

ADVOCACY 101

BASIC TIPS AND STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS



ADVOCACY OR LOBBYING?

While all lobbying is advocacy, not all advocacy is lobbying.

Advocacy is any action that speaks in favor of, recommends, argues for a cause, supports or defends, or pleads on behalf of others. It includes public education, regulatory work, litigation, and work before administrative bodies, lobbying, nonpartisan voter registration, nonpartisan voter education, and more.

Lobbying is communicating with decision makers (elected officials and staff; voters on ballot measures), about existing or potential legislation, and urging a vote for or against. All three components of this definition are required: decision makers, actual legislation, AND asking for a vote (National Council on Nonprofits, 2020).

WHY ADVOCATE?

Legislators often make decisions based on personal experiences. If they don't hear from you, but hear from those with opposing views, what do you think they will remember?

WHERE TO START

Find your Michigan legislators at www.senate.michigan.gov and www.house.mi.gov

Learn about your legislator and current efforts either for or against your cause.

Know your legislator's position on the issue, if they have one. If not, this is a good opportunity to start educating them on the pros and cons.

Does your legislator sit on a committee with jurisdiction over a related bill? It is possible to testify in front of these committees to express how the proposed bill will impact your community. This is also a good time to more widely educate policy makers. Legislators will often accept and read letters during session if you cannot testify in person.

Gather opinions and observations from your community that would be affected by the proposal.

Ask other community members to join in your legislative visit. There is power in numbers.

THE VISIT

PREPARATION

Develop a communication plan that includes messages that are clear, short, and to the point.

Limit the number of issues you are addressing. Your message will be more memorable.

Create a one page summary of your message that can be left behind after your meeting. Make sure you have enough copies for the legislator and their staff.

Set up your meeting at least two weeks in advance, more if possible.

Confirm your visit via email or phone call soon after you schedule your appointment and again a day or two prior to your visit.

Know what you want for your final result and craft your presentation around the result you are expecting.

FOLLOWING UP

Follow up is as important as the actual visit. It shows your determination and dedication to resolving your issue.

De-brief with your group as soon as possible.

Following up after your visit with a call or letter goes a long way.

- Use the opportunity to reinforce your message.
- Include a copy of the materials you left behind during your visit.
- Make sure your communication is personalized.
- Answer any questions that may have arisen during the meeting, but were not addressed.

Attend events in the district. Many legislators have informal gatherings in their representative communities, such as coffee hours. This is a prime opportunity to ask about progress on your issue.

VISITING DAY HELPFUL HINTS

- Keep your group of visitors small - 4 or less is best.
- Be respectful and arrive early.
- Be flexible. Schedules do change.
- Be prepared to meet with a staffer. Your message will be the same. It is their job to communicate your needs.
- Remember YOU requested the visit, so you will need to initiate the conversation.
- Create an open atmosphere by introducing yourself and whom you represent.
- Present your message. First by framing the issue; then by educating the legislator on your position; and, finally, supporting your position by explaining why it is good public health.
- Thank the legislator for meeting with you and considering your needs.

MANY WAYS TO ADVOCATE!

- Make a phone call
- Write an email
- Send a letter
- Visit the legislator's office
- Volunteer on a campaign
- Contribute money
- Participate in a march
- Hold a press conference
- Extend a speaking invitation
- Write a letter to the editor of your paper
- Join a community group
- Run for office
- Post a yard sign
- Get a bumper sticker
- Speak to friends and family about the issue
- Include legislators on your newsletter mailing list

WWW.MICHIGANPREVENTIONASSOCIATION.ORG
P.O. BOX 81071
LANSING MICHIGAN 48917