

Policy Advocacy - Bite-Sized

Here are five ideas for fitting advocacy into busy lives.

They spring from one simple fact: **ADVOCACY JUST MEANS SPEAKING UP.**

Step 1. Sign up for good "Alerts." Identify an advocacy group that works on issues you care most about. Ask to get their "legislative alerts:" information about legislative actions likely to affect your priority issue/program. They will keep you informed, provide a sample "message," and help you know when your voice is needed most. (Many also offer advocacy trainings.)

Step 2. Use the TELEPHONE or WRITE

Washington has a **TOLL-FREE hotline** to the State Capitol: **1-800-562-6000**. Operators will take your message and send it to your Senator, both your legislators, and the Governor (or just one of these). Most days it only takes about two minutes - because you can use the message provided in the "alert" you signed up for in Step # 1.

Or you can **send a simple email message**. Mention the bill number or issue in the subject line; state clearly what you want the legislator to do; and be sure to put your home address so they know that you live in their Legislative District. Keep it short, polite, and to the point.

Finding telephone numbers and/or email addresses is easy: just go to the website for the state Capitol – www.leg.wa.gov - and follow directions to look up your legislators. Or, contact the League of Women Voters; ask for copies of They Represent You.

Step 3. Help others to.

➤ Make cardstock "telephones" with the Capitol website, telephone number, and the dates when the Legislature is in Session. Add your own logo, website, or agency name. Make up a supply, and give them to everyone you encounter: board members, staff, consumers, friends, neighbors, extended family.... You and they should pledge to make one toll-free call or email every week the legislature is in Session.

➤ Set up a "TAKE FIVE" TABLE. Make it easy for others to write or call their elected officials. Bring a laptop and/or cell phone and use the handout headed "Take Five." You can also sign people up for your Network, or send messages about a budget item or issue.

Step 4. Advertise your issue.

➤ Anytime you are around elected officials (e.g., at a City or County Council hearing, a Town Hall Meeting, in Olympia, etc.), wear or carry something (a bright badge, a briefcase, or bag) that identifies you with your issue or agency. Bold lettering on a neon background will be seen even from a distance – e.g., FEED KIDS, or, HEALTH CARE NOW! The politicians present will quickly realize those badges mean there's an organized group that cares about a particular issue, and has its members in the audience.

➤ Write a slogan or the name of your group on the folder holding your "fact sheets" or handouts. Then carry the folder to Hearings or Candidate Forums so the slogan shows.

Step 5. Talk. Mention key bills, issues, and budget items at every opportunity.

Talk to anybody who will listen: at a meeting, in a grocery store line, waiting for the light to change, after services on Sunday.... Get your key issues on other voters' radar screens.

USEFUL TIP

It helps if you prepare a "30-60-Second Speech," ready for any occasion when you might get to talk to an elected official or decision-maker. For example, you might run into your state Senator at the local farmers' market or you might spot the aide to a County Council member where you worship. Those are great opportunities for a quick-bit of advocacy.

Here are two versions for what to include:

"SPEECH A"

- ⇒ **your name, and where you live** (Hi, I'm _____, and I live in your District.)
- ⇒ **your group or agency** - mention the number of members or people served in the elected's District (e.g., I'm on the board of DAWN – Domestic Abuse Women's Network; we're in your District and we serve about 300 women every month....)
- ⇒ **say what you want to call to their attention.** (I'm very concerned about adequate funding for domestic violence programs....)
- ⇒ **say what you'd like them to do** (Please vote for DV funding in the budget...)
- ⇒ **Give them something in writing** that includes how to contact you/your group. (I'd be glad to answer any questions you might have; meanwhile, here's some basic information about what we do....) Have a basic Fact Sheet or brochure about your program with you at all times.

"SPEECH B"

- **your name and where you live; your group or agency** (same as above);
- **put a human face on your program, paint a brief "word picture"** – it can be about someone your group or program has helped, or about your own situation;
- **mention something you are doing now, that WORKS;**
- **note how your efforts help in their community**, how your efforts help put public dollars to work there;
- **remind them: volunteers, even the whole non-profit sector, cannot do the job alone.** We can't have a "public-private partnership" if the public "partner" opts out.