

The COVID-19 pandemic necessitated an important shift in how high-level advocacy is conducted. This shift means that now, more than ever, high-level advocacy is often conducted in online rather than in-person environments. This change has brought with it certain relative advantages for community advocates. These include increased opportunities for engagement, better access to policymakers, and, in some cases, a higher frequency of meetings.

Conducting high-level advocacy predominantly in online environments, however, can also bring problems and limitations, such as a lack of opportunities for all-important side conversations, networking, and forming new relationships with policymakers and advisers. Often, there is a lack of clear guidelines in relation to meaningful engagement in online environments, and results and outcomes are even more difficult to track for digital high-level meetings than for in-person ones. There can also be challenges in relation to different time zones, limited potential for influencing high-level debates, lack of availability of high-level-meeting recordings in multiple languages, and disparities in participation opportunities due to unequal access to the necessary technology and internet data.

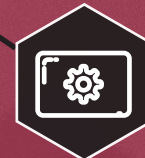
## DIGITAL HIGH-LEVEL ADVOCACY TIP SHEET

With the emerging context in mind, this tip sheet has been designed to support community-led organisations and networks of people who use drugs to conduct effective high-level advocacy in online environments. For example, this includes meetings at the global level, such as CND, UNGASS on Drugs, and high-level meeting (HLM) on HIV/AIDS, and meetings at the national level, such as drug control meetings, technical working groups on harm reduction, and meetings concerning the national strategic plan on HIV/AIDS. The tips have been developed in consultation with advocates from within the INPUD global network. This is not an exhaustive list, but the strategies proposed may amplify the impact and effectiveness of your digital advocacy efforts.

### INVEST IN ADVOCACY TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT



Invest in **advocacy training** to ensure that everyone engaging in digital high-level advocacy has the skills and information required to advocate effectively. Advocacy training should cover topics such as advocacy planning in relation to the decision-making bodies you are targeting, e.g., UN, Global Fund, and government systems, and methods for strategic engagement in high-level advocacy. For example, INPUD has produced resources focused on [human rights advocacy](#), [Global AIDS Strategy 2021–2026](#), and [2021 Political Declaration](#). You may also find useful the advocacy resources by the [Global Network of Sex Work Projects](#), [Students for Sensible Drug Policy](#), [International Drug Policy Consortium](#), [Harm Reduction International](#), [UNAIDS](#), and [Youth RISE](#).



You should also invest in **basic technology training**, which should equip advocates with the knowledge of how to use video conferencing platforms such as [Zoom](#). This will reduce the likelihood of experiencing technical issues during high-level meetings. Advocates should also be trained in [cybersecurity](#), which will help prevent data breaches, hacker attacks, and financial and reputational damage to your organisation. [Cybersecurity training](#) should include the main aspects of cybersecurity and offer clear instructions on using organisation software, emails, passwords, and social media accounts.





To help you prepare for high-level meetings, have a look at **advocacy resources** at INPUD's website and read about UN-related advocacy, as well as advocacy with the Member States, national and local governments, and Global Fund Country Coordinating Mechanisms.


## START PLANNING ADVOCACY INTERVENTIONS EARLY

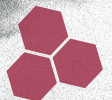


Whenever possible, **organise a pre-consultation** with the community, which can be delivered via WhatsApp or as an online webinar. This can be particularly – yet not exclusively – useful in relation to formulating key positions. For example, INPUD frequently conducts and participates in webinars as a pre-consultation and planning mechanism for high-level advocacy meetings and events. These webinars aim to equip advocates with knowledge and skills to advocate for their priorities effectively. They typically cover key processes, concepts, and issues that are expected to be debated and highlight opportunities and methods for meaningful engagement.



**Starting your planning early** in the lead-up to high-level advocacy meetings and events is important. This means not just planning as a community but also understanding who is going to be in the meeting or process and the key roles they will play. Within your preparation, you should:

-  Review the participant list (if there is one);
-  Reach out to the relevant meeting participants in the lead-up to meetings or events;
-  Consider organising a planning call with like-minded civil society allies;
-  Prepare a list of what you want to accomplish in the meeting. The list should be developed with inputs from the community, which can be obtained via a webinar or WhatsApp;
-  For UN or CND meetings, find out who is on particular Member State delegations, what resolutions are the Member States sponsoring or co-sponsoring, and who will be negotiating key resolutions of interest;
-  If you are not invited to a meeting that you wish to attend, consider writing to meeting organisers and asking for an invite. Make sure to include the main information about your organisation, explain how your work is relevant to the meeting's topic, and state the reasons why your organisation should be invited to the meeting.







Many community-led organisations have limited resources, so reaching out to multiple Member States may not always be an option. If this is the case, **be strategic about which countries you reach out to**. When making the decision, consider the contacts you have already established, what you are aiming to achieve with your advocacy intervention or longer-term advocacy plans, and which Members States are leading on the issues most relevant to your advocacy goals.



Take advantage of reaching out to the Member States via email, WhatsApp, and social media platforms. Advocates report that one of the benefits of a greater level of online advocacy is that officials are often easier to reach for an informal conversation and more willing to share their contact details, such as mobile phone numbers. This can serve as a foundation for meaningful dialogue with Member States who support or are important to your advocacy goals.

## DURING THE MEETING



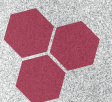
If possible, it is best to arrive at high-level online meetings early – being on time demonstrates seriousness and allows you to accommodate any last-minute technical issues that can often arise when dealing with Zoom links, apps, and internet connections.



Speak up and make interventions during the meeting, and make sure to utilise the chat function to ask questions or make comments. The chat function is generally well monitored, and the chat is often saved to inform proceedings.



When engaging in a high-level meeting, do not deviate from the discussed topic and avoid disrupting the meeting's flow or focus.







## PREPARE ADVOCACY MATERIALS



Consider producing **brief summaries** (ca. 3 pages) of the 10 most important advocacy points you want to make in relation to a set of draft resolutions or a new policy or government strategy, etc. Ideally, develop and refine such resources together with the community, or alternatively, get them community validated, then distribute them among your members.



Advocacy interventions in online environments also include advocacy letters and civil society shadow reports. **Advocacy letters** can be directed at decision makers at different levels of influence and should entail a strong call to action. For example, you can prepare a letter that calls for an end to the death penalty for drug offences and direct this at governments that continue to have such laws in place, a letter urging a response to a humanitarian crisis, or a letter aimed at influencing the overall narrative or approach for new strategy or initiative. Advocacy letters may also be linked to days that carry special significance; for example, a letter advocating for change in drug policies may be sent to the UN agencies and governments to mark the International Human Rights Day.



**Shadow reports** are a valuable tool for providing an analysis and critique of government reports. This resource from Civil Society Academy offers more information. You may also find useful the guide from GNP+ on how to write an advocacy report and the toolkit from the International AIDS Society on how to analyse legislation/policy and prepare a briefing note and a position paper.

## CASE STUDY

For the HLM on HIV/AIDS in 2021, a multistakeholder taskforce (MSTF) was created that produced advocacy documents and statements and served as a coordinating body that planned who would reach out to specific governments. GNP+ and Aidsfonds were appointed to act as NGO co-conveners to work with UNAIDS to facilitate the active and meaningful participation of CSOs and communities in the entire HLM process.

Regular briefs, webinars, and meetings were organised in the lead-up to the HLM to support the preparation of advocates and to formulate the position, as well as coordinate around Member State reach out amongst its members. The preparation included the development of an engagement guide and a civil society declaration, which was jointly signed and endorsed by various networks and organisations. Following the HLM, GNP+ and Aidsfonds also developed an advocacy brief outlining the outcomes and suggesting follow-up actions. The result was a Political Declaration that was stronger than the previous one, which was a notable success given that the political environment had become more conservative. The smoothness and effectiveness of this process were facilitated by the fact that UNAIDS had an already established coordinating mechanism through which to work with the community.





## ORGANISE UN SIDE EVENTS



UN side events offer an opportunity to get additional perspectives (e.g., community perspectives) on an issue or discuss a topic in more depth. UN side events need to be formally registered and co-sponsored, and competition can be high, so applying well in advance of the deadline is important. In planning a UN side event, you should choose a thematically relevant topic and use a diverse panel of distinguished speakers (including community members, allies, multilateral agencies, and policymakers), which should reflect geographic and gender balance. You should also join forces and co-organise side events with other CSOs or the Member States that are allied to your cause or that you aim to influence.



For community-led organisations, positive results from the CND are often linked to side events. For example, INPUD had excellent participation attendance at its side event at CND 2022, which was co-sponsored by two Member States and received a good time slot from the CND Secretariat. This helped to raise the visibility of both INPUD and our issues. In 2019, INPUD was also able to influence the adaptation of the WHO and UNODC treatment standards as a result of the CND side event and follow-up work.





## DO NOT NEGLECT INFORMAL WAYS OF INFLUENCING



**Approach governments** by sending advocacy letters to the heads of state, ministers, or other relevant officials. It is good practice to prepare a position paper or a research report (provided as a PDF or link) to accompany your letter and give more detail on the issues you raise. This will help to ensure your advocacy target understands the topic and your advocacy objectives. It is also an important broader tool in educating others about your organisation and the communities and issues you represent.



**Develop relationships with the UN Secretariat staff** responsible for working with civil society organisations. They can be a valuable source of information. They also provide logistical support and design panels and speaker lists, so an established contact can support the smooth working of these processes. UN staff, especially UNAIDS and UNODC, are also supposed to broker relationships between communities and governments – if you notice that they are not performing their job at the country level, you should report this to INPUD.

## COLLABORATE WITH ALLIED NETWORKS AND ORGANISATIONS



Collaborate with allied networks and organisations that engage in high-level online advocacy, and establish links with other community-led organisations, such as sex worker groups, gay and bisexual men, and transgender people. For example, you can reach out to ally organisations before meetings to plan interventions or common positions. Ally organisations can be helpful in guiding your overall advocacy strategy and approach, and they can also provide introductions to new individuals and networks of relevance to your organisation.



**Use media advocacy** to mobilise public support and put public pressure on governments and official delegations. Approach journalists and editors proactively with a pitch story, and offer your availability for interviews and opinion pieces. You may also consider issuing press releases, organising press conferences, and preparing media packs, factsheets, and background papers. You should also take advantage of the power of social media – tag relevant people and organisations (e.g., Global Fund, UNAIDS, WHO, UNODC, and relevant governmental ministries) in your posts, start hashtag campaigns, share visuals and videos, and organise online events. For more information, see INPUD's Media and Social Media Advocacy Tip Sheet.





## MONITOR YOUR PROGRESS REGULARLY

Follow-up monitoring and evaluation is necessary for any meaningful assessment of high-level advocacy actions, so conduct an analysis focusing on the progress and results of high-level meetings. You may consider assessing outcomes such as increased political will and support or new political champions, e.g., decision makers who have delivered supportive statements on a drug policy issue.



Organise briefings and follow-up webinars to review participants' experiences and discuss and agree upon the potential follow-up steps. Good examples of this were IDPC's [debrief after UNGASS](#) in 2016 and, more recently, a [follow-up webinar](#) that reviewed the 64th Session of the CND.

Another possible way to analyse the progress is to compare the results of the meeting in question with an earlier or previous meeting on the same or similar issue. A good example is the Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations (AFAO)'s [analysis](#) of the 2016 Political Declaration versus the 2021 Political Declaration, which compared the number of references to harm reduction, key populations, stigma, and discrimination in 2016 and 2021. The 2021 Political Declaration included more specific references to key populations and significantly strengthened language on action against restrictive and discriminatory laws, policies, and practices; harm reduction; and community-led and community-based resources.

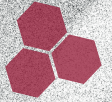


## FINAL WORDS

Nothing replaces in-person interactions, so as we move into “post-pandemic” times, it is also important to anticipate combining online advocacy with strategic face-to-face advocacy actions. Forging new relationships often requires some level of personal contact, but online advocacy is set to remain a critical ongoing aspect of high-level advocacy into the future. It is likely that

high-level events will continue to include some form of hybrid format to mitigate the issues related to online-only events identified above. Nevertheless, it will remain important that community-led and key population-led organisations are well-prepared and equipped to make the most of the additional levels of outreach and access that effective online advocacy opens up for our communities.





The International Network of People who Use Drugs (INPUD) is a global peer-based organisation that seeks to promote the health and defend the rights of people who use drugs. As an organisation, INPUD is focused on exposing and challenging stigma, discrimination, and the criminalisation of people who use drugs, and their impact on the drug-using community's health and rights. INPUD works to achieve its key aims and objectives through processes of empowerment and advocacy at the international level; and by supporting empowerment and advocacy at community, national, and regional levels. [www.inpud.net](http://www.inpud.net)

This publication was produced with funding from the Robert Carr Fund - Exceptional Opportunity Funding (EOF). The EOF initiative is designed to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on HIV programmes for inadequately served populations.

INPUD and the author would also like to thank all representatives from regional networks/national organisations representing people who use drugs and other key stakeholders who participated in consultations for this publication.

Written by: Lana Durjava

Designed by: [Altlier](#)

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License 