing;
- She involved other members in her community;
- In time and with support, her solution took hold.



What is her secret to success? She tells us that the key skills to develop are patience and perseverance. The whole process would have defeated her if she hadn't been able to summon up these strengths. She reminds us that:

- It is never easy to make change;
- It always takes more than you anticipated;
- The system counts on you being worn out by it all before they actually have to do anything (*see 36*).



More than just a flash in the pan

Social action is more than flashy campaigns. It is the everyday hard work of hundreds of volunteers and staff across Ontario. Networking results in strong coalitions that get the bigger jobs done. In this section a volunteer with the Hamilton and District Chapter describes some recent coalition-building successes.

In the fall of 1997, a series of workshops were held regarding the changes in long term care (LTC). A number of individuals and agencies recognized that they shared concerns regarding the newly-formed Community Care Access Centre (CCAC). They formed a group to address these concerns.

At a preliminary meeting, the group determined that its first priority was to request information from the CCAC Board of Directors. Members' concerns included that:

- Consumers did not know the rules regarding community care services;
- Communication from the CCAC was poor;
- Changes to community care funding had increased the burden on consumers and their family caregivers.



They initially contacted the CCAC by mail, describing concerns and requesting answers to a number of key questions (*see 31*). Despite letters and personal meetings, the CCAC board and executive continued to be unresponsive to community concerns.

However, the group did not give up. Its members began a second stage of the process, outlining their concerns to local politicians and representatives of the Ministry of Health. Networking with other



community activists, and with researchers and educators at the local university, they inundated the media with consumer stories and letters to the editor (*see 32-33*). When the CCAC held community consultations, involved community groups voiced shared concerns regarding the lack of information for consumers, problems with service delivery, and the lack of community involvement in the organization.



After two years of the group's advocacy efforts, the CCAC board and executive could no longer ignore the voice of the community. The CCAC hired a new chief executive officer, held its first open board meeting, elected a board of directors, which included consumers and community activists, and began a membership drive.

Unfortunately, problems continue, primarily due to insufficient government funds. However, the community now works cooperatively with the CCAC toward community health care solutions (*see 52*).



The big picture

Social action is also about being able to see the big picture while focusing on local action. A volunteer who helped found the Leeds Grenville Chapter of the MS Society over 35 years ago has been a life-long champion of improved accessibility in his community. Along with several other chapter members, he founded the advocacy association Education for Quality Accessibility (EQA) over seven years ago. This organization works to promote a cross-disability perspective in all of their undertakings (*see 66*).



Years after its beginnings, EQA has enormous credibility in its community. The group helps ensure that construction project designs do not exclude persons with disabilities. They have produced:

- A manual of accessibility guidelines, including detailed diagrams illustrating restricting barriers;
- A video that uses plain language and humour to illustrate the same concepts.

Brockville's Chief City Planner keeps a copy of the manual on hand when he reviews all construction projects in Brockville. He distributes copies of the manual and often recommends that applicants for building permits consult with EQA.

EQA began by working locally, but it is now regarded as a resource far



beyond its own community. Such credibility is a result of volunteers keeping their long-term goals in sight and applying steady pressure, over time. They don't just say what not to do—they offer solutions. EQA's co-founder tells us:

Disabled persons aren't looking for special consideration. They're simply asking for the same things that the rest of the population wouldn't dream of doing without. Disabled people want to be as close to "regular people" as possible. They don't want to have to go in a back door or an alley. They want to be able to go through the front door like everyone else.

A simple solution

Just as important as considering the bigger picture is recognizing when a problem can have a non-confrontational solution. The Essex County Chapter Social Action Committee learned that a Windsor medical centre had limited accessible washrooms. A trip to an accessible washroom often meant taking the elevator to another floor, travelling through the overpass to the next building and going down an elevator. This was time and energy consuming, causing many difficulties.

The chapter initially contacted the appropriate person at the centre and presented the problem along with a recommendation. They pursued the matter with a follow-up letter. The medical centre rectified the problem (*see 31*).



Consider Essex County Chapter's action in light of the MS Society mission statement: Essex County Chapter enhanced the quality of life for people who have MS, as well as the lives of people with other disabilities through their simple solution (*see 13*).



Making the connections

A volunteer with the Halton Chapter tells us that her father's medical condition made manual dexterity a problem for him, which resulted in a lack of dental hygiene so that he lost three teeth. She then discovered that accessing a dentist's office and a dental chair for an individual in a wheelchair was a real problem. She asked, using the chapter newsletter, if any members of her MS chapter were experiencing similar difficulties.



She discovered that others experienced the same barriers to good dental care (*see 28*).

She met with a staff member of the regional public health department responsible for dental concerns. Together they decided to try to do



what they could do to overcome the barriers. They recruited two more interested individuals. Realizing that they could not solve the barriers to good oral health on their own, they spent the next few months planning a community forum. Great care was spent to make sure that they invited a representative from each agency which receives funding from the Ministry of Health and long term care (for example, hospitals, CCAC and day programs) in the region (*see 28*). In this way all stakeholders were part of the problem-solving discussion. They invited a speaker to share recent research on the impact of poor dental hygiene on residents in Toronto long term care facilities .



Representatives of over 30 organizations attended the meeting to determine the problems faced by the community and the solutions to those problems. During the meeting, volunteers came forward saying that barriers to good dental care were a significant problem and that they wanted to continue with the project (*see 38*).



These volunteers became the nucleus of a group which, working from the forum's conclusions, wrote a task force document. The volunteers distributed the document to regional, provincial and federal politicians, Ministry of Health staff members and District Health Council staff. They then conducted personal meetings and presentations with many possible funders (*see 52*).



At last report, the Halton Oral Health Outreach Project was up and running under the joint partnership of the Community Care Access Centre of Halton and the Halton Regional Health Department.

Local activists make provincial change

The London/Middlesex Chapter Social Action Committee decided that their local government should be playing a larger role in advocating for the development of an *Ontarians with Disabilities Act* (ODA), as suggested by the Ontario Division. Several chapter members recently joined together and successfully lobbied their city council to pass a resolution calling on the provincial government to enact a strong and effective ODA (*see 29*). This section explains how they did it.



Even a few enthusiastic chapter members on board at one time is enough to make political change happen. The London/Middlesex





Chapter volunteers began by sending every city councilor a copy of the MS Society brief *Accessibility Creates Opportunity* with a strong cover letter (*see 57*). Some volunteers sent letters to all of the involved local politicians (*see 61*).



Having the media cover the story was particularly important in this case because the city council was about to vote on a resolution. Media coverage gave politicians the feeling that everybody was paying attention to their actions during the the vote. Volunteers secured coverage by asking editors, well in advance, to assign a writer to cover the story. The press release gave the phone number of a volunteer who was usually at home. This person was available on demand to answer the telephone and the media's questions (*see 60*).



Leading up to the event they kept a supportive politician in the loop (they benefited immensely from the fact that a chapter member had made this useful contact when she had campaigned on her scooter for this council member). On the day of the vote they packed the committee room with persons with disabilities of every sort and made sure that there was a sign language interpreter present for the entire meeting (*see 63, 52*).



Success can hide just about anywhere

Members of Northern Action Group (NAG), can tell us how a project's success can sometimes be more immediate than anyone expected.

Working with NAG, an MS Society volunteer coordinated "Project Accessibility" in downtown Fort Frances in August 1997. Eight individuals, including attendants and those in wheelchairs, travelled from building to building documenting accessibility concerns. They visited and detailed 137 buildings, including government, retail, commercial, and legal offices.

NAG audited municipal shortcomings with respect to the poor, the disabled, the mobility impaired, and seniors. They focused on the problems these individuals experience getting to the downtown core.

NAG presented its combined report to Fort Frances council, addressing councilors and local employers. The report takes the municipality to task, listing over 100 points of concern with municipal transportation



and private sector service delivery and facilities. It states that a barrier free society is a right, and that the

... exclusion of people with mobility problems ... carries a huge moral social and economic price tag. It forces people with valuable skills onto social assistance at public expense when they would rather be active participants in our workforce.

The report demonstrates how people cut off from the downtown core are also potential shoppers cut off from the town's businesses. NAG called upon council to address the identified problems and create a new town board—the Fort Frances Community Access Board (*see 63*).



When Project Accessibility took to the streets these were just a few comments they collected from local business owners:

...I never knew there were so many disabled in town.

...I've never seen so many disabled in the downtown core before. You just don't think of them, when you don't see them I guess you just don't realize they exist.

...I'm embarrassed. I've been in business a long time and I can't ever recall having anyone in a wheelchair enter my store before: it's like they never existed.

...You know, the downtown core is hurting. I spend a lot of time watching people, and it just hit me: I can't recall too many seniors walking the downtown core in the last few years. The senior customers just aren't here. Maybe we became complacent in our salesmanship—worse yet maybe we became complacent in our community.

Thanks to NAG, the needs of people with mobility concerns were noticed in Fort Frances. A private and individual problem was recognized as the responsibility of the whole community.





2. Principles

Chapter Two addresses:

- The MS Society's mission: why we do what we do
- Seven principles of social action
- The *MS Society of Canada Social Action and Advocacy Guidelines* (see Appendix A for a copy of the *Guidelines*)

Principles are the rules of thumb that help us navigate consistently through sometimes confusing situations. This chapter outlines the MS Society's mission, seven principles of social action and the *MS Society of Canada Social Action and Advocacy Guidelines*.

The MS Society's mission: why we do what we do

The mission of the Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada is:

To be a leader in finding a cure for multiple sclerosis and enabling people affected by MS to enhance their quality of life.

We will have achieved our mission when:

1. The cause and cure for multiple sclerosis are identified in the shortest possible time.
2. People with MS have the opportunity to participate fully in all aspects of life.
3. The Canadian public is fully aware of MS, the MS Society and what it does.
4. All necessary activities of the MS Society are adequately funded.
5. The volunteers and staff of the chapters, division and national organization are working together effectively toward our common mission.

This is the shared goal of the MS Society's volunteers and staff. All activities, including social action, work to further the mission. Of course, no one individual or group can meet all of these goals in one single action. In a list like this, our task can look quite daunting. However, our activities are part of a longer history of a larger group of people. Considering our work in this context, we can see how we are moving toward meeting our shared goals.



Seven principles of social action

The seven principles of social action are:

1. Respect the needs of the group you serve. Social action is sometimes challenging, because you must be:

- Clear about what the larger group wants;
- Certain that your methods don't contradict the longer-term goals of that group.

This group is:

- The local people you are working with (your chapter/unit and committee members);
- Other allies who will be directly affected by your social actions;
- Others who make up the MS Society of Canada.



If you've ever tried to get a group of people to agree, you know that consensus-building is very challenging. Yet consensus-building is an essential part of successful social action (*see 42*).



Note: Moving from personal advocacy to social action

Life-changing events can move a person to social action. If you are learning to speak up for your own rights as a person with MS you may want to speak up for others. Moving from facing a problem on your own to becoming a leader for social change can be empowering. Volunteers who have taken this route remind you that although you understand your own needs best, as a social activist you are still bound by the golden rule of advocacy: it is the group's needs, wants and rights that have to come first. We all know that consensus takes time, patience and the will of all the members of a community.

If you can't identify who these people are, then you have work to do before you can do social action (*see 28*). You'll likely re-define the problem as you identify your supporters. Working with an expanded group should result in you re-examining your initial perspective.

2. Empower that group. Successful social action often happens when people come together around a shared issue, becoming an empowered social force in their community. A lone hero doesn't always make the same kind of long-lasting

change that an empowered group of heroes can make.



3. Consult with that group to be certain you represent its needs. If your personal concerns overlap with the group's needs, that's great, but your

needs and desires cannot take over the group's. Be certain to make this distinction.

4. Remain rational and advocate in the least adversarial manner possible.

Your work is just one piece in a puzzle that has taken thousands of people years to build. One person's rash action can work against years of thoughtful actions.

5. Check in with the group often. We can't stress this enough. Open communications—meetings, networking, talking, discussion forums, feedback, group planning, informal chatting, telephone calls, E-mail, and faxes—are essential to good social action. You need to connect at the local level and with the MS Society's other organizational levels (*see 23*). Don't become a one-person crusade (*see 46*). Even if you think you can leap further working alone, in the long run you may alienate yourself from the community you claim to represent.

6. Maintain confidentiality. Do not divulge information that is not yours to share. Period. Even when you are tempted to tell details in order to get attention or to establish credibility. We've all heard a story that starts with: "My friend (or colleague or co-worker) who has MS (or a disability, etc.) had such-and-such problem". Telling such details of another's life may get attention but in the long run you'll alienate the group of people you need for long-term social action success. If you are considering revealing details of your own life, make this decision consciously and carefully (*see 46*).

NOTE: Maintain confidentiality

Sometimes it is tempting to tell a poignant personal story in order to draw social attention to an unjust situation. However, you always have to ask yourself: is this my story to tell? If it is not about you, then you need the express permission of the person it is about before you can use it. There is a fine line between saying to a reporter or even to a friend "I know someone who is suffering because of such and such a policy" and inappropriately divulging details of someone's private life.

7. Be fearless. Sometimes working on a problem that is slow to budge is frustrating and scary, especially when you encounter people who do not agree with you. Consider the volunteer's advice form Chapter 1: It's never easy to make change. It always takes more work than you anticipated, and people in power count on you getting exhausted before they actually have to change anything. But stick it out and you'll know the satisfaction of having stood up for something you believe in and made a real difference in the world.



The *MS Society of Canada Social Action and Advocacy Guidelines*

The *MS Society of Canada Social Action and Advocacy Guidelines*, printed in Appendix A, govern your work at the local level. The *Guidelines* also apply to how the division and national social action committees operate, along with all of the individual advocacy work at the MS Society (*see 23*).



3. Social Action at the MS Society

Chapter three answers the following questions:

- What is a social action committee?
- What is a chapter board of directors?
- What if I work with a unit, not a chapter?
- What is a committee?
- Why have committees?
- What if I don't live near an MS Society chapter or unit?
- What if my chapter/unit doesn't have a Social Action Committee?
- What are the purposes and objectives of a chapter social action committee?
- What do Directors of Social Action do?
- What staff at the MS Society will help me?
- Why is social action divided into chapter, division (provincial) and national levels?
- Why should I be aware of the actions of division and national offices?

This chapter is a map of the policies, regulations and organizational procedures that, in addition to the *MS Society of Canada Social Action and Advocacy Guidelines*, govern social action work at the MS Society. This map should help you place your local work into a broader context of work underway at the Society. Since social action usually means working to effect the decisions of governments, the organizational structure at the MS Society naturally mirrors the political landscape: it is divided into local, provincial (division) and national arenas.

What is a Social Action Committee?

Typically, the Social Action Committee is one of many standing (permanent) committees of a chapter board of directors. The other committees may include: Fundraising, Public Relations, Individual and Family Services (IFS), Education, Volunteer Resources and Finance.

A good way to participate in social action at the MS Society is to join the Social Action Committee at your local chapter.



What is a chapter board of directors?

At the MS Society, our by-laws require us to elect a board of directors. There is a board of directors for every organizational level, including chapters. A board is legally responsible for the actions of an organization. That is why a chapter board of directors has to approve all actions conducted by the chapter members in the name of the MS Society.

Boards provide more than regulation—they are communication devices. At chapter board meetings the active committees and directors report their actions so the board can forge a collective vision for the chapter.

Directors are volunteers who hold voting privileges on the chapter board. Some chapters or units have coordinators or executive directors. They may be either volunteers or staff. They do not have voting privileges.

What if I work with a unit, not a chapter?

Units follow the same structure as a chapter board. However, a unit doesn't need to fill all of the board positions nor does it need to offer all of the programs and services of the Ontario Division. For example, the MS Society group in Kapuskasing is a unit, not a chapter. It has a Director of Social Action, but no committee structure.

What is a committee?

A committee is a group of people assigned by a chapter board of directors to achieve a specific goal. At least one member of the committee—its chair—must be a director. A committee is accountable to the chapter board that created it.

A board strikes a committee either temporarily or permanently. Most MS Society chapter committees are standing committees: they remain in place permanently. In some cases, a board may decide to strike an ad hoc committee. This committee has one job to do; when it is done the committee dissolves.



Sometimes the work of one committee overlaps with another. In general, though, IFS is concerned with the needs of individuals

and families. Social Action is concerned with a larger group of individuals facing the same or similar issues. The role of the Social Action Committee and/or its director is to take up that group's concerns with local decision makers. The Education and Public Relation committees educate the broader public.

For example, consider an individual who, having difficulty with a particular municipal policy, approaches your chapter. Your chapter responds with the following actions:

- The IFS director acts as an advocate for this individual, providing information, and support.
- The Social Action Committee, with careful research, discovers that many more people are affected than just the first individual. After determining the best strategy, committee members may, for example, meet with their municipal representatives.
- The Education and Public Relations committees address this particular issue by educating the general public about MS.

Why have committees? Committees:

- Allow input from non-board members on issues facing the board;
- Can speed up board meetings, with lengthy committee discussions summarized by shorter recommendations to the board;
- Are a good place for new volunteers to begin assisting with chapter activities before making the commitment a directorship requires.

What if I don't live near an MS Society chapter or unit?

You should contact your division Manager, Government Relations and Social Action. If your issue or concern is a local social action issue, then follow this guide's tips on linking with other advocacy groups in your community (*see 52*).



What if my chapter/unit doesn't have a Social Action Committee?

Many chapters in Ontario have social action directors on their boards but may not have Social Action Committees. We hope that in time social action directors without committees will be able to develop a committee to support the chapter's social action activities. Meanwhile, you or the Director of Social Action can network with advocacy groups and other potential allies in your community around a particular social action issue. Getting a particular social action off the ground before you have a committee might be the action that interests enough people to create a committee (*see 38, 23*).



What are the purposes and objectives of a chapter social action committee?

The following is a sample "Purposes and Objectives of a Chapter Social Action Committee". This text was revised in February, 1993, and first printed in 1992 by the MS Society of Canada, Ontario Division.

Purpose: To develop and implement strategies that will bring about an improvement in the quality of life of persons with MS, through public education, direct political pressure and planned attendance at various government forums. To provide input on chapter budget regarding social action activities.

Objectives: To work together to find issues of concern to those with MS through personal contacts, surveys, etc. To gather information concerning issues, make decisions about issues to be addressed, develop strategies for social action and implement a social action plan under the leadership of the director. To use their specialized knowledge to assist the committee in their work (e.g., a person who has knowledge of the government could provide guidance to the committee when dealing with an issue involving government). To be willing to work actively and be involved in social action.

Skills/ Knowledge needed: Ability to organize a group. Knowledge of multiple sclerosis. Able to assist the group with developing leadership, resources, etc. or be able to recruit others for this function.



What do Directors of Social Action do?

The Director of Social Action sits on the board of directors of a local chapter. Besides acting as liaison between the Social Action Committee and the rest of the chapter, this person chairs (i.e. both *leads* and takes *responsibility* for) the effective functioning of the chapter's Social Action Committee. If a chapter does not have a Social Action Committee, the director, while working toward getting a committee together, works on an ad hoc basis with community members interested in social action.

Director of Social Action Job Description (sample)

Responsibilities are:

- Ensuring the goals and objectives of the chapter/unit board of directors and the Social Action Committee are met;
- Identifying and providing information on social action issues of concern to members with MS;
- Advocating on behalf of members with MS to decision makers at the local or municipal level and consulting and keeping the Ontario Division informed by reporting through the division Manager, Government Relations and Social Action;
- Advocating on behalf of members with MS to federal and provincial legislators regarding issues of a federal or provincial scope *only when requested* by the Ontario or National Social Action Committees, and reporting through the Manager, Government Relations and Social Action to the Ontario Division Board of Directors;
- Providing input into Ontario Social Action Committee activities through the Manager, Government Relations and Social Action;
- Providing information and updates about chapter social action activities to the chapter/unit board of directors and the membership.

Accountable to: The chapter/unit board of directors, which is accountable to Ontario Division Board of Directors.

Specific duties include the following:

- Recruit committee members.
- Chair regular committee meetings (i.e. monthly).
- Report on committee activities and solicit board of directors support for social action activities.



- Prepare and present a separate social action budget (under code 493) to the board of directors. This budget includes all costs relating to social action, including mailing, photocopying, transportation costs (to get people to meetings), long distance telephone costs, meeting snacks and so on.
- Use the Regional Manager, Individual and Family Services as a resource and contact person on municipal issues (i.e. locally funded programs or services, such as transportation and housing) as well as individual advocacy requests.
- Use the Manager, Government Relations and Social Action as a resource and contact person on MS Society social action policies and provincial or national social action activities.
- Respond to requests for support from the Ontario and National Social Action Committees and bring local concerns about provincial and national issues to the attention of these committees through the Manager, Government Relations and Social Action.
- With the assistance of the chapter Social Action Committee, identify issues of importance to the chapter membership and identify and implement appropriate action plans.

Working relationship is with:

- Chapter/unit board of directors;
 - Chapter/unit Director of Public Relations;
 - Chapter/unit Director of Individual and Family Services;
 - Chapter/unit Chair and Executive Director, if applicable;
- Regional Manager, Individual and Family Services;
- Manager, Government Relations and Social Action.

The skills/knowledge needed include:

- Willingness to work within the *MS Society's Social Action and Advocacy Guidelines (see Appendix A: 69)*;
- Interest in systemic issues concerning people with MS;
- Advocacy skills;
- Problem solving skills;
- Self-starting attitude;
- Ability to recruit other committee members (*see 38*);
- Willingness to collaborate with other agencies on issues of common concern;
- Willingness to undergo training.



What staff at the MS Society will help me?

Social action at the MS Society occurs across several departments and organizational levels. A social action volunteer at a chapter should work directly with the:

- Manager, Government Relations and Social Action;
- Regional Manager, Individual and Family Services (Regional Manager, IFS).

If you want to learn more about what is happening provincially or federally on an issue, contact the Manager, Government Relations and Social Action.

Why is social action divided into chapter, division and national levels?

While there are different organizational levels at the MS Society—local chapters/units, divisions and national—we nonetheless work together. These organizational levels mirror the existing political landscape: local, provincial and federal governments and organizations. This just makes sense: our advocacy efforts have to mirror the government levels they address. The *Social Action and Advocacy Guidelines* are organized in this manner as well (*see Appendix A, 69*). Chapters have a responsibility to address local issues. They are best positioned to do this work. So too, division and national levels are responsible for work at their relative political and organizational levels. We use the word “responsible” here very consciously: social action is a significant part of the mission of the MS Society.

Chapter members take on these local actions:

- Network with local groups.
- Develop partnerships with local public and private sector organizations.
- Build and maintain open communication with local politicians and community leaders.
- Sit on local community boards such as regional transportation committees, rehabilitation services, social planning councils, long-term care facilities, elder abuse boards or seniors’ councils.



These actions concern:

- Local transportation;
- Supportive housing and long-term care;
- Municipal standards and by-laws;
- Access to all facilities used by the public, including schools, businesses, churches, as well as social and recreational facilities.

Each organizational level at the MS Society has its own role to play in almost every issue faced by people living with MS. Moreover, just because a problem gets taken up by the national or a division committee doesn't mean a chapter's job is done. Chapters are resources for the division and national committees, just as the national and division work teams are resources for local chapters. A chapter can often find a way to address a national or division issue in a local manner (*see 9*).



Why should I be aware of the actions of division and national offices?

The whole picture is useful so that your group doesn't make work for itself by re-doing the work another group is doing, and because people working at the division and national levels are good resources. You may want to enlist their help on your local project.

The Ontario Social Action Committee (OSAC). OSAC, like a chapter social action committee, is made up of volunteers. Membership attempts to ensure representation from the five geographic regions of Ontario. The committee often works with chapter Social Action Committees to co-ordinate province-wide activities. The staff position that supports OSAC is the Manager, Government Relations and Social Action. OSAC acts as an advisory body to the Ontario Division Board of Directors and division social action staff on provincial social action issues.

The National Social Action Committee (NSAC). NSAC, also made up of volunteers, acts as an advisor to the National Board of Directors and national social action staff on national and international social action issues.



To find out what is happening provincially and nationally, contact the Manager, Government Relations and Social Action.

4. Getting ready

Chapter four offers advice on how to:

- Identify the key issue
- Brainstorm
- Gather information
- Work together
- Address a national or provincial issue locally
- Keep good records

Before you can plan a social action, you must first identify the key issue your action will address. A key issue is an issue that is local, likely to be successfully addressed and is within the scope of your group's resources. This chapter uses an example to demonstrate how to get ready to plan local social action.

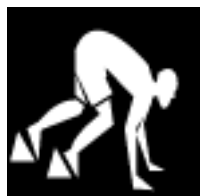
Identify the key issue

Before you can plan a social action, you must first identify the key issue your action will address. Put another way: What precisely is the problem you are trying to fix? Finding the answer is easier when you break it down into steps.

We'll use an example to explain: Imagine that you are having problems accessing a washroom in a medical facility. Each time you visit, you are painfully aware of the long walk to the equal access washrooms—up elevators and ramps, down to the basement of an adjacent building. Hardly “accessible,” you think, “without an expedition pack and a week's supplies.” You mention this to staff, and the response you receive isn't promising. It feels like they brush you off, citing a local by-law around accessibility. By the law's definition, the washroom *is* accessible, they tell you.

The *problem* is obvious: you have a painful journey to make each time you visit that facility. Others have probably encountered the same difficulty. But what is the *key issue*? You get together with two other people who have noted the same problem and, by the end of your conversation, it becomes clear that the key issue is different for each of you.

Your main concern is that the staff disregarded a complaint from a person living with MS. You want to address that institution's long



history of ignoring clients who speak from experience. You are frustrated with the long walk, but even more frustrated about the way in which your encounter left you feeling like a second-class citizen. You want to call up the provincial funder of the programs that run at the facility and ask some questions.

The second person's concern is that the facility needs an equal-access washroom in a more convenient location. She wants to meet with the administration to get things moving.

The third person's concern is the by-law itself. If building code allows for such a washroom to be called "accessible" then there is a problem with that building code! He wants to begin to convince the province to make changes to building code.

Question: Who is correct?

Answer: You are all correct. But you'll have to agree where to begin. Read on to learn how to do this.

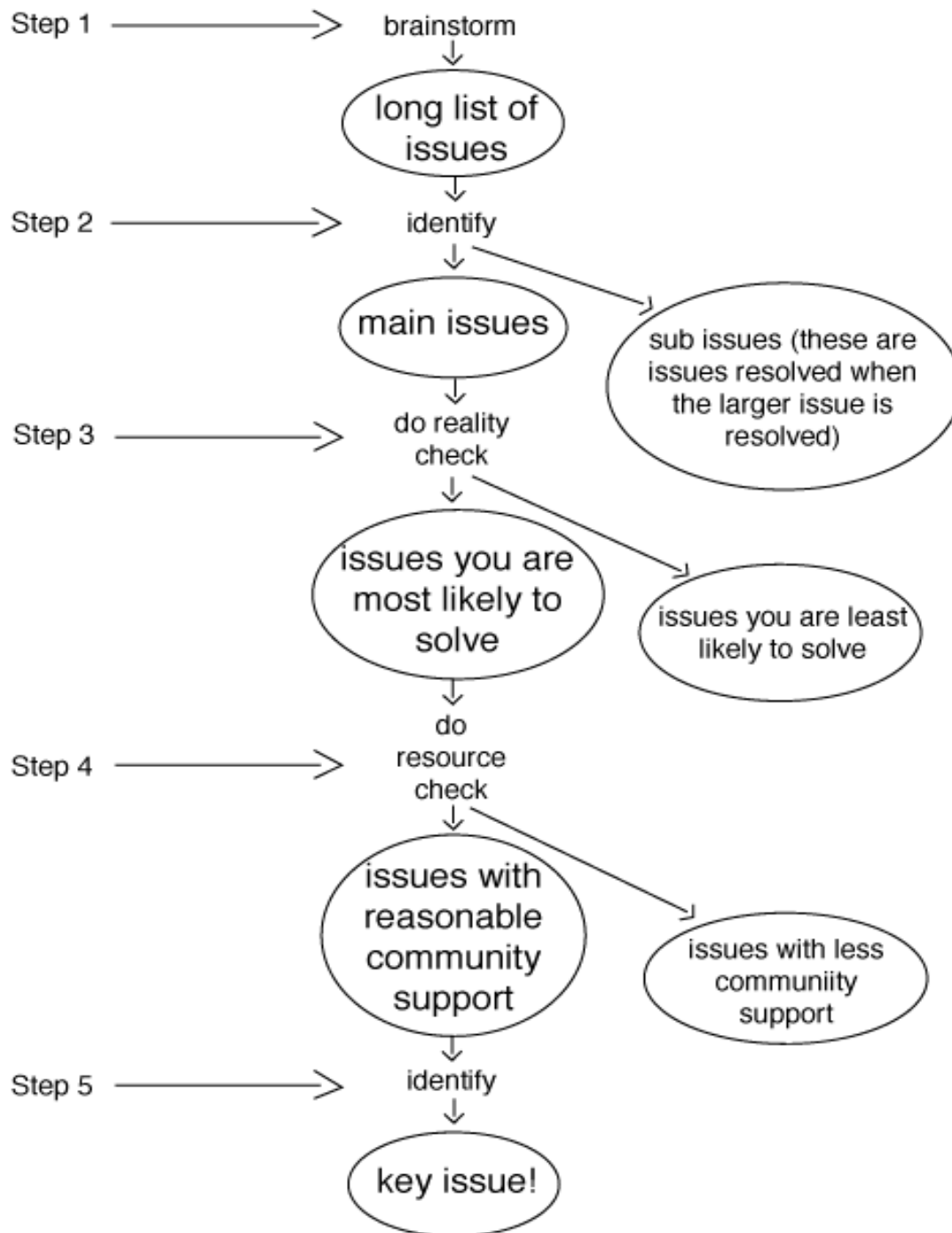
Brainstorm. By expressing different points of view your group has already started to brainstorm. That's great—keep going. It's a good idea to time-limit brainstorming. Five or ten minutes is usually enough for a first round. Think big. Be imaginative. Don't try to convince each other of one idea's merit. There will be time for such discussion later.

Have one person record the ideas your group generates. If you are the recorder remember to write down all of the ideas, not just the ones you like. Another technique is to use a tape recorder so that nothing gets missed. If you are keeping notes, don't worry about order or tidiness. Since reading or hearing other people's ideas repeated often triggers new ideas, it is a good technique to write the list where everyone can see it. Use a dark marker on a flip chart or on a big piece of paper stuck to the wall. If you are using a tape recorder, play back the list a few times until the last round of ideas triggering new ideas slows down.

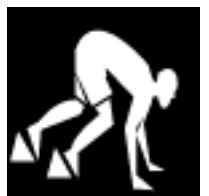
Narrow down to the key issue. All of the issues you have identified in your brainstorming session may be important. Now you must prioritize the list you have generated. Your results will depend upon your groups specific resources, skills, and experience. A diagram of that process is on the facing page:



Determine the key issue:



Remember: there is no mathematical formula for determining the key issue. Your answer depends upon the specific resources and challenges your group faces (*see 35-43*).



Gather information

Now that you and your group have identified the key issue, it's time to do some research. These are some questions you need to answer:

- Has this issue been addressed in your community before?
- Has your chapter been involved with a similar issue before?
- What about in other communities?

To find the answers to these questions:

- Check with chapter members who have been around longer than you.
- Read through old meeting minutes and other chapter records (*see 67*).
- Talk with your Manager, Government Relations and Social Action.
- Talk with your Regional Manager, Individual and Family Services.
- Call other advocacy and support groups in your area.
- Look in the index of your local paper in the library.
- Search the Internet.
- Call your telephone community resource help line.



Remember: information flows two ways. As you research your issue by talking with other members of your community (including other advocacy and support groups), you are doing more than simply collecting information. You are also communicating your group's concerns to the public. Use this networking opportunity to learn more about the issue, to educate around the issue and to make connections and allies (*see 52*).



Work together



The first basic principle of social action is: respect the needs of the group you serve (*see 14*). Now it is time to ask: who is my group? If the group whose need you serve is only yourself and the two other people at that brainstorming meeting from our example (*see 26*), then it is time to start connecting with other people. Who else in your community might be served by addressing the issue you have identified? Who are your supporters? If the answer is: only a few people, then it is time to revisit your steps, but this time ask a few more interested people to join you in your decision-making processes. If you discover that no one else—not



even the people and groups you figured would be supporters—finds your issue to be of great concern, then it is likely that the time is not right for this issue.

Work locally

If the issue your group has isolated is not local and you've referred your concerns to the Ontario Division Regional Manager, Individual and Family Services and/or to the Manager, Government Relations and Social Action you may not have finished with your work. In some cases, the Ontario Division will ask chapters to support provincial social action activities locally. In most cases an element of the issue can be addressed locally (*see 23*).

While most agencies primarily rely on staff to represent their concerns, the MS Society counts on its membership to call on legislators and speak out on behalf of people with MS. Our grassroots advocacy network plays an important role in informing government officials about the issues. By acting at the local level, you can have an effect on what happens in the province's or nation's capital.

When change is needed in a community, people who live and work there have more power than people coming from the outside. Volunteers who work tirelessly and have made significant improvements to their communities' social service programs are the ones to whom political types listen.

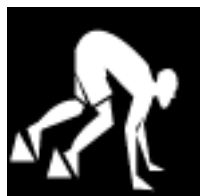
Note: Share information

Don't forget to keep your chapter board of directors, chapter membership, your division Manager, Government Relations and Social Action, and your Regional Manager, Individual and Family Services informed. Sharing information is particularly important when your activities are likely to result in political fallout



Note that the *MS Society Social Action and Advocacy Guidelines* state:

“Chapters will communicate with local federal and provincial legislators regarding issues of a federal or provincial scope only when requested by their division.”



Keep good records

As you research and network, keep notes on what you learn. Be certain to record the:

- Names, phone or fax numbers and E-mail addresses of supporters;
- Name and type of organization that each person represents.

Make lists of local service, advocate, education, health care public and special interest agencies. It's useful to detail the type of work done by an agency, its interests, what issue it might assist with in the future, and what other support it offers.

If you have access to a computer, you might use an electronic address book to keep names, numbers and contact notes (computerized notes are easier to search than handwritten). If you don't, be sure to keep records in an address book that has room for notes, a Rolodex or some other bound book that keep your notes together. Jotted names and numbers on scraps of paper tend to disappear (*see 40*).



5. Planning

Chapter five covers:

- **Level One campaigns:** making contacts, acting as a representative, networking;
- **Level Two campaigns:** handling the media, writing letters, creating petitions;
- **Level Three campaigns.**

This chapter explains how to apply the *MS Society Social Action and Advocacy Guidelines* to your social action planning process. It discusses types of social action your group might undertake. If you haven't already read the *MS Society Social Action and Advocacy Guidelines*, take a few minutes to read it now. It is found in Appendix A.

Level One campaigns

“Initially, social action is done in a low key, cooperative manner, through collaboration and networking with other agencies, and through contacts with decision makers (government, industry, unions, institutions, etc.) by letter, telephone, and personal meetings. The media should not be involved at this stage.”—*MS Society Social Action and Advocacy Guidelines*

Below are three typical types of Level One social action, with some of their advantages and disadvantages:

1. Make contacts. Contact the person who is closest to the situation who is willing and able to help. This person might be an administrator, local official, government representative or industry representative. There are two advantages to contacting this decision maker:

- He or she will have information you need to solve the problem.
- By contacting this person directly, rather than going over his or her head, it is more likely that person will be your ally when implementing a solution.

A disadvantage of this method is that it assumes that you or someone in your group already has connections with local decision makers. This is not always the case. If you can find people in your chapter/unit who have these types of contacts, great. Otherwise, try to find people who might be more comfortable making them, if you're not. Networking is challenging work. It is not cheating to find willing people who are already good at it to give you a hand or to share their contacts.





Different situations call for different methods of communication. In some instances, you may begin with a non-confrontational letter, then follow-up with a phone call if you have not received an encouraging reply. In other instances, you might ask for a face-to-face meeting using a phone call, an E-mail or a letter to make your request (*see 55-57*).



Calling a meeting with a decision maker is a step up from telephone calls, and E-mail and letter writing. A face-to-face meeting, especially if you are calm, prepared and ready to discuss (not argue) your position, is often a powerful way of making things happen (*see 58*).

2. Act as a representative. On-going or one-time representation on a board or committee may not seem the most flashy form of social action, but it is an effective way to make long-term social change.

Sitting on a committee gives you an opportunity to develop relationships with decision makers, paving the way for future social actions. It also helps to become involved in your local community decision-making processes before you face a crisis situation. Some of the disadvantages of being an on-going representative is that meeting schedules can be exhausting, and it is easy to get sidetracked by committee work that does not relate to the issues you mean to be represent. Still, if you are firm about your role and dedicated to your task, you can act as a powerful voice for those with MS through your on-going representation.

Presenting news to a municipal committee, organization or working group is another effective way of representing the MS Society in your community, without making the long-term commitment acting as an on-going representative demands.

3. Network. Even when your group is in-between issues, networking with

Note that the MS Society Social Action and Advocacy Guidelines state:

“Chapters will consult and keep their respective division office informed about issues in which the chapters are involved.”

interested groups and agencies is an essential part of effective social action. Find allies, learn what they have to teach you, and share your own concerns and needs. Together you are more powerful than working alone. (And in case you were wondering: no, there is no disadvantage to networking).



Level Two campaigns

“A second level of social action involves more persuasive methods, including making views public by working with the media to communicate a stance or position to the general public, letter writing campaigns to politicians, petitions, etc. Confrontation should be avoided since this approach tends not to lead to action or to attitudinal change as effectively as a cooperative approach”—*MS Society Social Action and Advocacy Guidelines*

The following are three instances of action related to Level Two campaigns.

1. Handling the media. If you are engaging in a high profile campaign, then you must be ready to work with the media (newspapers, radio, television and other forms of public communication such as the Internet) (*see 60*).



The obvious advantage to working with the media is that you stand to gain a large body of public support for your campaign. A disadvantage is that handling the media is risky. The media has its own agenda that may or may not match your goals. Furthermore, once you call in the media, it is harder to ask them to leave. Inviting media participation comes with responsibility. At the very least, inviting media support means that you have to have your information together, neatly packaged and ready to deliver at a moment's notice. In order to make use of the media you have to be very organized.

You must coordinate your media approach with everyone. Nothing is worse than two people who represent the same cause giving two different stories to the media (*see 9*).



2. Letter writing campaigns. A letter writing campaign is a great idea, particularly if you can mobilize people to write personal letters. While you might get more people to fill out form letters, these do not carry as much punch as personal letters. Rather than a form letter, distribute a short message asking people to write personal letters. In it, detail what a letter should contain.

The important element in a letter writing campaign is volume. If you do not have the resources to get many people writing letters, then a letter writing campaign might not be for you (*see 61*).

3. Creating petitions. With few exceptions, petitions are not as powerful as personal letter-writing campaigns. An effective petition must have many more signatures on it than the number of letters that would constitute a tremendously successful letter writing campaign (*see 62*).



That said, collecting names is easier than encouraging people to write personal letters, so it is often a strategy that people begin with, or work into their multi-pronged campaign. A

Note: Privacy laws apply

Because of privacy laws, names on petitions cannot be used for any other purpose unless the signer indicates otherwise (see the *Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada Privacy and Confidentiality Policy* or contact the Vice President, Communications for more information). If your chapter intends to contact those who sign the petition, there must be a mechanism on the petition (such as a tick-box) that people can use to indicate that they want to be contacted.

petition works best when an issue is timely and is already in the media. It is also essential that you can secure a significant percentage of the relevant electorate (people living in the area affected) and that you can deliver the petition to the appropriate institution or government body immediately. “Stale” petitions (names collected a long time ago on a now-dead issue) take up volunteer time and are not the most productive ways of making social change.

Level Three campaigns

“A third level of intensity may occasionally be called for, in situations wherein the

decision makers have resisted changes that are deemed important to the well-being of people with MS as a group. Actions such as court cases and demonstrations fall into this category. They should be considered only as a last resort”—*MS Society Social Action and Advocacy Guidelines*

Note that the MS Society Social Action and Advocacy Guidelines state:

“Third level campaigns require the approval of the MS Society National Board of Directors and National Executive Committee.”

Note that the MS Society Social Action and Advocacy Guidelines state:

“Civil disobedience of any kind is not condoned or sanctioned by the MS Society of Canada and must not be undertaken in the name of the MS Society of Canada Guidelines.”

Since the decision to use a third level campaign is made at the national level and involves the well-being of the entire membership of the Society, we won't be dealing with these types of actions in this guide.



6. Leadership

Chapter six outlines the following sets of social action skills:

- Mentoring
- Taking care of yourself
- Setting priorities and limits
- Maintaining a positive image
- Recruiting volunteers
- Being aware of timing
- Keeping doors open
- Conflict management and decision making
- Working with diversity and power

One chapter (or even a whole book) can't cover all of the social action situations you'll encounter, so instead this chapter outlines some key concepts of organization and leadership development. These are the skills essential to successful social action. We didn't put these tools in any particular order, because what you'll need first will depend upon your exact circumstances.

Mentoring

Advocacy, letter writing, networking: these are all complex tasks requiring much know-how. But if you are new to social action, where and how do you begin to learn these skills?

Most experienced advocates will tell you that while you can find information in books or learn it formally in classrooms, most of these skills come from practice, learning from mistakes, and learning from others. In a word: experience. If you don't have social action experience you can ask someone who does for help. Asking for help is not a sign of failure: it's a sign of good planning. Other people are your best resource. Be sure to use them.

Question: How do I find people who have the skills, resources and contacts that I need?

Answer: You ask, and then ask some more.

You'll be surprised at how often experienced social activists at your chapter or at other organizations, friendly decision makers, and other allies want to help (*see 5*). Asking is crucial, because most people won't offer information unless you indicate that you want it.



You can start small with what you ask for: Help writing a letter, advice on who to call for information, or some pointers on an upcoming meeting with a decision maker are all good starter requests. Sometimes these smaller questions and the person's response will build into a fuller mentorship. Sometimes they won't. That's OK, too.

Taking care of yourself

Self care is an often overlooked aspect to effective social action. If you are not looking after yourself, then an action is not likely to succeed. Everyone looks after themselves in their own way, but below are a few concepts you might find helpful.

Anticipate. When you take on new projects, always plan for times when your level of energy will be lower, such as when your attention must shift heavily to family, social or employment matters, or, if you have MS, when you need to be extra careful about managing symptoms.

Accept limitations and adapt. Be realistic about the load you can carry. If you take on an emotionally and physically consuming project that you do have time and energy for, but then your circumstances change, be flexible. Ask others to take on more. Failing that, simply say "no" yourself. No project is worth compromising your health or well-being. You might want to plan for taking on more work when you are feeling great, or when other life commitments are less taxing.

For example, if you find that travelling has become difficult, then you might let someone else take on duties that require travel. Instead, you might spend more time mentoring a new volunteer or acting as the media contact from your home.

Draw upon the support of others. Turn to family and friends for support. Keep networking for social action contacts, but also keep adding to your personal support network.

Maintain a positive outlook. This will contribute to a successful life, which is a solid part of being able to do good social activism.

Be engaged with the world around you. Any one issue you are working on is pretty important—but it isn't the whole world. Stay connected to a range of activities and interests. This will help you draw support from avenues that do not directly concern your social action work.



Draw clear boundaries. Learn how to say “no.” You will not be able to take on every task that comes your way: guaranteed. Learn your own limits and be clear about them. You can’t please everyone all of the time. If you exhaust yourself trying you’ll be unable to please anyone, including yourself. If your activist life completely blurs into your personal life, it may be time to re-draw some boundaries.

Be flexible. Not every social action you engage in will be successful. Some won’t budge at all. But change will continue, with or without you. An ability to roll with the punches and a sense of humour contributes to well-being.

Practice good health. Regular exercise, a balanced diet, adequate rest and leisure (and the ability to say “no” to work when it means skipping a meal, needed sleep or time-off) are all necessary parts of successful social action.

Setting priorities and limits

In addition to setting your own priorities and limits in keeping with the above principles of self care, the social action *group* must also set limits and determine its priorities. Follow the same criteria for your group as you would for yourself. And always be ready to do a reality-check:

- Do we have the needed skills and resources to do this particular action at this time?
- Would another time be more appropriate for this particular action?
- Do we need more resources before we can continue?
- Are there more pressing issues than this one particular issue that we would be better off addressing first?

Remember that there will always be more tasks than there are resources to address them.

Maintaining a positive image

Keeping up a positive image and remaining constructive over a long period of time can be tough. You and other volunteers sometimes get tired. This is a fact; get ready for it. It can be pretty easy to let a bitter comment slip or a negative mood get you down. If you are working





with the media, providing a positive image is all the more important, because the media often look for a negative spin for sensationalistic journalism (*see 60*).

Below are three tips to help you maintain a positive image.

If you need to get angry, give yourself safe time and safe space to vent. For some, joking or expressing anger about the difficulties of doing social action can be a morale booster. For others, such negativity only drains energy. If you're someone who sometimes needs a good rant, please respect that your response might hurt those around you. Find some private space with your fellow ranters and go for it. Remember though, as a member of that group it is partially your responsibility to help steer the group back to positive solutions once the venting is over..

Talk with people who have had successful social actions. You'll find that most activists have periods when nothing seems to be happening and from that they still manage to snatch success. So get on the telephone and start talking (*see 52*).



Understand that some of the issues we face affect us in very personal ways. It is very difficult to be confronted with indifference or ignorance without begin offended or hurt. Be sure to find people and places to talk about the range of feelings that are bound to come up when you are doing social action. It takes courage to work publicly for very personal concerns. Remember to take time to re-charge your emotional batteries (*see 36*).



Recruiting volunteers

This section is a general guide to volunteer recruitment and management. Your chapter may or may not have a Volunteer Resources Committee. Suffice it to say: everyone at the chapter or unit has a role to play in recruiting volunteers (*see 21*). If your chapter has a Volunteer Resources Committee, it may be a good idea to seek their help. The Chapter Resources Department (Ontario Division) has material on volunteer recruitment and support that goes into much greater detail than we can here. Use this section as a guide to your work, but keep in mind that volunteer recruitment is done in conjunction with other individuals and committees at your chapter.



Recruit when you already have enough. Don't wait until you are under-peopled. If you wait until you are in fierce need of new energy, those carrying the load will be too taxed to support and train the needed new volunteers.

People often arrive with new energy, different tactics and strengths. They also need to be brought up to speed on an issue—which gives you a chance to re-visit why you are doing social action in the first place. Teaching someone skills is one way of renewing your own excitement.

If you want volunteers to get and stay involved, then you have to meet their needs. People volunteer to:

- Develop contacts and experience for work or school;
- Support the goals of the organization;
- Develop skills;
- Make a difference in the world;
- Be part of a group and meet like-minded people.

Remember that volunteers are more than free labour. They are the backbone of the MS Society, the source of its vision and the ultimate directors of the organization's purpose. A new volunteer needs support, sometimes training, and probably on-going mentorship. In exchange, the organization is one person stronger.

Find the people you need. Everyone at a chapter has a part to play in drawing in new people. Many new volunteers join after an event or after media publicity. As a social action volunteer, you can actively recruit other volunteers by:

- **Networking.** Talk about the MS Society, what your chapter or committee does and why people should get involved. Word of mouth is still one of the most powerful forms of recruitment.
- **Asking people.** Sometimes the only difference between a volunteer and a non-volunteer is someone asking.

Be ready to welcome new volunteers. Be sure to ask for a volunteer's help as soon as possible. Failure to accept offered help often leads a new volunteer to feel undervalued. That person will likely drift away, or might even get angry.



Ask your volunteers what they need. Have new volunteers fill out a volunteer intake form, or do an interview. Your volunteer director/coordinator may already do this. Here are some good questions to ask:

Note: Keep good records

Keep a good record of the names and numbers of social action volunteers along with their information. Periodically, telephone the people who have stopped coming to help. Check in with them. Sometimes, people leave because they don't feel like their presence is being noticed. If they tell you they are no longer interested, stop calling them (and remove their name from your master list), but if they just got distracted, a telephone call may bring them back. Keep your records up-to-date and coordinated with the volunteer records of other committees and work areas in your chapter. Talk with your volunteer coordinator/director about how she or he does this.

- Why did you choose to volunteer with us?
- What do you feel you have to offer as a volunteer?
- Would you rather work with a group or alone?
- Are there any areas you would prefer not to be involved in?
- What do you expect to get out of volunteering?
- Have you participated in meetings before?
- Do you have any questions?

Remember that not everybody wants to do the same thing, nor has the same amount of available time and energy. Fit the right people to the right social action jobs.

Take time to celebrate. Don't forget to ease off the work from time to time and celebrate your involvement. Support each other with volunteer appreciation fetes, consider writing up a colleague's

profile for the chapter or division newsletter, or just take the time to get together informally, maybe to share a meal and talk about something other than activism. Talk with your volunteer coordinator/director about volunteer appreciation efforts already underway at your chapter.

Being aware of timing



All issues have a time and place. You can control some factors, but sometimes, no matter what you do, your issue gets and stays stuck. While this is frustrating it certainly does happen, even to the most experienced.

Sometimes timing an action is as simple as waiting—for example, that politician who wouldn't talk with you now finds himself hungry for public support at municipal election time, and, suddenly, he is ready to meet with you.

Keeping doors open

If your action is going nowhere and every strategy seems to have failed, contact your Manager, Government Relations and Social Action for advice.

Let the people you have been working with know when you are taking a break from an issue. This is especially important when they have “gone out on a limb” to help your cause. Be as clear as you can be about your intentions, and give them a chance to “climb down”—don't leave them hanging!

Do not use personal attacks on the people or group who are blocking your action.

Acknowledge that you're of a different opinion and leave as many doors open as possible.

Then, record what you have learned in case someone other than yourself will pursue the issue later. Take your new knowledge and skills with you to your next project (*see 67*).

Always thank your contacts even when an action doesn't work out. Thank people not just for their results, but for their listening and time they've taken with you along the way (*see 60*).

Note: Understand roadblocks

The roadblocks [you face] may be symptoms of internal conflicts within the system you are approaching. If this is true, you may need to alter your plans. It's possible that simply waiting for a more opportune time will increase the chances of a successful resolution of your issue. On the other hand, you may need to approach a different level within the system or approach a different system altogether. Continue to focus on the issue and make constructive suggestions for resolving it. By offering to cooperate with the decision makers, you open the door to a positive reception of your issue. Give them a chance to change their minds gracefully.

—from *Advocacy the Process A Resource in Support of Canadians with Disabilities*, produced by The Active Living Alliance for Canadians with a Disability



Conflict management and decision making

We all know: sometimes we don't agree. At any step of the way, a disagreement can slow us down. What do we do when this happens? This section explores some conflict management strategies.

Disagreement is not necessarily a problem. When you encounter disagreement, it may be helpful to re-frame the problem. Maybe the disagreement isn't "slowing you down" but is asking you to re-evaluate where your group is going. Disagreements, when negotiated, can help clarify a group's goals.

Diversity in a group often means that your goals are informed by your differences. To get ready to encounter these differences, recognize that it takes time (sometimes a long time) to ethically, respectfully and collaboratively make a decision.

Conflict resolution should be part of a planning process even before conflict is visible.



Establish ground rules. Whether you are planning a meeting or planning long-term action, you need ground rules (*see 53*). A meeting sets ground rules with a clear agenda established with everyone's input. Similarly, all planning and decision-making processes need ground rules.

The following four questions, when answered by your group, can form part of the ground rules of any negotiation:

1. **What is the role of each person participating?** Is it the same? What group/committee/interest is each person representing?
2. **Does your action have a deadline?** Do you have to arrive at consensus and act by a particular date or time? Be realistic about this. But remember that it's not a "solution" to skip the consensus-building, because without it, a lone hero approach is the only outcome that can follow (*see 47*).



3. **How will you make decisions?** Consensus? (When everyone must agree for a decision to be taken, just one person can veto everyone else's action. But if you can all agree you'll be a stronger body after the vote.)

Vote by simple majority? (Will an outcome with just over half voting "yes" and nearly half voting "no" result in unity or dissention after the process?)



Vote by other majority rules? (For example, you can decide that in order

for the “yes” side to win, more than 75% of those present must vote “yes.” This decision-making technique can result in group stability after a vote. However, it also demands careful planning of the question to be voted upon.)

Binding arbitration?(If the “yes” and the “no” sides present arguments to a third party and then that party makes the decision will you end up with a decision that no one likes?)

4. What is appropriate behaviour in meetings and away? Is it OK to have private conversations with each other? What about discussing your business with third parties?

Take time to educate each other. If you find yourself in a conflict, an excellent question to ask yourself is: Do I really understand the other side? Below are some questions to ask the person or people with whom you are disagreeing:

- Help me understand: Why this is really important for you?
- What concerns do you have?
- What’s the real problem?
- What would be wrong with...?
- What are your fears concerning this?
- What exactly do you want from me?

And before you throw up our hands and declare a conflict unresolvable, ask: What are all possible options to solving our conflict?

For additional conflict resolution resources, see Appendices C and D.

Working with diversity and power

Because a diverse group is an effective group, it is useful to give some thought to the relative diversity of your working group.

Ask yourself these questions:

- Does everyone who has (or could have) an interest in your group know about what you do?
- Do the people in your group represent the people that you serve or speak for?
- Does everyone who gets involved in your group participate equally?



- Do you meet the needs or provide services that are equally useful and needed by everyone you should be serving?
- Does everyone in your group feel comfortable with your group's structure, activities and policies?

It would be unusual for any group to answer “yes” to all of these questions. Many groups haven't even thought about asking them. It's important to consider these issues, though, because small groups often repeat the same mistakes that are made in society at large.



We come together in groups because they are so powerful. We can accomplish more than if we worked on our own (*see 28*). However, our personal prejudices can take on new power if we enforce them by developing policy, claiming to speak on behalf of a community and creating an informal group culture.

Not having diversity in your group can limit your effectiveness and understanding of the issues you're working on. For example, if you are not involved in the Portuguese community, you may not know about the Portuguese community centre down the street. Even if you've seen it, because it is unfamiliar to you you are unlikely to have developed any networks with it. Are there people at the centre who share your needs and goals? Bringing them on-board helps them and gives you access to another group of potential supporters.

We bring specific personal experiences to a group. If everyone in the group initially shares those experiences, working in the group comes quickly and easily for us because we can assume that we agree on some basic things. But what happens when those shared experiences don't reflect our community? What happens if our assumptions exclude people from our organization? The barriers we set up may be invisible to us from the inside but they are very effective at keeping people out.

Working with power and diversity is an ongoing task because power structures are always being reinforced by society. There are a number of steps your group can go through to be more welcoming and fair, but it's important to remember that it isn't something you do once and forget about. It's an ongoing process.

Define your community. At an MS Society chapter, your community seems well defined when compared to most groups. It extends to the geographical limits of your chapter coverage, and includes people living with MS, family, friends and supporters. But in fact, your community is



also other groups facing similar challenges, and any other member of your geographical community who may want to get involved. Consider getting the census information for your area and comparing an imaginary “slice” of that population to the actual involved membership. Are there huge differences? (Age groups? Neighbourhoods? Ethnic and racial groups? Genders?) Are you missing potential allies?

Take inventory. Is your physical space:

- Accessible?
- Welcoming?
- Safe, if you have meetings at night?
- Easy to find?

What kind of atmosphere does your office have? What groups and people do you share your space and/or resources with? Are there resources you could offer other community groups? Look at the posters on the walls of your office: What races, genders and cultures are represented?

Consider your printed materials. Who are they written for? Who would understand them best? Who would identify with them best? Do they have a lot of difficult words, acronyms (for example, CCAC, NSAC or IFS) or jargon? What language are they in? What images are represented? Are they printed in a large, clear font?

Examine the group norms (that got established when no one was looking). There are probably some obvious gaps in your group; most groups have them:

- Do you assume everyone who volunteers has a computer?
- Do you have accessible washrooms?
- Do you take time-out at meetings for washroom breaks?
- Do you assume everyone knows how to facilitate a meeting?
- Do you assume that everyone knows and understands the MS Society mission and its manner of doing business?
- Do you meet at a convenient time for parents? Working people? Older people? Youth?
- Do you provide transportation for people who can't afford to come to your meetings?
- Is everyone equally informed about what's happening in the chapter?
- Can people take on a variety of roles and duties in your chapter?



- Do you provide training and opportunities for people to learn new skills and take on new roles?
- Where do you go to socialize after a meeting? An expensive restaurant? An establishment where some people may be uncomfortable, such as a bar?

The next step is to figure out why your group lacks diversity and how you can change.

Identify what you want to learn. Create a set of questions such as the following: What concerns would a person living with MS in a rural area have that would be different from someone living with MS who lives right in the town center? A heterosexual person with MS-related medical concerns versus a homosexual person? What proportion of the people in our area would be more comfortable reading our pamphlet in a language other than English?

Get input and feedback. You might think the next step would be to figure out the answers to these types of questions. However, it's actually better to ask people in your community. Communicating with people who aren't involved in your organization is very important, especially if you want to be an open, dynamic group that represents your community.

The answers will often be surprising. That's why it's important to ask these questions. Part of welcoming new people and being willing to share power is the realization that new people bring skills and experiences of which you aren't aware. Diverse involvement will change your organization. You will be more responsive to your community. This can be unpleasant because the priorities and energies of the group will change and you might find yourself missing the comfortable feeling of being in the majority. However, being aware of the need for diversity and your responsibility to pursue it will make the process of outreach easier.

Work as a team: no lone action heroes. Your immediate team includes members of the MS Society staff, the division social action committee, chapter members, and the chapter's board and committees.

On the next page is the unfortunate tale of a social activist who decided he was the Lone Ranger. That is to say, he acted on his own behalf, without doing his homework and without considering the impact of his actions on others.



Note: Lone Ranger strikes again, a true and sorry story

“Ring! Ring!”

“Hello, Lone Ranger speaking. Can you repeat that please? So you say the guy went to the local hardware store to pick up some nuts and bolts and he couldn’t get in with his wheelchair, eh! There are steps in the front and steps in the back. You don’t say! Not even a parking spot for disabled persons?! Well this calls for the Lone Ranger Social Action Hero!”

“Now let me see. Ahhh! I got it. I’ll send a letter off to the storeowner and tell him how despicable he is for not having his building accessible for disabled people. I’ll let him know that if he doesn’t do anything about it, that I’ll take this to the press plus I will send a copy of my letter to the members of Parliament.”

Lone Ranger wrote his letter to the local hardware owner and sent it in the mail. The owner of the hardware store wrote a letter to the president of the MS Society explaining that when he purchased the building for his hardware store he had looked into making it completely accessible. However, since his building was a historical building it could not be made accessible because the structure would then become unsafe. When he advertised his business, he offered free delivery to persons with disabilities, and he said that he was willing to meet people in their vehicles, take their orders and bring the goods out to them.

The owner of the hardware store was very familiar with MS. Both his wife and daughter had been diagnosed with MS and were in the chronic progressive stage of MS. The hardware store owner had made several donations to the MS Society for a number of years. His financial contribution was substantial. He informed the president of the MS Society that he felt angry with the local chapter for not checking out the facts before accusing him of not being sensitive or aware of disabled persons issues. The owner declined from making any further contributions to the MS Society.



In the above case acting as a loner didn't work! And, we at the MS Society believe that working as a group (or for the group's interest) is the most effective kind of social action.



7. Action Tools

Chapter seven discusses how to:

- Act as an advocate
- Identify key players/decision makers
- Network
- Organize a meeting
- Make a phone call
- Write a letter
- Write a fact sheet
- Meet with decisions makers
- Act as an MS Society representative
- Wrangle the media
- Create a letter campaign
- Run a petition
- Write and present a brief
- Speak up in public
- Speak as a representative of more than one organization

No guide can cover all of the social action situations you'll be facing. Instead, we assembled a package of common social action tools. Not all of these tools are as easy to pick up as others. Some tools might be familiar to you and others will require practice and help from others to master. If you are comfortable with a tool, be ready to help people who are newer to social action (*see 35*). Review them, apply them and adapt them— but above all, make these tools your own.



Act as an advocate

A significant portion of social action is advocacy. Advocacy is trying to influence decision makers—key administrators, politicians and other people in positions of power—so that they do what you want them to do. Or, so that they don't do what you don't want them to do.

Advocacy isn't forcing your opinions on someone else: it is giving the person the opportunity to change their mind.

Successful advocacy requires:

- Objectives that are clear, realistic and achievable;
- Facts that are beyond reproach;



- One voice (your group must completely agree on strategy and act as one);
- A clear sense of your priorities;
- Knowledge of the costs of what you are asking. If it increases the decision maker's budget, your work will be much harder and perhaps not possible (*see 10*).



If you are participating in a formal meeting using meeting procedure new to you, let someone else who knows the ropes do the talking until you learn the rules. Always select your most qualified people to talk, but bring people who are learning so that they get experience (*see 35*).



And, above all:

- Keep situations light, use humour, never take up personal attacks directed at you (and never direct personal attacks at others);
- Anticipate opposition and plan for it, without creating self-fulfilling prophecies that occur when we approach a situation with hostility.

Know when to make a request. Know how city hall/town hall or your regional representation works, such as when budgets are planned and announced. This knowledge takes time to build, so it helps to be experienced at the game. If you are new at social action, work with other people who are experienced. Do your networking before you dive into the fray. People already involved would love to have new support and energy. Find people who share your views and ask them for help.

Keep in mind as you work that a good political advocate understands politicians' motivations. Politicians want to:

- Get re-elected;
- Be liked;
- Feel important in their work.

As an advocate, you must capitalize on these facts. If you are asking for something that works against a politician's impulses, your job will be much harder.



Don't assume that a decision maker understands your issue. What might look like opposition could be ignorance. A big part of advocacy is educating. Always use an approach that suggests that both you and the decision maker want to solve the problem (*see 42*).



Avoid putting a politician on a hot seat. A favourite tactic of the media, because it creates exciting stories that sell papers and newscasts, is to put politicians on a hot seat. Unless finessed to perfection, this strategy will more than likely backfire. Even if you win on this one issue the politician will likely stay in office and you'll be needing his or her support in the years to come (*see 60*).



Additionally, know the difference between community involvement and social action (which is OK), and harassment (which is not) (*see 16*).



Be prepared to wait. Advocacy takes time. Sometimes a long time. Get excited about your first meeting, but keep mind that one meeting (or 10... or 100) may not fix all. Be patient. And prepare for the times while you are waiting to hear back from a committee, to file a report or get results from a legal proceeding. Some of these processes take years.

Make a timeline estimating the waits and gaps. With your group, come up with actions for these dead times. Most volunteer loss happens when people get tired waiting for something to happen. Plan, perhaps, to start a new action that complements the schedule of the longer-term action. Maybe there are short-term issues that were second priority in your planning process that you now have resources to address (*see 37, 25*).



Don't forget the thank-yous. Thank your contacts for the time, energy and attention they gave to your issue, not just for their positive results. Even if an action doesn't work out, send a "thank-you".



Volunteers have credibility. The volunteers of an agency carry more weight with decision makers than paid staff. So if you have a choice between presenting an issue yourself, or having a member of the MS Society staff make the presentation, do it yourself and ask the staff for support (*see 23*).



Identify key players and decision makers

A decision maker is someone who actually holds the power (legal, organizational, political) to make a decision. You may find yourself dealing with someone who later proves not to have decision-making power. Being able to identify the real decision makers comes with:



- Research (*see 28*);
- Time and practice;
- Patience as you learn by making mistakes;
- Learning from other's experiences (*see 35*).



Network



Good networking is making many informal strategic alliances (*see 6*). An informal alliance that someone or some group might form with your group comes out of:

- Mutual need;
- Shared knowledge;
- Shared potential gains.

That is to say: everyone must win.

When you call any other individual at any other organization, maybe for information as part of your research on an issue, always record the person's name, position and contact information (telephone, address, fax number, E-mail) (*see 30*).



Note: Share contacts

Remember to cross reference your network contacts with chapter education volunteers, the IFS director and other chapter members who may have compiled contact lists of their own.

Talk about yourself, your project and your concerns (be brief and to the point). Ask about the work that the organization does, and take a few minutes to discuss possible connections. Notice similarities in your concerns, and also any gaps that you can help fill with work you've already done (don't be pushy about this,

though). Never make promises you can't keep or offer help you can't give, or you'll lose credibility before you've gained it.



Follow up! Don't wait until you need this person's help to contact them again. A good time to call is when you have something to offer. For example, you might have information he or she wants but doesn't have (*see 41*).



When you next ask for support on an issue, you already know where that person stands and how you might work together to mutual benefit.

When networking, remember the following points:

- Keep phone calls and conversations short (*see 55*).
- Try not to “corner” people you run into at events.
- Keep excellent notes (no one likes to have to explain themselves repeatedly). Get used to carrying a notebook, or a tape recorder to help you make notes later (note that you must get permission before recording anyone).
- Be prepared before you call/visit, even if this just means taking a few minutes to clear your head and focus.
- Always identify yourself with your full name and relation to the MS Society and any other relevant organizations you represent (*see 66*).



Keep your contact lists up-to-date. Below are two types of contact lists that are essential social action tools:

- Municipal government representatives and their assistants;
- Key individuals and agencies in the cross-disability world.

Organize a meeting

All meetings that flow well and get everyone home in time for dinner have:

- An agenda (a list of topics that will take place at the meeting, often with the time given to discuss each topic) that includes regular washroom breaks (*see 42*);
- An accessible location that has easy washroom access (*see 45*);
- A time (that includes a beginning time and a closing time);
- Criteria for who is invited and is welcome to participate;
- A method for informing everyone of the meeting and its details;
- An appointed minute-taker, a facilitator (or chair) and a timekeeper.



The facilitator is someone who:



- Reviews or creates an agenda, sets times to discuss each item;
- Opens discussion with brief background and summary of what the group is asked to do (brainstorm a solution, make a decision, listen to an announcement, or accept a proposal) (*see 42*);
- Ensures that everyone has a chance to participate equally in discussion by moving discussion along when someone wants to “own” the spotlight or by encouraging the quiet ones to speak;
- Ensures that meeting stays on topic;
- Ends the discussion of an item by summarizing the decision and checking for the group’s approval

There is no perfect facilitator, but some people are not up to the challenge and allow discussions to digress, personal interests to rule, conflicts to rage and proposals to be confused. Provide training in facilitation, especially for people with little or no experience.

The minute taker is someone who:

- Writes the topics;
- Gives a brief outline of the discussion and decisions made;
- Records who has agreed to carry out a decided action;
- Circulates minutes soon after the meeting so people are reminded about tasks they’ve agreed to do.

Know when to meet and when not to meet. If the decisions, announcements and information to be presented at a meeting can be communicated another way (by fax, phone, E-mail or mail, for example) then maybe the meeting is not needed (*see 36*).



Always start on time. Begin even if everyone hasn’t arrived. If people get used to starting late, they will arrive later next time. A good bribe is to offer food, served before the meeting begins (and put away when the meeting starts) to encourage prompt attendance.

Always end on time. Ask people to commit to the full length of the meeting.

Try to set a date for the next meeting before you leave your meeting.

Standing dates are a great idea for regular meetings (for example, the last Thursday of every month). When you are set a date, remember to notify everyone who wasn’t at the prior meeting.



Make a phone call

Before you pick up the telephone (*see 31*):

- Have pen and paper at hand;
- Review what you want to communicate, including any relevant fact sheets;
- Check the name of the person you are calling and try saying it aloud if it's new to you;
- Close the door or ask those around you not to interrupt;
- Clear your head and focus.



During the call:

- Speak in a loud clear voice;
- Use plain language, avoiding jargon, acronyms and slang;
- Identify yourself using your full name and your relation to the MS Society and any other organization that you are representing in this call (*see 66*);
- State the purpose of your call, how this particular person can help you, and what you hope to learn from the call;
- Suggest meeting times/dates/locations, if appropriate;
- Keep to the point.



Before ending the call, clearly state any follow-up action you understand to result from your conversation.

If you are calling to alert someone to a problem and to request a meeting, use the fact sheet you have prepared (*see 57*) to:

- Explain why you are concerned;
- Use examples;
- Use facts;
- Suggest solutions.



After the call, take a few minutes to make your notes and any necessary changes to contact information.



Send an E-mail

Before you turn on your computer:

- Review what you want to communicate;
- Review any relevant fact sheets (*see 57*).



There are many different E-mail styles. Many early Internet users argue that E-mail is best suited for a light, informal style (loose punctuation, capitalization, and forms of address/salutation). More recent Internet

users argue that E-mail should be structured as formally as a letter.

Note: E-Mail etiquette

A rule of thumb is that if you name anyone in an E-mail, put them on your “cc” list. If you are uncomfortable sending this E-mail to them, then you may want to re-think your E-mail. Your E-mail may reach that person, because once copies are in circulation you can’t recall them. Consider also that most computer archives are searchable by key word. If your E-mail ends up in a public archive it could turn up in a search result *years* after you sent it.

Regardless of what style you are most comfortable with, make certain your E-mail:

- Uses plain language, avoiding jargon, acronyms and slang;
- Identifies you, using your full name and your relation to the MS Society and any other organization you are representing in this E-mail;
- States your purpose for E-mailing (are you seeking information? asking to meet?) and how this particular person can help you;
- Keeps to the point.

Since one advantage of E-mail over a phone call is that you can have a colleague look over your writing before you send it, take advantage of this feature if it helps you feel more confident. Only type in the addressee after you have had time to evaluate the post’s content. An unaddressed E-mail can never be sent by accident. We tend to think of E-mail as less permanent than a paper letter, but an E-mail can be forwarded to many people just by clicking a button.



Write a letter

A letter:

- Uses plain language;
- Identifies you and your connection to the issue;
- Clarifies the issue;
- Explains why you are concerned;
- Uses examples and facts (that you have checked and asked others within the MS Society to double check);
- Suggests solutions;
- Explains why and how these are solutions;
- Asks to meet to solve the problem together.

Note: Ask for help if you need it

Letter writing is a snap for some and a chore for others. For some the words flow effortlessly while others rack their brains for the right word or phrase. If letter writing is not your strength, find someone in your chapter who has this easy way with words and invite them to work with you. You don't have to do it all. We all have different skills to bring to what we do together.

A letter is written on chapter letterhead and should speak for all of the membership. Be sure you have the support of the board before you sign a letter on their behalf. Let your division Manager, Government Relations and Social Action know about your letter as well; she or he may have suggestions or information regarding successes of another chapter with the same issue (*see 28*).



Include everyone mentioned in the letter on the “cc” line. Everyone you think should be aware of the situation should simply receive a copy of the letter without their names appearing in the letter.

Write a fact sheet

Sometimes, having just the right thing to say at the right moment is the best act of advocacy. Even the most eloquent of speakers needs help though, and fact sheets are some of the best help you can get. Fact sheets are extremely good when you have to think fast and respond with confidence. The MS Society has some useful fact sheets. Contact your division Manager, Government Relations and Social Action to see if he or she has what you need. You can use these, or use these to create your own. A good fact sheet is something you use to refresh your memory, is



easy to carry with you, and helps you find just the right way of putting things. Or, you can copy it and give to someone else as a quick summary of an issue.

While the MS Society's official fact sheets are often relevant, it is useful to prepare a very specific sheet that summarizes your group's issue exactly. You might find that if your issue is on-going, later you will formalize this early draft into an official fact sheet published by the Society. Regardless, having it now is essential. When you are communicating your actions and plans to other chapter members and the Manager, Government Relations and Social Action, include your fact sheet to have others double check your facts.

Note: Prepare in advance.

All fact sheets printed with the MS Society name and/or logo must be approved by the MS Society (chapter or division office, depending upon the issue), so prepare in advance to allow for this process.

Your fact sheet should:

- Use plain language;
- Identify your group and its connection to the issue;
- Clarify the issue;
- Explain why your group is concerned;
- Use examples and facts to make a point;
- Suggest solutions;
- Explain why and how these are solutions;
- Succinctly state your group's position in a phrase.

Meet with decisions makers



Long before you meet, write up your fact sheet (*see 57*) and your supporters list. Include the names and organizations you've talked to when researching your issue (*see 28*). If your concern is on-going and your social action efforts are increasing, you might consider working on getting some high-profile and respected names on this list.



Just before the meeting, meet with your group in a quiet private area to establish your game plan and to review material you've brought. Assign your best or most experienced speaker to be the primary speaker.

Everyone else will act as "recorders" and resources to help the meeting stay on track. If you are meeting with one person, two people should go



to the meeting. If you are meeting with several people then three people is a good number. Only bring more people to a small meeting in urgent circumstances. Many people in a small room are threatening and can shift the situation into conflict (*see 49*).



Bring to the meeting:

- Your supporters list;
- A fact sheet on your issue to leave behind;
- Any related MS Society fact sheets;
- A pen and paper to take notes.

During the meeting:

- Speak loudly and clearly;
- Present your point of view;
- Wait to hear the full response to any question you ask;
- Wait until the speaker has completed his or her thought before responding;
- Make sure someone takes notes and records pertinent details of the discussion.

And, when in doubt: say nothing!

Meeting strategies. If you are told:

“No one else has ever complained of this.”

Present your supporters list. It’s a good idea to include high-profile respected people (*see 28*).



“The issue isn’t a problem.”

Present what you know clearly and calmly, using facts and figures. Point out how your concerns fall under their influence or mandate. Turn the tables: ask them to prove the issue isn’t a problem.

“Resources/money is tight.”

Show how resolving the issue will save money. If you can, offer to assist with fund raising and sourcing funding.



“Sorry, we can’t help you, try the next department.”

Point out that the issue falls under the decision maker’s influence/mandate.

If talking to someone else will help, try it. Set reasonable deadlines for action (and know that you’ll have to do periodic check-ups).

At the close of the meeting review what you have discussed and confirm any agreements or follow-up actions. Then, in a private place, compare perceptions with others in your group. Take notes and plan your next move.

Send a letter to the person after the meeting, thanking them for their time and attention. Use the letter to re-cap your key points and desired outcomes (*see 41*).



Wrangle the media

Involving the media requires, at minimum:

- A media strategy;
- A media contact list;
- A press release.



Media strategy. Develop your media strategy in partnership with your chapter; division Manager, Government Relations and Social Action; and the Ontario Division office (*see 51*). A media strategy includes your rationale for using the media to publicize an issue or concern, all of the facts, arguments and possible solutions you will be communicating to the media, who will be responsible for acting as spokesperson (*see 9*), and a list of media contacts to whom you’ll be sending your media release.



In a strong media campaign:

- The issue is timely and media worthy;
- Your facts are beyond reproach;
- Your group is consistent and speaks with one voice;
- You present your issue in a manner that grabs attention (*see 33*);
- You are well-networked and persistent with your media contacts.



Media contact list. A media contact list is the up-to-date fax, phone and E-mail addresses of local media sources, and the specific

people/titles responsible for the type of information you are releasing. For example, it gives the full name and direct fax or phone number of the news editor or health and lifestyle editor of a particular newspaper. One media list does not fit all.

If you don't have a media contact list: network! Call up like-minded organizations that would have the type of list you need and ask for a copy; offer to update an older list in exchange. Once you have a list, keep it updated by calling the outlet and asking them to give you the names and contact information of their various staffers (*see 52*).



Press release. A press release should be printed or faxed on your letterhead, addressed to the exact person at the outlet you are trying to reach, dated and titled.

It should contain the five W's (who, what where, when and why), as close to the beginning as possible. Keep it short and to the point. Include quotable sound bites (compact phrases that communicate your idea in a few seconds).

Organize a letter campaign

All letters you send as part of a letter-writing campaign should be legible. Some experts argue that handwritten is best, as it tells the decision maker that the writer cares enough to make the effort. Others argue the same about computer or typewritten letters.

A campaign letter should tell the reader something about yourself, such as where you work or volunteer, what you do, and how long you have been working or volunteering there. Outline the problem as it affects you personally or how it affects people close to you. Specify the action you want the decision maker to take.

Prepare and circulate a sample letter specific to your concerns. Include facts that respondents' letters should contain, and addressee information. Or, to help people understand what is expected of them, you can create a help sheet that explains:

- How to write a letter (you can copy this section);
- What this letter should contain (include details from your fact sheet, or a copy of the fact sheet);
- To whom it should be addressed.



Run a petition

A petition is a formal declaration of a concept or demand. When someone signs a petition they are indicating that they completely agree with that declaration.

It consists of:

- A preamble, that states who you are and background to the problem;
- A demand or demands: your concerns and your proposed solutions;
- Space for people to fill out their name (printed), signature, mailing and residence address (a decision maker may check postal codes, because residents from outside the area are not as relevant to him or her), telephone number, and/or E-mail;

It may also use tick-boxes. Signers can tick the boxes to indicate that they consent to your use of their contact information for other purposes (for

Note: Prevent a classic Internet problem.

If your petition doesn't include a "return by" date that states the calendar date, including the year, it could remain in circulation for years (we are not joking), collecting unsuspecting signatures for a long-dead issue. Avoid this! Include the year on all Internet calls for support. Similarly, include location information (even on postings circulated locally), because the Internet is international by its very nature.

example, for follow-up contact). Note that because of privacy laws, the names on petitions cannot be used for any other purpose, unless the signer indicates otherwise (see the *Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada Privacy and Confidentiality Policy* or contact the Vice President, Communications for more information).

Although the *Social Action Guidelines* suggest petitions as a social action strategy, petitions are often unsuccessful: a *successful* petition must collect many more names than the number of letters that would constitute a successful letter writing campaign.

The names on the petition usually have

to make up a significant portion of an electorate before decision makers take notice.

If you are distributing a petition on paper, be certain to include return information (your mailing address, telephone number, fax number, e-mail) on each sheet.



If you are using other mechanical means of collecting signatures (faxed forms, e-mail, or web site petitions), a return E-mail address is *not* enough. Include your geographical address/region and an explanation of who you want to sign the petition. Signatures from Scandinavia might be fun, but likely won't impress your local politician.

Write and present a brief

The purpose of a brief is to:

- Criticize existing conditions;
- Suggest steps to remedy a situation;
- Initiate a project;
- Inform and persuade.

When planning a brief, be certain to do the following:

- Consider all the ideas that may come out of your group.
- Select the main issues (*see 25*).
- Select two or three people (no more) to research and write the brief.
- Decide who will present the brief. Pick a person with a good speaking voice and presentation style.
- Decide who will receive your brief. This determines your language and your approach. Is your intended audience made up of scientists? Lawyers? Advocacy workers? (*see 52*)
- Consider assigning a contact person or “expert” to avoid confusion. This person should have voice mail. When decision makers contact people other than this contact person (for example, a board member they know), they should be re-directed to the contact person. In order to ensure this re-direction occurs, it is essential that the group writing the brief works to keep all board members informed (*see 60*).
- Decide on your tactics, including the style of presentation and whether you'll need a specialist to present. For a private presentation, present with two to three people. For a public presentation, the more who come the better.



As you write:

- Collect all available material and information;
- Include all necessary factual material;
- Use easy to understand words, concise sentences and simple adjectives;
- Make statistics understandable. For example, round off any decimals.

When editing the structure and form of the brief, be sure to do the following:

- Ensure that it is typewritten, clean copy.
- Be clear that diagrams, maps and plans are drawn to scale. Check zoning regulations if necessary.
- Prepare a realistic budget. If your audience is knowledgeable you'll lose credibility with inaccuracies.
- Be certain that your brief has all of its parts.



On presentation day:

- Be on time.
- Dress appropriately. Unusual clothing will distract your listeners.
- Have copies of the brief to leave with listeners, along with any background materials.
- Introduce members of your group or explain whom and how many you represent.
- Compliment the listener(s) on taking steps to remedy a situation even if its only by listening to you.
- Deliver your brief with assurance and confidence in the importance of your message. You must be sold to sell someone else (*see 9*).
- Be prepared to answer questions.
- Have consultants available if necessary.
- Be respectful.



After the presentation:

- Arrange for follow-up meetings.
- Ask for a report on actions taken.
- Offer assistance in research.
- Keep in touch by letter or telephone.
- Report to your group.

And, don't forget to send notes to thank all the people who supported your issue, even if that support was only by listening to you!

Sections of a brief. When writing a brief, divide it into the following sections:

- 1. Preamble.** States background and subject matter.
- 2. Statement of the problem.** Says who it concerns and why, and describes the causes and contributing factors to the problem.
- 3. Proposed solution.** Lay this out in a comprehensive form, simply stated. Follow the solution through in step-by-step form.
- 4. Expected results.** Enthusiastically describe results to the community or cause. You are selling an idea (*see 10*).
- 5. Budget.** Include all costs, suggested revenues, available grants, volunteer labour, “in-kind” costs (the amount a service or supply is worth, but that you haven't paid for with cash). Do not suggest anything unless you have verified its availability (*see 21*).
- 6. Summary of recommendations.** Sum up your proposed solutions and related issues. Do not introduce any new ideas here.
- 7. Bibliography.** Footnote your statistics and direct quotes throughout the brief, and provide detailed references in the bibliography.
- 8. Approval of brief.** The group that you represent must approve the brief and note this in the brief itself, otherwise it carries no weight.



Speak up in public

Speaking up for something you believe in is sometimes intimidating, especially in an unplanned instance where you do not have a prepared speech. These are some rules to follow, whether or not your speech is planned:

- Do enough research on your topic that you know your facts. If you are unsure about a fact, do not use it.
- Carry and know your fact sheets (especially ones you have made for a special issue) (*see 57*).
- Always introduce yourself with your full name and your relation to the MS Society (*see below*).
- Talk about what you do at the MS Society, and the reasons for doing social action. If you are convinced of its importance, you can convince others of its importance too.
- Keep terms simple and avoid long-winded explanations.
- Talk to as many people as possible: friends, family and professional associates, as well as decision makers. They might want to hear about your social action activities and how they can participate. Ask them to help.



Wear two or more hats

Sometimes we represent more than one organization. Given the importance of networking and alliances, you might find yourself wearing your MS Society hat and that of another group or agency. This can be a great thing, but it does mean you have to be extra careful in all of your actions and responsibilities. Always state clearly who you are representing when you speak. Don't assume people know. Take a few minutes now to look up the *MS Society of Canada Conflict of Interest Guidelines*, or read a summary of these guidelines in Appendix B (*see also 7*).



8. Evaluation

Even though evaluation is rarely a discrete step that comes after you've completely achieved a social action goal, we include it as its own chapter to encourage you to remember to do it. This chapter includes checklists and hints on sharing and comparing your experience with the MS Society community.

Evaluate!

Try asking these questions using a questionnaire or in a brainstorming session:

- Was the action successful?
- What worked best?
- What didn't work?
- Were there any results that surprised us? What didn't we know when we were planning that we know now?
- Would we do the same thing again?
- Was there anyone we could have worked with or contacted that we know of now who would help us or work with us next time?
- If someone came up to us today and said they were about to embark on a similar project, what would our advice to them be? How are we going to tell them? (*see 28*)

Leave your answers to these questions where others can find them, as part of official chapter records. For example, include them in board meeting minutes as an attachment of your report to the board. Make it easier for the next set of advocates to learn from your successes and mistakes.



These are some other ways to share your experience:

- Talk to your Manager, Government Relations and Social Action, your Regional Manager, Individual and Family Services, or your regional representative of the Ontario Social Action Committee. Fax all three people a copy of your summary sheet (*see 29*).
- Write up the story about of your social action and share it with the various editors of the division newsletters.
- Bring your story to the spring and fall IFS training workshops and the social action workshop at the Ontario Division Fall Conference and Annual General Meeting.
- Talk about your experiences with new volunteers who are learning the ropes (*see 35*).
- Look for new ways to share your story and what you have learned.



Appendices

In this section you'll find:

- **Appendix A: The *MS Society Social Action Guidelines***
- **Appendix B: Other MS Society policies you should know about**
- **Appendix C: Other leadership and conflict resolution text resources**
- **Appendix D: Other community supports for conflict resolution**

Appendix A: MS Society of Canada Social Action and Advocacy Guidelines

Approved by the National Board of Directors November 28, 1992:

The Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada (MSSC) recognizes that social action and advocacy are legitimate and necessary activities in which its divisions, chapters and members can be engaged to assist people who have multiple sclerosis when denied full access to all aspects of Canadian society.

ADVOCACY

Advocacy within the MSSC is understood as efforts to support, empower and/or act on behalf of an individual who has multiple sclerosis.

Advocates are intervenors who act on behalf of an individual who has asked for assistance. Advocates are not to use their influence to sway the decision of the individual nor put forward their own opinions in place of the individual requesting assistance. When a person requesting assistance is engaged in a personal dispute with another person or organization where responsibility for the situation is unclear, the MSSC advocate will not attempt to mediate, but will try only to ensure that the person requesting assistance is treated fairly.

The Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada recognizes that relatives and friends of individuals who have MS can often be effective advocates.

SOCIAL ACTION

Social action within the MSSC is understood as those efforts designed to improve legislation, policies, practices, opportunities and/or attitudes that affect people with MS in general.

It is well known that government action at the municipal, provincial or federal levels affects all of us in all parts of our lives. Coupled with the intertwining of government decisions and regulations has been the growing desire and need on the part of most people to have more control over their lives. And since it is difficult for just one individual to effect change or to protest an unjust law, it has been natural for people with like needs to join together to make their voices heard.

Non-governmental practices and actions also greatly affect all of us. Actions by corporations, businesses and private individuals have a direct impact, positively and negatively, on how people are able to carry out their lives. Again, it is natural and useful for people with like needs to join together to try to change unjust practices and actions so that all of us can participate fully in all aspects of life in Canada.

The following Social Action and Advocacy Guidelines are designed to serve three purposes:

- to indicate which level of the Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada (chapter, division or national) has responsibility for what activities;
- to indicate expectations regarding accountability and communications, and;
- to identify various strategies for involvement in social action and advocacy, and the implications of each.

A. ADVOCACY

I. Levels of Responsibility

Advocacy on behalf of, and in partnership with, individuals who have MS is normally carried out by Individual and Family Services personnel at all three levels of the MSSC in a quiet, persistent, non-confrontational manner in keeping with the definition of advocacy and advocates noted above.

- a) Chapters will act primarily in the context of local/community/municipal issues.
- b) Divisions will act primarily in the context of provincial issues. They may act in areas of local concern where no chapter exists.
- c) National will act primarily in the context of national/international issues.

II Accountability and Communication

- a) Chapters need not always consult with their division office prior to

undertaking advocacy efforts on behalf of and in partnership with an individual who has MS. However, if there appears to be a greater risk than usual in a particular situation, or if the circumstances have not been previously encountered by the chapter, the chapter should seek advice from the division Director of Individual and Family Services.

b) Divisions may undertake advocacy on behalf of and in partnership with an individual who has MS, especially if the individual is not represented by a chapter. If the individual is a chapter member, the division should inform and consult with the appropriate chapter regarding the advocacy being undertaken.

The division Individual and Family Services staff may seek advice from the National Director of Individual and Family Services when advocacy on behalf of an individual is indicated in more unusual or difficult circumstances.

c) The national office may occasionally undertake advocacy on behalf of and in partnership with an individual who has MS in consultation with the appropriate division. The national office may also undertake advocacy for individuals who need assistance on an international issue.

III Advocacy Strategies

At all levels of the MSSC, advocacy may include gathering information, research, telephone calls, letters, assistance with letter writing and personal visits to the appropriate decision makers whom one is attempting to influence. The focus should be on assisting persons with MS to advocate effectively on their own behalf and only advocating for them directly when the situation warrants and when the MSSC is requested to advocate directly.

B. SOCIAL ACTION

I. Levels of Responsibility

a) Chapters

- Chapters will act primarily in the context of local/community/municipal issues.
- Chapters will consult and keep their respective division office informed about issues in which the chapters are involved.

- Chapter efforts may include:
 - social action resources for individuals to access (newsletters, books, audio-visuals, etc.);
 - coordination and collaboration with other agencies;
 - communication with local government and corporations, etc.;
 - Chapters will communicate with local federal and provincial legislators regarding issues of a federal or provincial scope only when requested by their division.
- b) Division
- Divisions will act primarily in areas of province-wide concern. They may act in areas of local concern where no chapter exists.
 - The division will assist social action activities at the chapter level and will solicit suggestions and input from chapters about provincial issues.
 - Divisions will keep the national office informed about significant social action issues of province-wide concern.
 - Division activities may include:
 - maintenance of appropriate social action resources such as newsletters, books and audio-visuals;
 - coordination and collaboration with various provincial not-for-profit agencies with similar interests, and provincial government agencies;
 - communication with MLA's/MNA's (government and opposition), particularly those responsible for social services and health concerns;
 - coordination of province-wide social action campaigns.
 - communicate with corporations that operate only within the respective divisional boundaries.
- c) National
- The Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada will coordinate action in areas that involve the federal government or corporate entities operating in more than one province.
 - The national office will assist social action activities at the division level and will seek input from the divisions.

- National activities may include:
 - coordination and collaboration with similar national agencies;
 - communication with federal government and corporations of a national or multi-province scope;
 - coordination of nation-wide social action campaigns.
 - maintenance and provision of social action resources such as newsletters, books, audio-visuals, legal actions and opinions, pending legislation, etc.

II. Accountability and Communication

Chapters and units are directly accountable and responsible to their respective division offices. The divisions are directly accountable and responsible to the national level of the Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada. Well planned social action activities at any level will have a positive impact on the entire organization's work and on our capacity to achieve our goals.

- a) At all levels close ongoing cooperation and communication between Individual and Family Services and Social Action departments/committees and the appropriate Executive Committee or Board of Directors is imperative.
- b) Social action activities should be undertaken after careful planning and preparation (recognizing that, on occasion, an issue requires a quick response). Preparation includes defining the issue, gathering information, and identifying supporters. Planning includes identifying possible solutions, choosing a route or method, developing an action plan, and assigning tasks.

One or two persons—normally the president of the respective organizational level and the senior staff person—must be designated by the appropriate board of directors as official spokesperson(s) for the chapter or division in situations involving social action. When time permits, appropriate board prior approval should be obtained before the chapter, unit, division or national Social Action Committee comments or reacts to a particular issue or event. Care must be taken that statements to the public are in keeping with the positions and policies of the Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada. Written statements should be on the appropriate level's letterhead.

In situations where social action is contemplated, chapters are expected to seek prior input from their respective division, because of the

potential for political fall-out. This allows division staff to monitor social action throughout the division and thus be in a better position to advise chapters and to coordinate activities that affect more than one chapter.

Divisions are expected to keep the national office informed (usually through the chairs of the Social Action Committees and/or the designated staff person) about significant social action issues of province-wide concern. In turn, the national office is expected to keep the divisions informed about significant social action issues of national concern.

III. Social Action Strategies

- a) Initially, social action is done in a low key, cooperative manner, through collaboration and networking with other agencies, and through contacts with decision makers (government, industry, unions, institutions, etc.) by letter, telephone, and personal meetings. The media should not be involved at this stage.
- b) A second level of social action involves more persuasive methods, including making views public by working through the media to communicate a stance or position to the general public, letter-writing campaigns to politicians, petitions, etc. Confrontation should be avoided since this approach tends not to lead to action or to attitudinal change as effectively as a cooperative approach.
- c) A third level of intensity may occasionally be called for, in situations wherein the decision makers have resisted changes that are deemed important to the well-being of people with MS as a group. Actions such as court cases and demonstrations fall into this category. They should be considered only as a last resort. Such action requires the approval of the National Board of Directors or National Executive Committee. Care must be taken to ensure that such methods are in proportion to the gravity of the problem and that those representing the Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada continue to do so in a positive, constructive and courteous manner. Otherwise, public support will quickly be eroded.
- d) Civil disobedience of any kind is not condoned or sanctioned by the Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada and must not be undertaken in the name of the Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada.

From time to time, the Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada will find it advantageous to communicate and cooperate with other organizations that are seeking similar goals in social action issues. The various levels of

the MS Society (chapter, unit, division, national) will keep their respective boards of directors and executive committees fully informed about these activities and in addition will share information with the other levels of the MS Society in the appropriate manner (e.g., national to divisions, divisions to national; divisions to chapters, chapters to division).

N.B. It is acknowledged that individual members of the MS Society are free to engage in social action activities on their own, so long as they do not purport to represent the Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada

Appendix B: Other MS Society policies you should know about

Appendix B contains summaries of the following documents:

- *Conflict of Interest Guidelines*
- *Confidentiality Policy*
- *Policy on Receiving Financial Support from the Pharmaceutical Industry and Medically-Related Products Industry (Short name: Pharmaceutical Policy)*

Conflict of Interest Guidelines. Approved by the National Board of Directors, November 26, 1994.

Rationale:

In order to maintain the high level of public support and respect that the MS Society of Canada enjoys, it is essential that the affairs and business of the MS Society be conducted professionally, objectively and without interference, or the appearance of interference, arising from personal interests of the individuals involved in making decisions for the organization.

In order to achieve this goal, the MS Society requires that all directors and officers of the MS Society refrain from placing themselves in a position that could foreseeably produce a conflict of interest or the perception of a conflict of interest or which could potentially give rise to a conflict of interest between their own self-interest and the best interests of the MS Society.

Further Information: The *Conflict of Interest Guidelines* include information on disclosure, prohibition on voting, and documentation. It is not intended to prohibit a volunteer from working with the MS Society.

Please contact Chapter Resources for a full copy of the guidelines and the agreement to be signed. Chapter Resources is also available to assist any chapter/unit board of directors with a conflict of interest situation.

Confidentiality Policy. Approved by the National Board of Directors, June 10, 1989.

The maintenance of confidentiality is a key requirement of staff members and volunteers working for the MS Society of Canada. The purpose of confidentiality is to safeguard information about people who have multiple sclerosis. The following is the MS Society's policy in this area:

Definitions:

- A) Confidential information - This is any information that could identify a person as having multiple sclerosis. This could include: name, address, phone number, any physical, personal, family or financial information.
- B) Individual and Family Services Records - This includes any or all written or printed lists, records, files or data collection materials.

No policy on confidentiality can be established which will fit the needs and circumstances of all persons with MS. It should be stressed that the maintenance of confidentiality requires tact, common sense and an appreciation of privacy.

Volunteers and staff in chapters, divisions and national have an obligation and responsibility to safeguard the individual's right to confidentiality with regard to such information. This can refer to any information spoken, printed or written.

Further Information: A copy of the full *Confidentiality Policy* and the agreement to be signed is available from either Chapter Resources or Individual and Family Services.

Volunteer Code of Conduct Policy. Approved by the Ontario Division Board of Directors, August 28, 2000. Implementation for all chapter/unit board volunteers September 1, 2001

Background & Rationale: Volunteers have a fundamental role in the operation and success of the Multiple Sclerosis Society. Foremost among their responsibilities is their role as representatives of the MS Society of Canada. As volunteers with the MS Society, individuals are expected to conduct themselves in a manner that will promote the mission and goals of the society. However, there have been situations in which volunteers

have acted in ways that reflect poorly upon the MS Society and/or affect its activities. The Volunteer Code of Conduct provides chapters, units and the Ontario Division Office with clear expectations to be communicated to all volunteers along with a means of enforcing the code through discipline and/or dismissal if necessary.

Elements of the *Volunteer Code of Conduct*: Volunteers will be asked to sign a form signifying that they have read the *Volunteer Code of Conduct* and agree to abide by the standards outlined in the *Code*. The *Volunteer Code of Conduct* will be enforced through Discipline and Dismissal procedures. These procedures recognize the right of all volunteers to be treated in a fair and equitable way when the performance of their duties or their individual behavior is at issue. Note that the formal use of the discipline and dismissal process is intended to be used only when less formal methods of communication/resolution have been exhausted. The Chapter Resources Department is responsible for ensuring compliance with the Volunteer Code of Conduct.

Further Information: Please contact your Chapter Resources representative at 1-800-268-7582.

***Policy on Receiving Financial Support from the Pharmaceutical Industry and Medically-Related Products Industry (Short name: Pharmaceutical Policy)*.** Approved by the National Board of Directors, June 5, 1999.

Rationale: The policy outlines how the Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada, its volunteers and staff must conduct themselves when soliciting and receiving support from pharmaceutical and medically-linked products companies. A important part of this policy is the requirement that the MS Society must control the presentation of unbiased, accurate information presented at all industry-sponsored educational sessions and in educational materials whether printed or electronic.

The policy applies to all levels of the Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada. It includes detailed examples of how to abide by the guidelines in specific situations such as educational programs, event and fundraising activities, sponsorships and displays at conferences and workshops. Following this policy allows the MS Society to ethically accept funding and other support from pharmaceutical and medically-linked industries. It is recognized that acceptance of this support enhances the MS Society's ability to provide services to people with MS and family members and to fund research into the cause, prevention and treatment of MS.

Further Information: Please contact the Communications Department

for a full copy of the policy. Communications staff are also available to assist any chapter/unit board of directors with approved wording of credit lines and disclaimers which must be used on publications and other materials produced with pharmaceutical or medically-linked industry support.

Appendix C: Other leadership and conflict resolution text resources

Bolton, R. *People Skills: How to Assert Yourself, Listen to Others and Resolve Conflicts* Toronto (Simon and Schuster). Clear and practical guide to topics listed in title.

Bush and Folger. *The Promise of Mediation: Responding to Conflict Through Empowerment and Recognition* (Jossey-Bass). Outlines an approach to mediation that de-emphasizes simple achievement of a settlement and emphasizes disputant self-determination and the development of their capacity to relate to one another.

Cornelius, Helena and Shoshana Faire. *Everyone Can Win: How to Resolve Conflict* (Simon and Schuster). Sourcebook on recognizing and resolving conflict.

Fisher, Roger and Scott Brown. *Getting Together: Building Relationships as We Negotiate* (Penguin Books). Sequel to the bestseller *Getting to Yes* (see below)

Fisher, Roger and William Ury. *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreements Without Giving In* (Penguin). Short easy to read. The book that introduced the concepts of principled negotiation.

Hoffman, Ben. *Conflict Power, Persuasion: Negotiating Effectively* (Captus Press) Description of negotiation analysis and implementation.

Macbeth, Fiona and Nic Fine *Playing with Fire: Creative Conflict Resolution For Young Adults* (New Society Publishing). Excellent guide for anyone working in groups (with adults too). Contains useful exercises.

Moore, Chistopher. *The Mediation Process: Practical Strategies for Resolving Conflict* (Jossey-Bass). Very thorough description of theory and practical strategy for mediation in many contexts.

Tannen, Deborah. *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation* (Ballantine Books). Detailed description and case examples of conversational style differences between men and women and the misunderstandings they create.

Appendix D: Other community supports for conflict resolution

Call these organizations for workshops, written materials, training or other information about conflict resolution:

- Family Mediation Canada, 123 Woolwich St, Guelph, ON N1H 3V1. Phone (519) 836-7750 fax (519) 836-7204. Membership includes membership in Ontario Association for Family Mediation.
- The Network: Interaction for Conflict resolution. Conrad Grebel College, Waterloo, ON N2L 3C6. Phone (519) 885-0806. National resource organization for everyone interested in dispute resolution in Canada. Membership includes membership in Society for Conflict Resolution in Ontario (SCRO).
- The Society for Conflict Resolution in Ontario. A non-profit professional organization devoted to fostering alternative methods of resolving conflict in the public sector. SCRO members represent a wide spectrum of consultants, academics, lawyers, and public officials. For information and membership, contact The Network (above).