

Raise Your Voice!

Advocacy Basics and Meeting Working with the Legislators

Voices for Ohio's Children
Yvonne C. Hunnicutt

Objectives

- Demystify “public policy.”
- Provide basic information about the legislative process.
- Outline the steps to effective advocacy
- Share how to’s advocacy tools
- Tips for working with legislators
- Advocacy activities



Reasons to Engage in Public Policy

- Bridge between practice and policy.
- Extension of responsibility to children and their families.
- Providers have a unique and important contribution to make to policy.



Defining Public Policy: Lobbying

- Lobbying is a form of advocacy.
- Specifically refers to taking positions on legislation.
- Nonprofits can lobby!
- Resources on nonprofit lobbying:
 - Alliance for Justice (www.afj.org); and
 - Charity Lobbying in the Public Interest (www.clpi.org).



Types of Advocacy



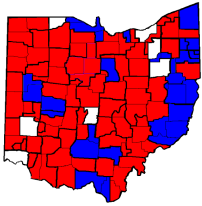
- Client Advocacy
- Legislative Advocacy
- Administrative Advocacy
- Electoral advocacy
- Legal advocacy
- Collaboration
- Public Education




Overview of Legislative Process



Legislative Realities 101(a)—How a bill really becomes law in Ohio



- ✓ Bill must be sponsored by a member of the majority party and, ideally, lobbied for by a firm allied with the majority.
- ✓ Bill must not call for substantial new spending or be seen as government “interference” in the lives of everyday Ohioans.
- ✓ Support of leadership is important, but term limits and anti-government philosophy now pervasive in the GA have undermined party discipline.
- ✓ Growing tendency to deal with problematic issues via the budget process.



Legislative Realities 101—How a bill really becomes law in Congress



- ✓ Most legislation, including appropriation bills, are introduced in the House.
- ✓ House and Senate leadership controls the process via Rules Committee and calendar.
- ✓ Most legislation dies in committee or subcommittee.
- ✓ Appropriation bills are now primary vehicles for policy making.
- ✓ Sixty is the magic number—absent 60 votes in the Senate, any piece of legislation is consigned to the dustbin of history.



Effective Advocacy

Steps to Effective Advocacy

- List your issues
- Prioritize your “ask”
- Target decision makers
- Develop a white paper
- Educate legislators
- Activate grassroots support
- Be flexible
- Have integrity



List Issues

- Develop a comprehensive list of legislative issues.
 - Identify short-term and long-term goals
 - Identify budget items and administrative/policy items
 - Weigh “political reality” of issues



Prioritize Issues

- Identify ONE short-term and ONE long-term issue
- Try not to work on more than one issue





Target Decision Makers

- Determine which policymakers influence each issue (relevant committee, leadership, relevant administrative agency).
- Identify volunteer, staff and allies with potential relationships to target decision makers.
- Utilize your relationships with business and labor leaders.
- Build relationships with key legislative staff.





Develop a White Paper

- Collect solid data that is sourced to make your case
- Find precedent or other policy examples
- Develop short main messages
- Describe how it will work- identify revenue source
- Keep to one page





Create Your Own Message



Educate Legislators

- Schedule tours for legislators in their district
- Make appointments in Columbus
- Use bi-partisan language
- Attend meetings/events where legislators will be
- Become a reliable source of information/expert for legislators





Organize and Activate Grassroots Support

- Write letters
- Make phone calls
- Testify on relevant legislation
- Organize clients that benefit from service
- Contact media
- Letters to the editor
- Gather public support





Flexibility

- Willingness to compromise is crucial
- Consider phase-in, pilot to scale
- Recognize healthy differences of opinion





Integrity

- Develop objective responses to opponents' views
- Use caution in characterizing your opponents to others
- Tell the truth
- Reputation is everything





Advocacy Tools





Meeting with Elected Officials

- Identify two to three key priorities for your meeting.
 - ✓ National After School Agenda Items.
 - ✓ Federal funding streams important to you and your programs.
 - ✓ Emerging issues in your community.
- Be flexible.
 - ✓ Pressing issues may arise.
- Identify and prioritize offices to meet with.
 - ✓ Prioritize based on committee membership, leadership, past interest/support for issues.





Develop Support Materials

- State/community specific info that ties to national data and federal policies where possible.
- Information about your organization or program:
 - ✓ Big successes; number of children/families served; capacity; printed marketing piece; map of your state indicating areas you serve.





Know Your Elected Officials

- Important Stats:
 - Committee membership; leadership roles; length of time in office; election cycle; personal background and affiliations.
- Resources:
 - (www.ohio.gov); (www.house.gov and www.senate.gov); local press; www.congress.org.
 - Co-sponsorship of your priority legislation (<http://thomas.loc.gov>).





Getting the Meeting with Your Elected Officials

- Explain who you are and background on your organization.
- Ask for the aide who works on your priority issues.
 - ✓ Staffers are VERY busy - be prepared to leave a message and be persistent.
- Let the aide know that you will be in Columbus or DC and would like to meet with him/her and the Member.
- Give other details of the meeting:
 - ✓ Purpose; additional participants.
- May require a formal meeting request through the scheduler.





A Successful Meeting

- **BE ON TIME**—TAKE ONLY THE TIME YOU ARE GIVEN!
- Brief 5-7 minutes on issue.
- **Provide a one-page summary.**
- Answer questions, but don't be afraid to say "I don't know."
- Don't argue.
- **Offer to be a resource.**
- Send a thank you follow-up letter.





Writing Letters to Legislators

- **Make the ASK!** Don't forget to tell them what you want them to do about your issue.
- Give them a brief background—don't assume they know you, or your organization.
- **PERSONALIZE YOUR MESSAGE**, make sure you include how this relates/affects YOU!
- **BE A RESOURCE.** Provide them your contact information, and additional informational resources on the issue
- Request a meeting on the issue.





Calling Your Legislators

- **Give them your name, address and organizational affiliation**
- **Thank them again** for the meeting
- State the reason you are calling
 - **Personalize it.**
 - **What you want** them to do about your issue.
- **Offer yourself as a resource for more information.**



...and what else?

- Educate your community on the importance of supporting children and youth (and other interests)
- Be informed- read the paper, watch the news, attend community meetings
- Mobilize a campaign in your community to support children and youth
- Organize your family and neighbors to support children
- Teach others to advocate for themselves



...there's MORE!

- Make your area of passion reflective in your work
- Educate elected and appointed officials
- Testify at public hearings
- Write letters to the editor of your local newspaper
- Make your political donations count for children by giving to those candidates you believe support children's issues
- VOTE



Remembering what it's ALL about!





Contact Us:

Voices for Ohio's Children is a non-partisan collaborative of private, public, and not-for-profit sector organizations and individuals who advocate for public policy that improves the well-being of Ohio's children and their families.

www.vfc-oh.org

1.877.881.7860