



The ABC's of Advocacy

The ABC's of Advocacy is intended for anyone and everyone interested in *seeking to influence government policy, but not to govern*. Conscious of its commitment to promote enlightened discussion and collective action in the Canadian arts and culture milieu, the Canadian Conference of the Arts encourages you to familiarize yourself with the key elements of an efficient political advocacy strategy and to act without delay . . . tomorrow may be too late!

Here is what you will find in this toolkit

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- ❖ Be informed: *Intelligence gathering is very important*
- ❖ Join with others: *Numbers are not everything, but they are important*
- ❖ Act: *A single voice can make all the difference*
- ❖ Communicate and stay in touch: *mutual awareness and understanding are essential*
- ❖ Say thank you: *Never let them forget you appreciate their support*

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- ❖ Be brief: *An elected official's time is limited*
- ❖ Act strategically: *A well-planned and developed strategy can go far*
- ❖ Be informed and informative : *Content and the presentation can make or break your case*
- ❖ Be respectful: *Courtesy is very important*
- ❖ Be appreciative: *Let them know you value their time and effort*

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- ❖ Newspaper articles
- ❖ Opinion pieces (op-ed) and letters to the editor
- ❖ Television and radio
- ❖ Internet and e-mail
- ❖ Attend town hall meetings or other forums in where key decision-makers will appear
- ❖ Organize petitions and letter-writing campaigns
- ❖ Other

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5 EASY STEPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL ADVOCACY STRATEGY

1. Be informed: *Intelligence gathering is very important*

- ❖ Ensure that you are up to date on the issues of interest to your organization. Notably, be aware of new policy proposals; proposed changes to, and introduction of, legislation; announcement of committee studies; political appointments; and, formation of special commissions.
 - The Parliament of Canada website is a good source of information on initiatives at the federal level. By familiarizing yourself with the resources on this site, you will be better placed to plan, develop and carry out your advocacy campaign
 - Most provinces and territories as well as certain municipalities offer similar resources.
 - Refer to the **Useful Links** on the CCA website.
- ❖ Know the name and number of the legislation, or the name of the committee study, that concerns you.
- ❖ Know the position of the other stakeholders interested in the same issues. This will help you identify possible allies and will prepare you to counter differing views.
- ❖ Understand how your issue fits into the other issues and priorities of the individual decision-makers or of the government. Be creative about how you present your case
- ❖ Know whom to address with your issues, who might be interested in them and how to best approach them.
 - Identify your MP as well as the Ministers and key bureaucrats connected with your issue / organization.
 - Maintain a file of background information on these individuals (their issues and areas of concern, interests, etc.) to assist with any contact.

The first rule of advocacy is: 'to whom are you advocating, and the second rule is 'what do they care about', not 'what do you care about.'"

Robert Lynch, Americans for the Arts

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2. Join with others: *Numbers are not everything, but they are important*

- ❖ Identify others to join you in delivering your message. In politics, repetition is key.



- ❖ Make common cause with usual, as well as, unusual partners; do not just preach to the converted.
- ❖ Identify opponents on the issue(s), and try to make them allies.
- ❖ When you lobby, ensure you indicate the people you represent. Decision makers want to be reassured that the issues you are presenting affect a large constituency.

- ❖ Involve prominent non-artists. Well known members of your community (arts board members, local philanthropists) will lend credibility to the cause.

3. Take action: *A single voice can make a difference*

- ❖ Make a commitment to do what you are able to do, no matter how small it may seem.
 - Timing can be everything; act regularly and promptly.
 - Do not wait for someone else to take care of the issues.

- ❖ Try to be proactive, instead of reactive. This will allow you to have more time to think about the best course of action, and to better prepare your case.



- ❖ See also: ***Ways to Get the Message Out.***

- ❖ If possible, act on several fronts at the same time; decision makers respond to public pressure:
 - Submit briefs, try to appear before committees, book meetings with key players and issue press release;
 - Keep your members informed and invite them to take action through newsletters, bulletins and your website.
 - Involve the community by holding public meetings, sending letters and organizing events around your issues.

4. Communicate and stay in touch: *Mutual awareness and understanding are essential*

- ❖ Cultivate your relationship with key decision-makers if you want them to become your future champions, as well as with their staff, they play a key role in ensuring your message gets to them.
- ❖ Put your MP and other key decision-makers on the mailing list and ensure you are on his / hers. Knowing each party's concerns is essential to building a strong relationship.

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- ❖ Ensure that your MP's office has some of your brochures. Let them be active in promoting you.
- ❖ Send a poster or photograph to your MP's office. Visual reminders reinforce their awareness of you, especially if the picture is of them at one of your events.
- ❖ Create visibility for your MP. Invite him/her to your activities.
- ❖ Explore creative options for exposure in the riding through your organization.
- ❖ Share your success stories. This will ensure your concerns are heard when you have a problem.
- ❖ See also: ***Meeting with Decision Makers.***

5. Say thank you: *Never let them forget you appreciate their support*

- ❖ Say thank you and say it often! If you do not have time to write a letter, make a call; if not time for a call, send an e-mail.
- ❖ Openly credit your public funding sources: placards in the lobby, announcements in programs and publications and press releases in newspapers. All of these are tools that take little time to create, but make an enormous impact.

“Advocacy is retail. It isn’t making a good case, it’s making a personal connection.”

Jim Kelly, 4Culture, Seattle

5 EFFECTIVE WAYS OF GETTING YOUR MESSAGE ACROSS

1. Be brief: *A decision-maker’s time is limited*

- ❖ You may get 15 minutes of a decision-maker’s time, crammed into a busy schedule. Make it count.
- ❖ Do not treat meetings as a one-shot opportunity. Re-visit issues on a regular basis instead of using your limited time to address all of your concerns without the appropriate depth.
- ❖ When appearing as a witness before a committee, respect the time limit set for the opening statements, and be concise in your answers to the questions posed by the members.
- ❖ When sending a brief or a submission, respect the requested page limit.

When advocating you need to use various arguments, “but use them with mastery, with insight, with elegance and with care.”

Andrew Taylor, University of Wisconsin-Madison



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2. Be strategic: *A well-planned and developed strategy can go a long way*

- ❖ Know ahead of time where your issue fits into the government's agenda.
 - Be aware of the « zeitgeist » ; i.e., where public opinion sits in relation to your issue , where political priorities lie and where support or opposition is to be found.
- ❖ Be able to accept compromises, and know when to back off.
- ❖ Be sincere and passionate without being overly emotional.
- ❖ Issues must be seen to be in the public interest in order to convince decision-makers.
- ❖ Establish as many connections as possible between you and the decision-maker.
- ❖ Do your homework and research information about the decision-maker's previous positions, voting records and legislative and policy goals.
- ❖ Give clear examples of why your issue should be supported. Include recent news pieces related to your issues.
- ❖ Be responsive the decision-maker's suggestions and, if possible, incorporate them in your advocacy strategy.
- ❖ Never vilify your opponents and do not assume the decision-maker knows both sides of the issue. In fact, indicating an understanding of the other side of the issue often helps to make your case.
- ❖ Always make a clear pitch, even if you feel uncomfortable about it.
- ❖ Ask the decision-maker for a particular decision or action. MPs and others expect it, and it will ensure that they consider your issue carefully.
- ❖ When appearing before a committee be aware of what has been said before and the line of questioning of the members by reading the minutes of past committee meetings. You will be better prepared for your presentation.

3. Be informed and informative: *Content and presentation can make or break your case*

- ❖ Always be well prepared; know your facts.
- ❖ Be sure to ask good questions when meeting with decision-makers. The information you gather could be crucial to deciding your next move. If you don't receive a satisfactory response, request follow-up as soon as possible.
- ❖ Instead of addressing a long list of underdeveloped arguments, focus on your three main issues and provide adequate background on each of them.
- ❖ Prepare a short document of 1 or 2 pages for the meeting. Outline clearly your position on the issue. If you do not have time to cover all of your key points, this document will provide the decision-maker with valuable information and will also serve as a record of your meeting.
- ❖ Become an information resource and cultural liaison to decision-makers. Build the groundwork to ensure they call you first when needing to find out more about certain issues.

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- ❖ Propose solutions that are feasible on the community level.

I am not trying to convince him, I would rather understand

André Laurendeau, journalist, writer and politician (1912-1968)

4. Be respectful: *Civility is very important*

- ❖ Always maintain a good working relationship with decision-makers regardless of whether or not you come to an agreement.
- ❖ Be a good listener, giving the decision-maker a meaningful opportunity to state his/her position so that you can begin a dialogue. A good rule of thumb is to spend a third of your time addressing your issue(s) and the rest listening to her/his thoughts on the matter.
- ❖ If you have to get tough with a decision-maker, pay him/her the courtesy of a heads-up.

5. Be appreciative: *Being a decision-maker is not easy*

- ❖ Acknowledge past support, do not be demanding and always say thank you!

An effective arts advocate is accommodating, holds in check those feelings of entitlement and exceptionalism, and really listens to policy leaders with contrary views.

Bill Ivey, Director of the Curb Center

FACE-TO-FACE MEETINGS WITH DECISION-MAKERS

1. Setting up the meeting

- ❖ Make an appointment: call the decision-maker's office, identify yourself and/or your organization and state the purpose of the meeting.
- ❖ Be flexible when setting the date and time of the meeting. If there is a real need to re-schedule, be accommodating and do not be discouraged.

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- ❖ Decision-makers' assistants are key resource people; make a note of their names.
- ❖ Confirm the time and place of your meeting in a follow-up letter sent by e-mail, fax or post, depending on time available. The letter could include:
 - Items you wish to discuss and your goals for the meeting, stated clearly;
 - A list of your group or organization's members (if applicable) who will be attending the meeting, and their positions;
 - Background information on your organization (if applicable).

2. The day of the meeting

a. Your objective should be:

- ❖ To inform decision-makers about :
 - The goals, activities and needs of your organization;
 - The needs of the arts and cultural community in Canada;
 - The importance of arts and culture.
- ❖ To identify how government could better support the arts and cultural sector.
- ❖ To develop a relationship so that your organization is considered a source of information about the issues in your community.
- ❖ To identify his/her position on your issues.
- ❖ To gather information as to what would be the best way to attain your goals.
- ❖ To identify possible information gaps that you could fill to garner support.



b. You should:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Be on time. Respect the time allocated for the meeting. ❖ Provide the decision-maker with an information package including a one-page summary of your main points. ❖ Introduce yourself and your organization. ❖ Explain your organization's mission, goals and objectives; describe who the organization serves. ❖ Introduce and explain the issues you wish to discuss. Remember to implement the "5 Effective Ways of Getting Your Message Across." |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Answer questions honestly. If you don't know the answer to a question, offer to get back to them with the information. ❖ Be a good listener. ❖ Ask good questions that will keep your agenda in focus. ❖ Take notes; if you go as a group, decide in advance who will act as official note taker. |
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3. After the meeting

- ❖ Have participants evaluate the meeting. Revise and expand notes taken during the meeting.
- ❖ Call and thank the assistant and ask for feedback.
- ❖ Write a thank you letter highlighting how the meeting was useful to you / your organization, and if applicable, any future course of action agreed upon.
- ❖ Write a bulletin (if applicable) announcing to your members the results of the meeting along with the message you delivered.
- ❖ Set up a further meeting, if required, to follow-up on issues that arose in the first meeting.
- ❖ If the decision-maker acts on the issues requested, write a thank you letter outlining how their action has affected you / your organization/ your community. You may want to copy your letter to the "Letters to the Editor" section of your local newspaper because a public thank you ensures you will not be forgotten.

4. Things to remember

- ❖ Make sure that the Board of Directors of your organization has agreed to the substance of the message you will pass on in meetings.
- ❖ Know the decision-maker before you meet her/him; research their background.
- ❖ Know the decision-maker's party affiliation and position on arts and culture. Remember, they are all committed to the policies of their party.
- ❖ Take a building block approach. Build your argument piece by piece.
- ❖ Ensure you are up to speed on any current debate on these issues. Focus on possible solutions, and try to position issues both for the short term and for the long term.

Decision-makers need

- To be well-informed
- To be reliable sources of information
- To be respected
- To understand your position before taking a stance



Decision-makers do not need

- To be talked down to or belittled
- To have their time wasted
- To hear repetitive versions of the same argument
- To be part of an emotional display of anger

*Always approach advocacy
as a long term commitment!*



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WAYS TO GET THE MESSAGE OUT

1. Newspaper stories

- ❖ Read your local newspaper(s) to find the name(s) of reporters most likely to be interested in your topic; call the reporter to discuss your idea. Be concise, specific, and factual.
- ❖ Be sensitive to newspaper deadlines and style.
- ❖ Have written material available describing the message you want to convey and which can be e-mailed or faxed.
- ❖ When writing about a national story, include details about the local impact.
- ❖ Do not overlook smaller papers and university presses; many are happy to print feature stories or articles which you have written yourself.
- ❖ Respond immediately to negative press on arts-related issues.

2. Opinion pieces (op-ed) and Letters to the Editor

- ❖ These can be easier to get in print than you might think, especially if you tie in current local cultural news to one of your main issues.
- ❖ Raise arts issues in a way that will be very visible to decision-makers and to the community.
- ❖ Send a copy of your printed editorial or letter to all influential policy makers.
- ❖ For maximum impact, and to increase the likelihood of being published, consider having an opinion piece authored by a well-known community or cultural figure. This person does not necessarily have to write the article – it is common for such articles to be written by someone else – but you must have the individual's permission in advance.
- ❖ For letters, make sure that they are brief (under 300 words), well written, pithy, contain accurate information and are non-defamatory.
- ❖ Even a letter or op-ed that does not get printed is valuable, as it may be considered by the newspaper's editorial board when reviewing an issue.

3. Television and radio

- ❖ Identify the topics covered by various talk radio programs and determine which programs would be most interested and open to a balanced discussion of the arts.
- ❖ Write down the call-in number and keep trying – it is not unusual for callers to wait “on hold” for 30 minutes or more for popular shows. When you get through, tell the producers your name, place and issues you wish to present.
- ❖ One way to move up the line quicker is to offer an answer or explanation to a previous caller.



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- ❖ Remain non-partisan; avoid making statements concerning your positions or your support for specific political parties or candidates. Avoid jargon.
- ❖ Television coverage is more difficult. Performances and exhibitions make good visuals, so use these to add to your appeal.
- ❖ Be aware, if you are on local television, that any “breaking news” stories may supersede coverage of your activity.
- ❖ Weekends are usually slow news days for most local stations and a good time to solicit TV coverage.

4. Internet and e-mail networks

- ❖ If you are a membership-based organization, ensure your members receive information on how to communicate with their candidates, either through direct material on your website or through links to other useful sites.
- ❖ Use your e-mail networks or lists to send concise bulletins on the advocacy issues your organization is addressing.

5. Attend town hall meetings or other forums where key-decision makers will appear

- ❖ Publicly raise arts issues and ask key people specific questions related to your issues. This will allow you to involve and educate other members of the community as well as the decision-makers.
- ❖ Remain non-partisan.
- ❖ Talk about success stories. Demonstrate how the arts improve the quality of life in your community and / or show how federal programs have made a difference locally.

6. Organize petitions and letter-writing campaigns

- ❖ Candidates are more likely to respond to initiatives which have been brought forward from the local level.
- ❖ Petitions that include signatures from a broad cross-section of the local population will carry weight.
- ❖ If a letter-writing campaign seems the appropriate medium, then you should:
 - Draft the letter, providing an opportunity for people to customize it if they wish.
 - Ensure that your guidelines are explicit regarding the key message and what outcome is expected. Be precise and don't dilute the message.
 - Ensure it receives wide distribution.
 - Provide clear instructions regarding the destination of the letter, and the timeline for sending it.
 - Ask people to inform you of their action so you have an indication of how many letters are being sent, and from whom.

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- ❖ When drafting the letter, remember to:
 - Introduce yourself, and state your reason for writing in the first paragraph.
 - Be brief, one page is enough.
 - Do not include bulky or lengthy supporting materials.
 - Leave no doubt what specific courses of action you are requesting.
 - Be courteous yet firm.
 - Proofread your written material, as a letter full of typos and grammatical mistakes tends to be ignored.
 - End by saying “thank you” and request a response in the near future.

7. Divers

- ❖ Embark on public action by organizing media events or news conferences. This works particularly well if you are a big fish in a small pond and if it's a slow news day or week.
- ❖ Invite the decision-maker to your institution, or to attend an exhibition or performance.
- ❖ Create a public service announcement.
- ❖ Place print advertisement in newspapers and cultural newsletters.

Useful links can be found at www.ccarts.ca/advocacy-resources/