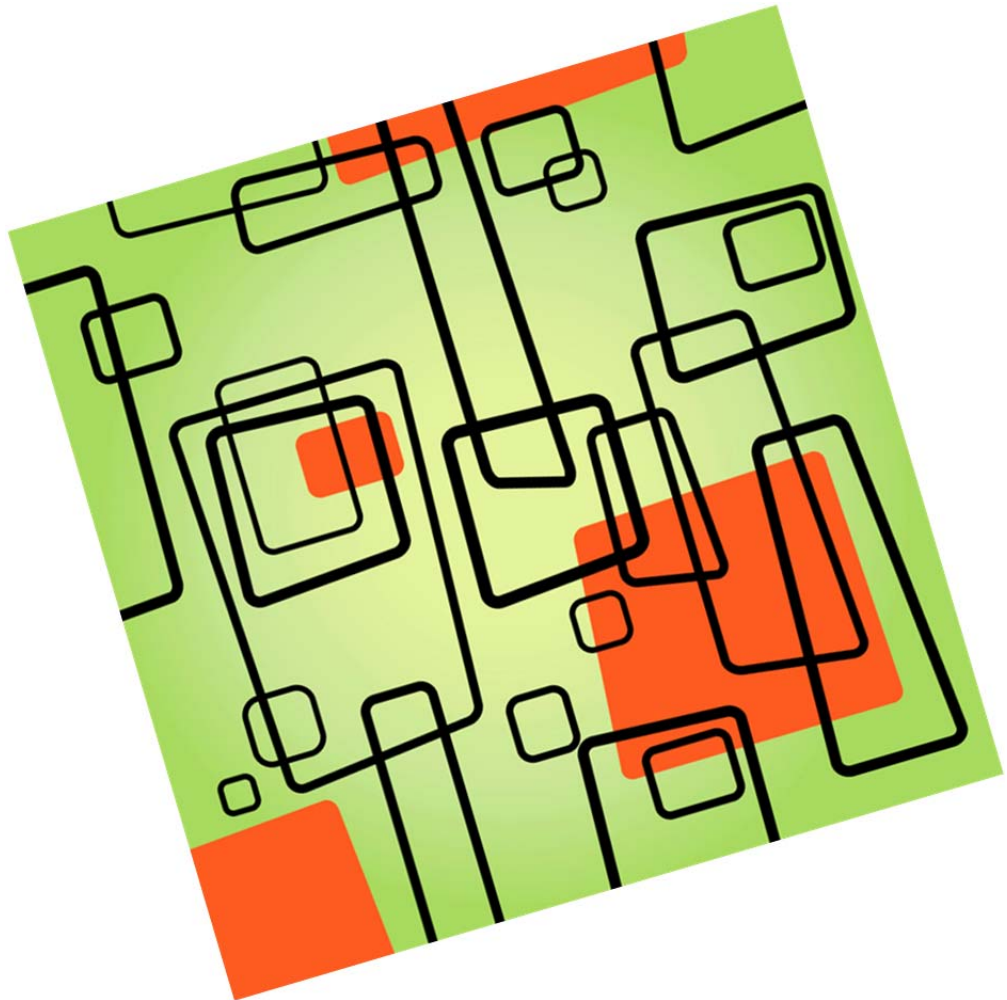


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Guide

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The Advocate's Role

- **Arts Advocacy is the process of supporting and promoting the arts broadly and specifically.** It is aimed at influencing and informing the general public, public-policy and key decision makers about the issues that threaten and/or provide opportunity for growth and stability of the arts as an employment sector, economic and tourist engine, educational tool, and quality of life essential.
- **The Advocate's Role** – Phone calls, letters and visits to elected officials can have a huge impact on their actions at both the local and state level. You can build a relationship with your local elected officials – county commissioners and city council members as well as with your state of Ohio legislative delegation and their staffs by expressing your concerns, offering information, and thanking them when appropriate. Below are the main components of the advocate's work:
- **Know who your elected officials are.** If you are not sure, call GCAC, the League of Women Voters of Metropolitan Columbus <http://lwvcols.org>, or the Franklin County Board of Elections <http://vote.franklincountyohio.gov>. You should be familiar with your state and local elected officials. Remember, they can change often, so it is good to update your contact list after each election cycle.
- **Contact GCAC on local arts issues or the Ohio Arts Council on state arts issues** to find out more about your elected officials' positions and voting records on arts related issues.
- **Build an ongoing relationship with your elected officials and key stakeholders.** You should contact their offices at least one to two times every year. Remember that this contact can be to provide information or an update on your organization or about a specific arts related matter. For example, it is a good idea to invite elected officials and/or their staff periodically to performances, facility tours, receptions, or one of your educational programs. If an elected official or community stakeholder attends an event make sure that they meet your board members.
- **Communicate your concerns to your elected officials.** Many officials will assume that your only interest is arts funding, so it is important to articulate the wide range of issues that may impact your organization.
- **Advocate on carefully defined issues.** Work with your board members, staff, patrons and businesses that share your concerns to contact your elected officials when appropriate. Coordinate these efforts with GCAC and other arts organizations. There is strength in numbers, but be sure to set realistic expectations and provide accurate information.
- **Recruit members of your community to help you.** Use media outlets, public forums, and social media to advocate your interests. One of the most important jobs of an advocate is to create other advocates.

- **Be visible in your community.** Remember outreach and education programs are important to elected officials. Make sure that you send them copies of news articles or publications that document your work and make them aware of your community engagement.

Advocacy Activities in Support of the Arts

Developing and maintaining a relationship with your elected officials is a critical part of your advocacy efforts. At times, you will have to translate dollar figures and concepts into the concrete reality of how public policy and funding changes will affect your institution's ability to serve the community. You will also have to relate how your work translates into jobs and economic development for the community.

Calling, writing and visiting your elected officials are the traditional ways to build a relationship, but here are a few more that increase your visibility for you and the elected official as well as help build sustainable relationships.

- Create a photo op for your elected officials. Invite them to an opening, reception, or other event at your institution. If appropriate, invite them to say a few words. Invite an elected official to be a featured speaker or presenter at an event.
- Invite an elected official and their staff to activities such as facility tours, rehearsals before performances, or exhibit tours. Invite a board member and key members of your staff to participate.
- When you hear of a major community concern, find out how you can assist elected officials in resolving the problem or help in some way. For example, if the city has a graffiti problem, artists can join together to volunteer in neighborhoods to paint murals over damaged walls.
- Publically and prominently announce and thank elected officials for their support.
- Send invites and related materials to your elected official's offices. These pieces remind them of your role in the community and your work.
- Add elected officials to your mailing list and ask to have the name of your organization added to his or her list as well.

Advocacy, Networking, and Collaboration

The arts community can reach out to other groups and organizations to help add to its effectiveness. These groups can become important allies. These groups are also good groups to work with in a collaborative manner. Examples of groups to network with include:

- Business Groups
 - ✓ Neighborhood business organizations like the Short North Business Association
 - ✓ Columbus 2020
 - ✓ Columbus Downtown Development Corporation
 - ✓ Chambers of Commerce

- Cultural Organizations
 - ✓ Ohio Citizens for the Arts
 - ✓ Ohio Arts Council
 - ✓ The Historical Society
 - ✓ Film and Literary societies

- Civic Organizations
 - ✓ Service clubs such as Rotary
 - ✓ Area commissions and civic associations

- Human Service Organizations
 - ✓ Human Service Chamber of Franklin County
 - ✓ United Way of Central Ohio

Encourage individuals drawn from these sources to help with your advocacy efforts, when appropriate, in the following ways:

- Attend meetings with elected officials together to demonstrate broad support for the arts.
- Include positive statements about the arts in their own promotional materials.
- Look for opportunities to work together and support one another through cross promotion of activities and events.

Meeting with Elected Officials

Arranging the Appointment:

- **Call your elected official's office** using the contact information provided. An aide or scheduler will answer the phone and can coordinate your visit. Be sure to address the elected official by his/her formal title; Senator/Representative Last Name, Commissioner Last Name, or Councilperson Last Name.

Generally, State senators and representatives are available to meet on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursdays in their offices. When scheduling a site visit, State officials are available on Monday and Fridays when the legislature is not in session. Council members are more flexible to meet, except on Mondays when there are city council meetings.

- **Some elected officials require a written meeting request** so schedule enough in advance of the desired meeting date in the event submitting a written request delays the process.
- **Don't ask for more than a 30 minute meeting** unless you have an unusual problem. Elected officials are often overscheduled and most meetings last about 15-20 minutes.

Preparing for the Meeting:

- **DO YOUR HOMEWORK!** Know exactly what you want to say and carefully review your message. You can always contact GCAC to find out about important issues and where your elected officials stand on each issue.
- **Compile figures** about how much, if any, money your institution receives from GCAC. Contact GCAC for this information or with any questions. Although you should avoid long lists of numbers, it is vital to demonstrate the impact of state or local dollars on your institution. Prepare a few dramatic numbers or anecdotes to illustrate your points. Like many people, elected officials more easily remember examples conveyed in personal terms.
- **Obtain information on your institution's artistic mission**, outreach, and educational programs, as well as the economic impact that your institution has on the community. Elected officials will be more likely to support your position if they understand your vital role in the communities they represent.
- **Understand potential counter-arguments** to your position and be ready to respectfully answer any questions or disagreements.
- **Make sure everyone in your group is prepared.** Brief everyone attending the meeting and make sure they have written materials such as background information or position papers to review ahead of time.

- **Prepare a packet of information to leave with the elected officials** that includes background information, fact sheets, supporting evidence including newspaper articles, etc. as well as materials about your institution and board members. *Attach your business card to the packet and how you can be reached for follow-up.*
- **In some instances you may meet with an elected official's legislative aide** even if you asked to meet with the elected official. Elected official's schedules often change at the last minute and they utilize aides to be their eyes and ears when they are not available. You should not be discouraged if your meeting is with a legislative aide instead. Be sure to provide the aide with the same quality of information and level of respect as they will report directly back to the elected official. *If you have an immediate request that requires the attention of the elected official exclusively, you should note that while scheduling the appointment.*

Delivering Your Message:

- **Be organized and on time!** Agree ahead of time the role each participant will take, who discusses what, and in what order participants will speak.
- **Begin by introducing yourself and your institution.** Talk briefly about who you serve and your institution's impact on the community.
- **Explain to the elected official why you asked for the meeting.** Get to your bottom line quickly. Be brief, direct, courteous, and positive. Do not assume that your elected official has any prior knowledge of the subject.

Suggested Outline:

BACKGROUND: Explain the issue in the simplest possible terms.

IMPACT: Explain how the issue directly affects your institution.

RECOMMENDATION: Indicate what you would like you elected official to do. Review what legislation is before the governing body and how you hope he/she will vote. If, for example, you want your elected official to oppose a proposed funding cut, explain how your institution uses its state or local dollars. Emphasize the consequences for your institution if funds are eliminated. Tell which programs you will have to curtail, how your ability to raise other funds would be hurt, etc. Finally, explicitly ask your elected official to oppose plans to cut the arts funding.

Please note; if you are asking the elected official to take a position on a current piece of debated legislation be up to date on where it is at in the law-making process. For example, your voice should be heard as a piece of legislation moves through the legislative process. It is not as effective if you wait until the last minute before the legislation is up for a vote to tell your official how you would like him/her to cast their vote.

If your meeting is simply an educational one-- meaning there is no immediate ask but rather you are educating the elected official on an initiative you plan to embark on-- that is perfectly ok too. Let the elected official know that upfront, that the purpose of your meeting is educational, and be sure to follow up and stay in touch with that elected official moving forward.

Other Helpful Suggestions:

- **Do not fight with your elected officials or staff members.** Take care to answer questions and concerns but if you disagree, make your point and move on. This is another good reason to be educated about the elected official's position on the issue prior to meeting with him/her so you can anticipate any negative feedback.
- **Always remember you are representing the entire Arts sector** when you meet on behalf of any arts organization with any elected official. Your demeanor and any lasting impression you leave will influence how the elected official feels about the arts and the issue you discuss.
- **If you do not know the answer to a question, say so** and promise to get back with the answer in a timely fashion.
- **Make sure you do not do all of the talking!** Give your elected officials opportunities to ask questions or state his/her opinion. Members and their staff will appreciate the chance to be heard. Also ask questions of them.
- **Stay away from jargon and initials.** Remember that your elected official deals with dozens of issues at a time. Each with its own language. Again, do not assume your elected officials have outside knowledge of the issue or your institution.
- **Thank your Elected Officials!** Always for their time, and especially if they have been supportive. They should not hear from the arts community only when they disagree with us or take a position we don't like.

After The Meeting:

- **Send a note thanking the elected official** or staff person for speaking with you. Briefly summarize the main points of the meeting.
- **Remember to follow up** if the elected official or staff person asked you anything that you didn't know.
- **Do not think of the meeting as an isolated event.** Although you may not have a face-to-face meeting again for some time, invite your elected officials to performances, facility tours, invite them to speak at an event, or think of other ways to maintain the relationship you have initiated.

- **Share feedback with GCAC.** Grassroots reports are invaluable in developing legislative strategies and tracking elected officials' positions on issues important to the arts community.