Making the Case:
Mobilizing Stakeholders to Take Action

Identify the issue to be addressed (e.g., high rates of school suspensions) and carefully frame the message:

Provide local data	Use data to describe the scope of the problem; this will generate interest and attention and create a sense of urgency.
Create a simple graphic	Present the community data and any relevant trends or patterns, such as disproportionality, in a simple, visual format.
Use findings from national research	Use national findings to demonstrate the consequences of exclusionary, harsh discipline. For example, show how harsh discipline and discretionary use of suspensions results in a variety of negative consequences.
Describe the costs of inaction	Use local numbers to make the costs of inaction seem even more pressing. For example: • Number of suspensions X the classroom hours lost per suspension • Hours of administrator's time spent dealing with suspensions • Cost to local economy due to unproductive citizens • Loss of tax base • Cost of law enforcement
Put a face on the story	Describe the impact of the issue on an individual and his or her community. Make it clear that this is a community issue, not just a school issue.
Use simple messages	Use language that stakeholders can relate to, and avoid jargon and acronyms. Your goal is to build a deeper understanding of the issue without making it seem simplistic.
"Dig a foundation, not a hole"*	Don't report negative information without offering solutions.
Present credible solutions	For example: • Stories of communities that successfully dealt with this issue • Specific actions steps that could help address the problem
Create a short, compelling story	Tell a story that engages and maximizes any brief encounter with a potential stakeholder. Focus on results rather than process.

* From *Using Data to Build Public Support for Shifting Gears Policy Changes* (memo, July 15, 2010)