

**PREVENTION JUSTICE SEMINAR****Terri Smith-Caronia****Lobbying Legislators and the IDUHA Experience**  
**Prevention Justice Seminar, November 15<sup>th</sup> 2004.**

- 2001: Community of Color with HIV AIDS Coalition established (COCHAC)– to bring \$ into organizations of color serving communities of color.
- Organizations that are run by white people tend to serve only white people.
- People of Color make up 70% of those infected with HIV in NY State
- The staff at the top level of an organization must reflect the community it is serving.
- COCHAC wanted to give organizations the funding to do better programming for the communities they serve.

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- 90% of women with HIV/AIDS in NY State are people of color.
- COCHAC campaigned for \$7 million but ended up with \$5 million.
- \$1 million of the money went to Harm Reduction/Syringe Exchange.



**Question from Participant:** *How did you negotiate with the AIDS Institute about them accepting the money on your behalf?*

**Answer from Speaker:** *We told the DoH what the money was for. New York State has a history of taking Federal money and converting it to state money, so it was no problem.*

**Speaker Continued:**

- 2002 – IDUHA Established – wanted to get money from city for syringe exchange
  - IDUHA = Injecting Drug Users Health Alliance – sprang out of the Harm Reduction Coalition and other syringe exchanges.
  - Mayor Bloomberg said nothing in his first year about HIV and AIDS. Fifteen months into his office he gave a speech in favor of syringe exchanges - this was the right time for IDUHA to ask the city for money!
  - IDUHA is a not-for-profit organization (i.e. you can't 'lobby' council members), so they started to 'educate' NY City councilors about the need for policy change and funding for syringe exchanges.
- You can't say 'lobbying' – must say 'educating'.

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- IDUHA had to learn how to do this – lots of councilors needed educating.
- Before you speak to legislators – must do your homework – get facts, statistics on how many people in their community will be affected by HIV/AIDS.
- Officials only care about getting re-elected so you must convince them that there is an issue in their backyard!
- Read councilors' bios on the New York City Website – find out their backgrounds – background in health care or criminal justice – useful! [www.nyccouncil.info](http://www.nyccouncil.info)
- Find out which council members sit on the Health Committee or the Finance Committee – people on the Finance Committee especially have a broad view of what everybody wants as they talk to the people on all the committees.
- Then arrange to meet with the elected officials
- City council members are required to know about EVERYTHING, but this is impossible and it is often necessary to educate them. Never laugh at them or correct them - and ask for specific things.
- City council member's **aides** are often the most knowledgeable people – they know about bills and they write the policy. Aides can often give you the down low on council members and their communities.
- Sometimes it is more realistic to ask council members not to oppose legislation rather than speaking in favor of it – this is a more strategic position. You have to weigh up what you're willing to let go in order to gain something else.

**Question from Participant:** *How do you get appointments with council members?*

**Answer from Speaker:** *Right after the Mayor releases the budget (Feb) people start to try to get appointments.*

**Question from Participant:** *What's the difference between voting and not opposing?*

**Answer from Speaker:** *People just abstain. Abstention can mean two things:*

- 1) *No*
- 2) *I don't have a clue about what we are voting about.*



**Speaker Continued:**

- The goal when speaking to city council members is to keep the relationship open. You must have continuing contact – as it is not always money that you want but also policy change.
- Coalitions often forget that it is not only about the budget
- You want council members to start asking favors of you! – e.g. they can ring up and ask for people to come to their speeches with placards and banners, etc.
- You must 'play the game' – must remember that politicians are representing everyone and there are many conflicts of interest and they have to mediate.

**Question from Participant:** How do you know when to turn up to things – how do you schedule?

**Answer from Speaker:** Mostly the officials will call you and ask you to turn up to an event. You should always leave a card when you visit and then follow the visit up with a phone call. Then when particular issues come up they will call you. The AIDS communities can wreak havoc on politicians election campaigning.

**Speaker Continued:**

- It is always good to have people who are actually impacted by issues speaking to city council members. They can say for example 'A clean syringe saved my life...'. Council people remember real stories.

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**Question from Participant:** *Housing Works offers advocacy training, how do we get on to that?*

**Answer from Speaker:** *We have groups that meet weekly and talk about either Federal, State or City issues. We also have a group specifically for women. Women globally now represent 50% of people with HIV/AIDS. Over the last 10 years the number of new infections in women has been steadily increasing.*

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**Advocacy groups: Sat 3pm-5pm at 130 Crosby St, Basement.**

**To become a client, call 212-966-0466- ask for 'intake' department.**