

Policy Advocacy - Bite-Sized

Here are five ideas for fitting advocacy into busy lives.

They spring from one simple fact: **ADVOCACY JUST MEANS SPEAKING UP.**

Step 1. **Sign up for good “Alerts.”** Get on a list for regular information about legislative actions likely to affect your issue/program. They will keep you informed, provide a sample “message,” and help you know when your voice is needed most.

Step 2. **Use the TELEPHONE or WRITE**

Some states have a **TOLL-FREE hotline** to their State Capitol; others have a regular number. Operators will take your call, or take your message, or transfer you to your legislator's office. Whatever the method, it only takes about two minutes - because you can use the message provided in the "alert" you signed up for in Step # 1.

Or you can **send a simple email message**. Mention the bill number or issue in the subject line, state clearly what you want the legislator to do, and be sure to put your home address so they know that you live in their Legislative District. Keep it short and to the point.

Finding telephone numbers and/or email addresses is easy: just go to the website for your state Capitol, and follow directions for finding your legislators. Or, contact the League of Women Voters.

Step 3. **Help others to.**

➤ Make cardstock “telephones” or “computers” with the Capitol website, telephone number, and the dates when the Legislature is in Session. Add your own logo, website, or agency name. Make up a supply, and give them to everyone you encounter: board members, staff, consumers, friends, neighbors, extended family.... You and they should pledge to make one toll-free call or email every week the legislature is in Session.

➤ Set up a “TAKE FIVE” TABLE. Make it easy for others to write or call their elected officials. Bring a laptop and/or cell phone and use the handout headed “Take Five.” You can also sign people up for your Network, or send messages about a budget item or issue.

Step 4. **Advertise your issue, not Nike.**

➤ Anytime you are around elected officials (e.g., at a City or County Council hearing, a Town Hall Meeting, in Olympia, etc.), wear or carry something (a conspicuous badge, a briefcase, or bag) that identifies you with your issue or agency. Bold lettering on a neon background will be seen even from a distance – e.g., FEED KIDS, or, SUPPORT the PTA. The politicians present will quickly realize those badges mean there's an organized group that cares about a particular issue, and has its members in the audience.

➤ Write a slogan or the name of your group on the folder holding your “fact sheets” or handouts. Then carry the folder to Hearings or Candidate Forums so the slogan shows.

Step 5. **Talk. Mention key bills, issues, and budget items at every opportunity.**

Talk to anybody who will listen: at a PTA meeting, in a grocery store line, waiting for the light to change, after services on Sunday.... Get your key issues on other voters' radar screens.

USEFUL TIP

It helps if you prepare a “60-Second Speech,” ready for any occasion when you might get to talk to an elected official or decision-maker. For example, you might run into your state Senator at the local farmers’ market or you might spot the aide to a County Council member where you worship. Those are great opportunities for a quick bit of advocacy.

Here are two versions for what to **include**:

“SPEECH A”

- ⇒ **your name, and where you live** (Hi, I’m _____, and I live in your District.)
- ⇒ **your group or agency** - mention the number of members or people served in the elected’s District (I’m on the board of DAWN – Domestic Abuse Women’s Network; we’re located in your District and we serve about 300 women every month....)
- ⇒ **say what you want to call to their attention.** (I’m very concerned about adequate funding for domestic violence programs....)
- ⇒ **say what you’d like them to do** (Please vote for DV funding in the budget...)
- ⇒ **Give them something in writing** that includes how to contact you/your group. (I’d be glad to answer any questions you might have; meanwhile, here’s some basic information about what we do....) Have a basic **Fact Sheet** or **brochure** about your program with you at all times.

“SPEECH B”

- **your name and where you live; your group or agency** (same as above);
- put a human face on your program, **paint a brief “word picture”** – it can be about someone your group or program has helped, or about your own situation;
- **mention something** you are doing now, **that WORKS**;
- **note how your efforts help in their community**, how your efforts help put public dollars to work there;
- **remind them: volunteers, the non-profit sector, cannot do the job alone.** We can’t have a “public-private partnership” if the public “partner” opts out.