



# Community Media Mobilizing Guide for Policy Change

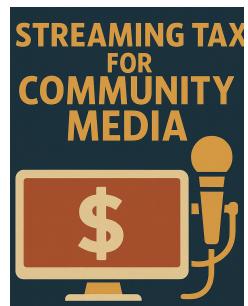
As US Community Media Centers contend with sharp declines in cable TV revenue and the erosion of public interest benefits, there is an **active effort to modernize cable TV regulations and secure new revenue sources.**

The good news is that we have a policy foundation to build upon! **New legislative policy alternatives** are emerging from several states along with model legislation developed by [Alliance for Communications Democracy](#) with the support of the Alliance for Community Media. You'll find policy examples in *Exhibit 1*.

This **Mobilizing Guide** is designed to help you chart a course to the passage of new laws in your state that support public interest requirements and sustainable revenue sources for community media centers and local media allies. We hope you will leverage these recommendations and **keep us posted** about what you are learning and what is working so we can share with each other as we enter into the post cable-TV era together.

## 1. Define the Goal & Policy Objective

**First, identify the policy change you seek.** What is the problem you are trying to solve? To make up for declining cable TV subscriptions with new revenue sources? To ensure public access to modern features of the cable or broadband network?



**Start with research.** Identify models that make sense for your community. Gather intelligence from community media allies at the front lines of policy

change in the US (*Exhibit 1*). In 2025, the Alliance for Communications Democracy (ACD) investigated a number of policy options for various revenue alternatives and drafted model legislation for a streaming excise tax to benefit community media, local franchising authorities and states. This draft legislation is based on the work underway in New York and Massachusetts.

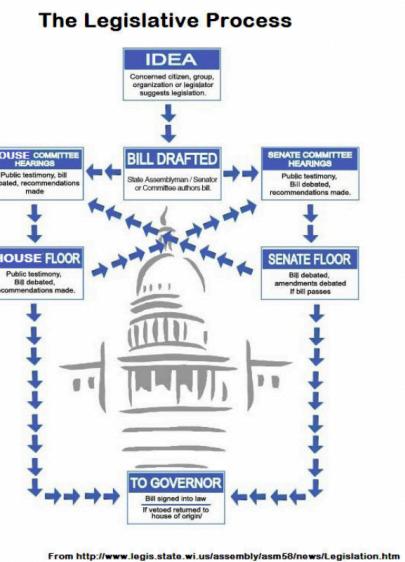
There are other legislative successes worthy of consideration. Vermont has secured annual General Fund grants to make up for lost cable TV revenue. Maine updated their franchise laws to include a definition of Video Service Providers that includes, with few exceptions, any entity that owns facilities in the public right of way and offers a channel selection application. And in a significant advance, Minnesota recently legalized the franchising of local broadband services.

**Understand how your state's regulatory and legislative processes work.** Learn how your state regulates communications and telecommunications services. Is this a state level legislative or regulatory process? City/town level? Regional/ county-wide? What levels of government regulation or legislation needs to be addressed in your policy?

**Clarify your win condition: What does success look like?** If, for example, you are looking for a new revenue source, how much are you looking for? Do you have a clear picture of that funding source, how much public benefit your proposed policy will yield, and how it might be distributed?

**What is a realistic time frame for achieving your goal?** Plan on a multi-year process that builds on best practices, trusted relationships (old and new) and *unrelenting endurance* throughout a political and often capricious legislative process. How long will it take to get ready? How long are your legislative sessions? (See also, *Gather Sufficient Resources*).

Moving through the organizing and mobilizing process, you'll **refine your goal**



**further** and draft legislation that establishes (*for example*) the precise structure of a streaming tax (e.g., % of subscription revenue, per-subscriber fee, or excise tax), how revenue will be distributed to PEG and other vested interests (e.g., state and local government, local journalism, community radio).



## 2. Identify Your Leadership Team

While your leadership team may grow as you build out your coalition, get started with a small group of leaders with a high capacity for risk and uncertainty who are willing to take up this work in addition to their daily responsibilities. **Look for values driven allies**, effective communicators, respected in the field with strong networks. Ideally, this core group represents community media centers of different budget sizes and geography.

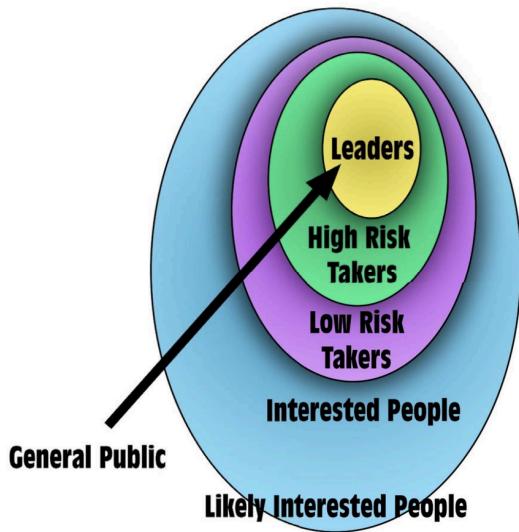
ACM's Mike Wassenaar offers this advice: "Find allies with common values and interests. It's important to have a shared understood strategy about how to build power together."

As you build out your coalition, you may choose to expand the core team to include key allies from related sectors such as local government, community radio or local news.

From this group and others that you identify as you move forward, make sure that you start to identify **key positions** for your campaign. Examples: Coalition Lead, Legislative Lead, Field Outreach Lead, Data/ Tech Lead and Communications Lead.

Start your work together with **regular meetings** to review and modify this mobilizing guide and build your campaign.

### 3. Build Your Coalition



**Our legislative success depends on the strength of our relationships.** Fortunately, relationship building is the core of our work as community media makers. From our viewers to volunteer producers to local, regional and state leaders, we have spent many years serving the information and community needs of our communities. In most cases, we have a solid foundation from which to build a coalition of supporters. It is important to understand that these people will become involved for different reasons and will contribute at different levels.

*(Image Courtesy of Action Circles)*

In the [Action Circles model](#) that we follow in Vermont, these circles of involvement start with **leaders, highly risk takers, low risk takers, interested people and likely interested people**. We don't have to build a large coalition, but we want it to include people at various levels of commitment who are willing to advance the cause.

Include community media centers, local journalists, community radio, libraries, arts organizations, digital equity coalitions, nonprofits, users of PEG services and public interest groups. Recruit governmental partners (mayors, town managers, city councils, county leaders) who rely on PEG channels for meeting coverage and emergency communications.

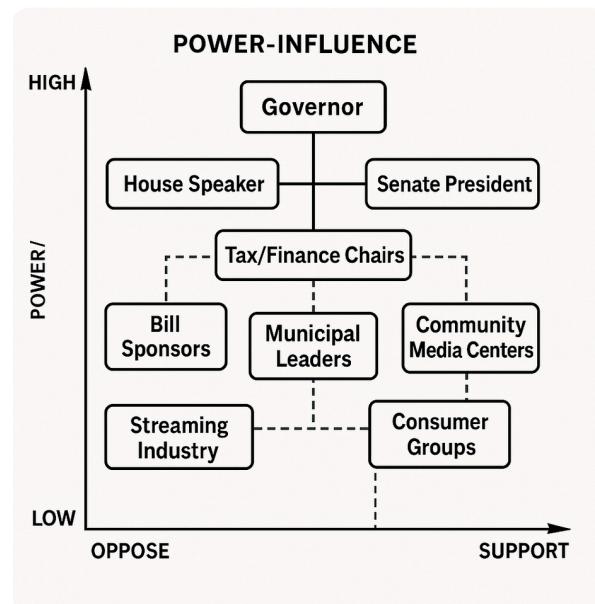


Again, the Action Circles model offers some helpful advice when planning how to work with the coalition: What are we asking people to do? How can we offer different levels of activities? Who

should be interested in what we are doing? How can we create systems and structures that continuously build trust and leadership as people get involved?

## 4. Map the Power Structure

Don't miss this step! A “**power map**” is a common strategic tool that visually represents the relationships, influence, and power dynamics around our specific goal. It helps to identify who has power in the decision making realm and what will move them. This map includes key **legislators, committee chairs, party heads, and agencies**. Conduct research so you really understand their interests, past votes, district make up and influencers.



Use this opportunity to assess actual and potential **champions** for the cause. These might be legislators who do a regular program at your media center or sit on your board or who have indicated an interest in helping or have worked on similar issues in the past. Identify legislators with media/telecom policy interest, municipal government backgrounds and positions on committees overseeing taxes, finance, or technology.

From this group consider who you will recruit as two strong **bill sponsors**—one in each chamber—and co-sponsors across caucuses for bipartisan strength. These are the first line of leaders that you will support with talking points, constituent stories, and district-specific impacts.

You will want to **meet with these champions 1:1** so develop supporting **contact data** as you start to build your lists. Your long term goal is to build and strengthen a relationship based on simple messaging, trusted information, reliable reports, regular notes of appreciation and wins!

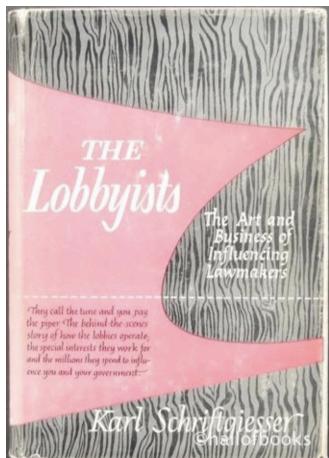
Don't forget the potential forces of **opposition**: cable, broadband or streaming companies, lobbyists and others you might not have imagined until you think about it with a group of your allies.

There are many resources for building a power map. NEA offers a simple point of departure for power mapping:

<https://www.nea.org/sites/default/files/2023-08/power-mapping-tool.pdf>

For a **deeper dive** visit The Commons Social Change Library:

<https://commonslibrary.org/power-and-power-mapping-start-here/>



## 5. Hire a Lobbyist

By this time, you may have determined that a lobbyist would be a good idea to have on your team. Your lobbyist is on the job in the halls of power when you are not able to be. You'll want someone aligned with the mission, with the **capacity for both strategy + ground game**, who does more than set meetings—they should help craft messaging, advise on bill language, anticipate opposition, and make sure you are where decisions are being made at the right time.

**Check List:** When selecting the best lobbyist for your campaign **identify the skills your campaign requires**. You want them to help your team to be more confident, not more stressed. Different lobbyists excel in different areas. For your campaign, you want someone with:

**- Strong relationships with leadership, i.e.,** key committee chairs, the House Speaker, Senate President, and tax/finance committee members. When interviewing for the job, find out: Which legislators they have strong working relationships with? How frequently do they meet with committee chairs? How comfortable are they with leadership in both chambers? You want to hear them describe specific individuals who trust them and why.

**-Experience with media, telecom, taxes, or municipal issues.** Ask whether they've handled topics such as: Telecommunications or cable legislation; Digital equity or broadband policy; Municipal funding measures; Excise, corporate, or tech tax bills; Controversial or "first-in-the-nation" proposals. The closer the match, the stronger the fit. Your lobbyist must be able to navigate complex corporate opposition certain to push back.

- **Articulates a Strategic Theory of Passing Your Bill.** A good lobbyist will articulate a strategy like: "We need bipartisan co-sponsors early because the tax committee chair is cautious." "Municipal officials will be your strongest validators." "We need to neutralize the streaming industry early." If they can't sketch out a theory of victory during the interview, they probably aren't the right choice.
- **Review Their Track Record** - Look for real wins—not just long client lists. Ask directly: What recent bills have you passed? What tough fights have you won? Have you helped pass anything that new industries opposed? How do you measure success?
- **Check Their Reputation Inside the State House.** Their reputation matters more than anything else. Speak quietly with a friendly legislator, Committee staff, Other advocacy organizations, Municipal officials and Former clients Ask one question: "When this lobbyist walks in the room, what do legislators think?"
- **Assess Communication & Work Style.** You want a lobbyist who fits your organizational style. Consider: Do they respond quickly? Do they listen well? Do they explain the political landscape clearly? Do they work collaboratively with grassroots advocates, not dismiss them?
- **Determine Their Bandwidth.** Even the best lobbyist is useless if they're overloaded. Ask: How many clients do you represent during the legislative session? How many bills will you actively work on at the same time? Will we be a priority?
- **Understand Cost Structure.** Make sure the contract includes deliverables, not just "monitoring." Lobbying fees are typically: Monthly retainers. Session-long packages. Optional add-ons (communications, rapid-response, drafting)
- **Conduct a Final Gut Check.** The best lobbyist becomes a **trusted strategic partner**, not just someone who sets up meetings. Pick someone who respects your mission and believes in your legislation.

## 6. Make Sure You Have Sufficient Resources

### **Passing legislation takes time and money.**

Put together a budget that includes expenses such as lobbying fees, communications materials, events you hold for legislators. Remember that you're likely going to be opposed by corporations with very deep pockets. You won't be able to match their resources, but you'll need to anticipate realistic expenses.

	<b>LOBBYING + POLICY WORK</b> \$60,000
	<b>LEGAL ADVICE</b> \$15,000
	<b>GRASSROOTS ORGANIZING + EVENTS</b> \$5,000
	<b>COMMUNICATIONS + MEDIA</b> \$2,500

**Determine a 1- 3 year budget** and determine a fair way to distribute those expenses. **Sharing costs = Buy In** from your coalition partners. Even small contributions are important.

In Vermont, for example, each of our 24 community media centers contributes to an Advocacy Fund based on relative budget size. Even the smallest centers contribute to the effort.

Your leadership team will need the capacity to collect, manage and disburse and report on the funds. Identify a trusted Treasurer with the wherewithal to manage this responsibility. Meet regularly with your coalition to report on progress and expenses.

## 7. Prepare Your Legislative Strategy

**Learn the Legislative Schedule** and stay up to date so that you are prepared for bill filing deadlines, committee meetings, cross over dates, key committees involved in budget approval, House and Senate votes, veto sessions. Legislative sessions vary from state to state.

**Prepare Your Bill** - Using existing legislative models modified to your particular goal, prepare draft legislation in time for the legislative drafting deadline. In preparation for this bill, (your supporting testimony/ presentations) you will



identify a simple problem statement, proposed solution, including revenue projection and economic impact. You'll work with your lobbyist and coalition to settle on your draft and meet with key sponsors to assess if any changes are required and ensure that they will move forward through the drafting process.

**Prepare Testimony/ Talking Points/ Materials/ Witnesses** - There are many key points to include in support of your draft bill, but remember, *legislators have short attention spans*.

- Prepare a **one pager** that explains who you are, proposed bill, problem it solves, revenue it generates, and benefits to your community. Coalition members will use this one pager in 1:1 meetings with their local legislators, key committee heads, and champions.
- Expand on this with **written testimony and a slide deck** that relies on visual images to tell the financial picture, the reach of your coalition, benefits to the state, examples from other states. You will need to modify your testimony for particular committees and stages in the legislative process. Make sure to keep track of Committee staff who will help get you scheduled for hearings and your materials posted on the legislative websites. Here is a short video ["Tips on Testifying Before a Legislative Committee"](#) from the Minnesota Senate Media Services.
- **Your Testimony includes:** Speaker Introduction, Purpose of Testimony, Problem Statement, What the Bill Does, Why it Matters, Constituent Benefits, Summary/ Closing. Prepare a 2 minute version and longer version if granted by the Committee.
- **Identify key spokespeople** to present to legislative committees and invite **state or national witnesses** that can bolster your case and, if necessary, its legality.

- Once you complete your testimony, be sure to **send thank you notes** to committee chairs and ask your coalition members to thank the committee members for their attention.



**Bring Public Pressure to Bear:** At different moments during the Legislative process it will become necessary to mobilize your coalition and/or members of the public in support of your bill. When mapping your time line you'll likely identify these opportunities. Here are some examples from Vermont:

- **The Governor's Office** asks for brief online budget comments a month prior to the session start.
- **The House Appropriations Committee** holds public hearings and 2 minute inperson/online testimony as it considers its budget during the session.
- **House + Senate Committees Votes** - Committees of Jurisdiction (e.g., Telecommunications, Government Operations, Commerce, Finance, Appropriations) put bills "on the wall" and invite testimony on those they are interested in pursuing. At a certain point, they vote to move the bills out of their committees to the next Committee or the House/ Senate floor for a full vote.
- **House/ Senate Floor Votes** are held on particular proposals (e.g. Streaming Tax or General Budgets) at key points in the session. Your bill may pass and also become part of a "**veto session**" (something to be aware of) that requires a certain percentage to over-ride a Governor's opposition.

**Prepare for the "Long Game"** - The legislative process can be capricious and random. In fact, the process that you map out can be sidetracked in unexpected ways. This is a good reason to have a lobbyist working on your behalf. In any event, prepare for legislative delays, amendments, opposition narratives, and multiple votes (committee → floor → other chamber). It's really hard to keep people optimistic when it takes several legislative sessions to make very slow progress—which points to the importance of a reliable communications strategy.

## 8. Savvy Media & Communications Strategy

**Prepare talking points and key messages that can be repurposed in various formats.** Be clear about your audience at different points in the process when you will need to mobilize different groups of people to take action on behalf of the cause.

In most cases, your audience are the key legislators considering your bill. But you will also have a public facing campaign to generate public support that helps bring the point home to decision makers.

**Think visually** as you explain key concepts such as (for example) threats to community media, what an excise tax is, why streaming services should contribute, how funds will strengthen PEG, media access, local news. Provide easy-to-share content for supporters to repost.

### Opportunities to communicate and influence comes in different forms:

- **Municipal/ regional meetings** used to recruit local government support for your bill. This format can be used while recruiting coalition supporters.
- **Targeted 1:1 meetings with committee chairs and key swing votes.** Provide tailored packets with local data (jobs, viewers reached, municipal support). Provide legislators with visual leave-behinds, infographics, and a local map showing PEG center coverage.
- **Organize "Community Media Day at the State House,"** bringing youth media producers, seniors, and municipal leaders. At a critical juncture you might hold a **press conference** designed to show broadbased public support.
- MassAccess holds an annual Legislative Briefing at the state house with the goal of inviting legislators to learn more about your issue and legislation. Food is often a draw. David Gauthier reports: "One time, I was up at the state house

**Fairness:** "Streamers use public infrastructure but pay nothing back."

**Local Information:** "Community media provides vital emergency alerts, local news, and government transparency."

**Equity:** Funding community media strengthens access for seniors, rural residents, and low-income viewers.

**Cost:** A small fee on multinational corporations—not on residents—keeps local information alive.

when the MA Fisherman's Partnership was there and the whole building smelled like clam chowder. But the legislators were sure happy".

- **Statewide town halls** (online + in person) explaining the issue. Augment these with...
- **Online/ Social media campaigns** - Some ideas: Launch campaign website + social media presence (#SupportLocalMediaNow). Collect community testimonials via short videos from residents.
- **Email / written notes/ phone campaigns** designed to urge legislator support or thanking them for support. You might consider a digital action center for emailing legislators. (Although gauge how effective email v. phone calls are in your state).
- **Local media** - Produce content for your local channels and online platforms! Use community media channels to broadcast public forums, legislative hearings and explainers. Pitch stories about the collapse of local news and PEG funding. Partner with sympathetic reporters and columnists. Release op-eds timed to bill introduction and committee hearings.

In the Action Circles model, we **consider some of these questions when preparing our materials for different audiences:** What is effective about this call to action? What might confuse the reader? Why might the reader be motivated to take action? Are there any barriers? What questions will the person have? What sort of support is offered? Is any other support needed? How could it be a better action alert? What if I didn't know anything? Could I participate?

## 9. Post-Committee Push + Final Passage



When your bill passes through the committee hurdles and is ready for a floor vote, be sure to thank supporters publicly and highlight movement momentum. This may be a time to mobilize constituents in swing districts.

Get ready to address last-minute concerns: cost pass-throughs, compliance burdens, or legal questions. If asked, work with leadership to secure floor votes. Prepare for governor outreach and potential signing ceremony. And ensure the coalition celebrates the win and gives bipartisan credit. And don't forget the thank you notes to legislative champions!

## 10. Even with a New Law The Work Continues...

After the campaign, conduct a debrief, document lessons, and maintain the base with celebrations, updates and progress reports.

Remember the work may not be over. Once the bill becomes law, you'll need to monitor implementation. This may require setting up contracts for the granting of funds, new administrative rules, and in some cases oversight and enforcement.

Remember what we said about the "long game"? Don't forget you part of a broad national network ready to support your efforts so keep in touch!

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## Exhibit 1 - Policy Examples

**Community Media and Civic Information Investment Act** – Developed by the **Alliance for Communications Democracy with the support of the Alliance for Community Media**. This draft bill for use in state legislative efforts spells out a streaming tax and drawn from current state legislative efforts. Notably, the draft includes an update definition for cable service: *The term cable service shall include any video or other programming services offered by a cable operator over its own facilities, regardless of the technology used to deliver such service, and shall include programming services available via the internet provided that such programming is delivered, at least in part, to the subscriber over facilities owned by the cable operator.*

**Massachusetts** - There are at least three bills under consideration in the MA

Legislature. These are designed to be streaming excise taxes that are shared with PEG, local and state government. S2556 is one of them:

<https://malegislature.gov/Bills/194/S2556>

**New York** - Similar to Massachusetts, NY proposed a satellite video/streaming tax bill, previously known as the Community Media Reinvestment Act (<https://www.nysenate.gov/legislation/bills/2023/S2581/amendment/A>) which been revamped as the Technology Education Arts in Media (TEAM NY), with a broader base of partners, setting up a fund for media arts and education.

**Maine** - Maine advocates successfully modernized cable TV system definitions in 2024 which apply to any providers that utilize cable TV infrastructure to deliver linear video content (Title 30/ 3008) and spells out responsibilities related to the line of demarcation. [\*\*Title 30-A, §3008: Ordinances relating to cable television systems\*\*](#) Title 30 was also amended to address HD transmission requirements: <https://legislature.maine.gov/statutes/30-a/title30-Asec3010.htm>

**Massachusetts** - There are at least three bills under consideration in the Massachusetts Legislature. These are designed to be streaming excise taxes that are shared with PEG, local and state government. H106 is one of them: <https://malegislature.gov/Bills/194/H106>

**Minnesota** - Minnesota's first broadband franchise enables the construction of a Fiber-to-the-Home network in Woodbury, while protecting the interests of local residents.

<https://bradleywerner.com/2025/09/29/first-broadband-franchise-ushers-in-a-new-era-in-franchising/>

**Vermont** - Vermont Access Network secured a place for PEG in the General Fund budget to address the decline in cable TV revenue. A pole attachment tax was floated in 2023 which did not gain legislative support but is useful to be conceptually aware of.

<https://legislature.vermont.gov/Documents/2024/Docs/BILLS/H-0575/H-0575%20As%20Introduced.pdf>

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