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ADVOCACY TIPS

Successful Advocacy in Ten Easy Steps

Prepared for YMPEP – December 13, 2016

“Lobbying” vs “Advocacy”

- *All lobbying is advocacy, but not all advocacy is lobbying!*
- *Advocacy: The act of arguing in favor of something, such as a cause idea or policy – Raising your voice! There is no limit to the amount of non-lobbying advocacy your organization can do.*
- *Lobbying: (as defined by federal tax law): Any attempt to influence specific legislation. Lobbying can be done in two ways:*
 - *Contacting or urging the public to contact policy makers for the purpose of proposing, supporting, or opposing legislation, or*
 - *By advocating the adoption or rejection of legislation.*
 - *Lobbying involves three parts: **Communication with a policy maker that takes a position on specific, pending legislation.***

(Adapted from Washington Nonprofits and “The Board Advocacy Project”)

Tip #1.

Talk to the right people.

Who are the decision-makers?

- *Federal, state, local, tribal*
- *Executive, legislative, judiciary*
 - President, governor, mayor/city manager, school superintendent , , , ,
 - Federal senators and representatives, state senators and representatives, school board members, city council members, water district commissioners, fire district commissioners, tribal councils . . .
And sometimes task forces, special advisory groups . . .
 - Federal, state and local court systems
- *Don't forget "The Bureaucracy" – the system of departments and divisions under each Executive Branch*

Tip #2.

Talk to the right people (part 2).

Who represents you?

- *Representation is based on residency. You will need to figure out, based on your home or business address, who represents you.*
- *Tip: If you are unsure which jurisdictions you live in, google King County Parcel Locator (<http://www.kingcounty.gov/operations/GIS/PropResearch/ParcelViewer.aspx>), click on the green tab that says “Start Parcel Viewer 2.0,” enter your address in the top left hand corner space and click on “search,” and when the inset pops up, scroll down and click on “District Report.” This will provide you with a list of all the governance districts you live in.*
- *Visit the websites of each jurisdiction to locate the elected officials who represent you, as well as a list of key staff people.*

Tip #3.

Understand the history and issues surrounding your cause.

What do you need to know to effectively advocate for change?

- *Develop a database of books, magazines, blogs, websites, twitter feeds, and organizations that provide background on specific issues. Examples: SAMHSA.org and NAMI.org.*
- *Understand specific proposed legislation. Go to <http://leg.wa.gov/> and click on “Bill Information.” Scroll down to “Search and Tracking Tools” to start searching for previous and current proposed legislation.*
- *Subscribe to legislative updates on particular bills you want to track.*

Tip #4.

Prepare for contact.

What are you going to say?

- *If you are representing an organization, does it have an official adopted position on the issue (i.e., adopted by a board of directors or agreed upon by executive staff?)*
- *Do not assume that the elected official knows anything about the change you are requesting.*
- *What are the top – one, two or three – reasons for the proposed change? Who will it help? How will it help?*
- *Most important: What are you **asking** your representative or official to do?*
- Put your “talking points” and “ask” onto a single sheet of paper that can be handed to the representative or official.

Tip #5.

Make contact!

How can you determine the most effective way to reach out?

- *Legislative hotline – 1-800-562-6000.*
- *Emails – go to <http://leg.wa.gov/> and click on House of Representatives or Senate to email directly. (For other jurisdictions, visit individual websites.)*
- *Phone calls*
- *Arrange a one-on-one or small group meeting*
- *Mail a letter*
- *Attend a Legislative Town Hall or other meetings (i.e., school board meetings, city council meetings, County Council meetings . . .)*

Tip #6.

Be polite.

How can you (maybe) ensure a positive outcome?

- *There is nothing to be gained by being rude to an elected official (even if they deserve it sometimes).*
- *You want to be remembered – but not as “the shouter” or “the accuser.” Practice language beforehand should a disagreement arise.*
- *Be sensitive to time constraints. Elected officials are often meeting with hundreds of people per day. If a meeting is scheduled for 15 minutes, be sure to conclude after 15 minutes.*
- *Take the long view – the elected official you disagree with today may be your strongest ally on another issue. “We can disagree without being disagreeable.”*

Tip #7.

Be patient.

What if you get a negative response?

- *In elected democratic governance, change takes time.*
- *Be respectful, but persistent.*
- *Hone your arguments.*
- *Gather other people to support your cause.*
- *Work in the community to raise awareness and interest.*
- *Understand the “opponents” if they exist.*
- *Not all good ideas are embraced immediately.*

Tip #8.

Include the voices of affected citizens.

How can we tell our story more effectively?

- *Legislators and bureaucrats, like all human beings, respond to personal stories.*
- *In advance, work with those sharing personal stories to ensure that the stories correspond with your talking points.*
- *Ensure that personal stories are given freely, because the person sincerely supports your agenda. Very important when including student voices.*

Tip #9.

Include community in your advocacy work.

How can we increase awareness and support?

- *Network with other organizations and community groups who share your mission, or interest in a particular issue, to help create strategic partnerships.*
- *Hold informational forums, invitation-only or open to the public, to raise awareness.*
- *Speeches before civic organizations – Rotary, Kiwanis, Lions, Y boards, and so forth . . .*
- *Letters to the editor*
- *Community events*

Tip #10.

Say thank you. Say it publicly!

How do we create an on-going relationship with those who represent us?

- *When an elected official or bureaucrat helps you, be sure to say thank you!*
- *Even better, where appropriate, make your thank you public – at a community meeting, through Facebook and Twitter, on your website, or with a letter to the editor.*

Examples

- *Issaquah Skate Park re-location*
- *Meetings with state legislators*
- *Teen Café*