

WHAT COMES NEXT?

SEQUENCING COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP POLICY CAMPAIGNS

Community Ownership advocates rarely have the luxury of a blank slate. Working with limited capacity, they exist in specific political and economic contexts. That makes the sequencing of policy campaigns matter: early wins can lay the groundwork for more ambitious efforts later, while a poorly timed or implemented campaign can exhaust scarce resources without building lasting power. This brief distills lessons from our interviews with 37 practitioners across the country on how to think strategically about prioritizing policy campaigns that advance Community Ownership.

These findings draw on the research presented in the reports below, which document specific campaigns and policy examples in greater detail:

- [The Community Ownership Policy Guide](#)
- [Beyond the Win: What It Takes to Make Community Ownership Policies Stick](#)
- [Advancing Community Ownership Policy Through Multi-Sector Partnerships & Coalitions](#)



Use Modest Policy Goals to Educate, Build Relationships, and Establish Legitimacy

Advocacy campaigns are not only valuable for their impact on rules, laws, and budgets. Modest and even largely symbolic policy wins can serve to educate policymakers, build coalitions, and establish Community Ownership as a legitimate strategy that government agencies and elected officials have to engage with. The campaign itself, not only its outcome, is the vehicle for that work.

- Practitioners have used resolutions and proclamations from legislative bodies to signal political support for Community Ownership and open doors for future asks.
- Budget advocacy, even when unsuccessful, builds relationships and keeps Community Ownership on policymakers' radar.
- Technical policy measures like tax exemptions or legal definitions of Community Ownership models often read as common sense. They educate lawmakers and the public while avoiding the fights that more politically sensitive policy proposals invite (see the [Community Ownership Policy guide](#)).

Sequence Enabling Legislation and Funding Strategically

The order in which funding measures and enabling legislation are pursued is worth deciding deliberately, rather than leaving it to whichever opportunity arrives first.

- Sequencing decisions should account for whether the Community Ownership organizations will be positioned to act on the opportunity a policy creates. A policy that creates rights or preferences that organizations lack the capital or capacity to exercise can go unused, and that record of non-use becomes an argument against the policy itself.
- For instance, there is consensus that it is optimal to have funding in place before the passage of opportunity-to-purchase acts or measures that prioritize Community Ownership organizations for public lands, tax-foreclosed properties, or other assets.
- On the other hand, the potential of funding advocacy is often determined by circumstances beyond the control of advocates, such as the condition of city and state tax revenues and the availability of federal resources. When budget conditions are difficult, some advocates proceed first with enabling legislation to build momentum.

Lay the Groundwork Before Policy Windows Open

Policy change rarely follows a straight line. Unpredictable shocks like recessions, housing crises, natural disasters, and interest rate changes can create sudden openings for ambitious policies. However, advocates who haven't already laid the groundwork in advance are rarely able to capitalize on those moments when they arrive. Much of this preparation happens before and between campaigns.

- Community Ownership practitioners prepare for political opportunities by building coalitions both among Community Ownership organizations and with a broader set of mission-aligned allies (see [Multi-Sector Partnerships & Coalitions](#)).
- Advocates educate elected officials, agency staff, and the public so Community Ownership strategies are already known and understood when resources become available.
- Community Ownership policy advocates develop ambitious policy proposals that are ready for consideration when circumstances become favorable.

Know When to Adjust the Campaign Mid-Course

Even well-executed campaigns encounter unexpected challenges, whether from government agencies, political opponents, or shifting political priorities. The ability to adjust policy goals mid-stream, rather than holding rigidly to an original design, is often what determines whether a campaign ends with an impactful change to the status quo.

- Mid-campaign adjustments are not failures of strategy. They reflect a realistic understanding that policy campaigns unfold in dynamic political environments.
- A modest but implementable win often does more to build long-term momentum than a maximalist policy that stalls or is rolled back in implementation (see [Beyond the Win](#)).
- Not every adjustment builds long-term power. They have to be assessed based on their impact on coalition unity, public perception, and the possibility of future political dealmaking.

Conclusion

Community Ownership advocates run policy campaigns in dynamic political environments, where identifying and sequencing policy goals shapes what is ultimately achievable. By timing campaigns carefully and balancing the needs of practitioners with what is politically feasible in a given place and time, policy campaigns can both impact work on the ground while also building political power that can pay dividends in future campaigns.

About This Project

This document reflects research conducted by Leo Goldberg and Miriam Zuk of Ground Works Consulting in affiliation with The [Community Ownership Learning & Action Lab](#) at the University of Miami. In addition to reviewing published sources, the research team interviewed 37 Community Ownership advocates and practitioners from across the United States.

About Ground Works Consulting

[Ground Works Consulting](#) works at the intersection of community power-building and community development. We partner with communities to advance health equity, climate justice, and shared prosperity with a focus on housing justice and community development systems. Operating between big vision and implementation, we work with a wide range of communities and leaders to transform aspirational ideas into positive community outcomes.

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