

ADVOCACY STRATEGIES:

Tools and Tips for Communicating and
Meeting with Elected Officials

“If you think you’re too small to have an impact, try going to bed with a mosquito”

- Anita Roddick

What is Advocacy?

- *Noun*: the act or process of supporting a cause or proposal: the act or process of advocating something
- Our goal is to *effectively advocate* for our school system, teachers and students in the legislature



How Do You Effectively Advocate?

In order to effectively advocate, you must:

1. Know Your Issue
2. Build an Effective Message
3. Build Relationships
4. Recognize Opportunities for Advocacy
 - Meetings with Legislators
 - Communicating with Elected Officials

Know Your Issue

- Have detailed knowledge about the current issue, the different factors that are creating the issue, and why those factors are there
- Have resources (people, statutes, agency rules, etc.) you can use to find this information
- Most importantly, develop a specific *SOLUTION* that addresses the factors contributing to your issue

Build an Effective Message

- **ISSUE:** Select a priority
- **FOCUS:** Provide a recommendation
- **IMPORTANCE:** Identify local examples or a personal story that supports the recommendation
- **FACTS:** Identify data, supporting evidence, or research that makes the case for the recommendation
- **ASK:** Provide the “ask”. This could be a specific amount of funding, a specific bill, or a specific amendment

Build an Effective Message

- **Most Persuasive Messaging** (According to a Survey of Legislative Aides)
 - Communicate to legislators how something is affecting/will affect their district (93.5% effective)
 - Use personal stories (93.5% effective)
 - Highlight specific constituent concerns (90.9% effective)

Build an Effective Message

- Know who you're audience; predict how they may respond to what you are requesting; know their likes and dislikes
 - See how legislators have voted on similar issues in the past
 - Get clues from their social media pages
 - Groups they may be associated with or are members of
 - Their general/employment background
- Use this information to frame your solution in a manner that appeals to them
 - Highlight certain features of the solution that they may like
 - Avoid highlighting aspects that they may not like

Build Relationships

- Meet with and get to know your local legislators
 - Know what they can do for you and know how you can be a resource to them
 - Know what committees they are on and what policy areas they have influence over
 - Make a connection with them and keep in contact
- Get to know legislators that can help you advance your agenda
 - Legislators on key committees and in leadership

Build Relationships

- Be a resource
 - Offer your help and expertise in matters related to your field
- Relationships you've built can help advance your agenda
 - If you've built a strong enough relationship, legislators may ask for your advice on issues they know you would be interested in
 - This gives you an opportunity to influence their decision



Opportunities for Advocacy

- Meetings with Legislators
 - Arrive on time; early if possible
 - Dress and act professionally
 - Know you're information and what your request is
 - Be brief and organized- keep handouts to one page
 - You'll have about 10 -15 minutes with the legislator (In Tallahassee)
 - Follow up with them promptly if you don't know the answer to something (email them the same day)
 - Be positive, polite, friendly, and solutions- focused
 - Do NOT lose your composure, get angry, or complain
 - Do NOT make negative or accusatory statements
 - Remember your message!

Opportunities (Con't.)

- Meetings (Con't.)
 - Legislative Aides:
 - Legislative aides are very important in the legislative process and it is good to have them on your side
 - Be willing to meet with them to discuss your issue
 - Copy them in emails to the legislator
 - Be nice to them!
 - Thank- you notes
 - Always write thank- you notes to legislators thanking them for their time
 - Always write the legislative aides thank-you's as well

Opportunities (Con't.)

- Communicating with Elected Officials
 - Always be courteous and respectful
 - Clearly and simply state the purpose of your letter
 - Keep your letter short- one page is best
 - Provide specific rather than general information about how the topic affects you and others
 - Do NOT use form letters
 - Address your letter correctly
 - Ex.

The Honorable Travis Hutson
Florida State Senate
312 Senate Office Building
404 South Monroe Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399