

Your voice matters in arts advocacy. If you are a board member or employee of an arts organization, an artist, a volunteer, a donor or an audience member, your message carries a special power: there is nothing that captures the attention of elected officials more than the hometown constituent point of view. This edition of *The Practical Advocate* offers three easy ways to voice your support for the arts in your state. None of them are complicated, and none involve lobbying or asking for money. All are easy and effective!

Now is an especially important time to get involved. Elections for 5,915 state legislative seats took place in November 2016—that's more than 80% of all state legislative positions. Some newly elected officials will be unfamiliar with issues relating to public support for the arts. For incumbents who retained their seats, a new term presents a fresh opportunity for legislators to make their mark on state policy. And you never know who will be appointed to committees that influence decisions about the arts. So the time is ripe to lay a strong foundation of understanding.

1. Congratulate the Winners

Once the legislators representing your state House and Senate district are sworn in, drop them a note to congratulate them on their election success. The note can be brief and it should not ask for anything. Instead, your goal is to establish contact and show that the arts are an involved part of the electorate.

It doesn't matter whether you share the official's party affiliation or political philosophy. Hearing from you at the outset of a term will set a positive tone for future consideration of policies and funding decisions affecting the arts.

Addresses can be found on your [state legislature's website](#). Or try [Cicero](#), an on-line database that provides state and federal legislators' postal mail and e-mail addresses, phone numbers, websites, Facebook pages and Twitter handles.

An initial note has even more power if a follow-up communication reinforces the connection. Good times to drop a line to your representative or senator are when you receive a grant from your state arts agency or launch a new program or initiative. Use these occasions to describe the impact of the arts on people your organization serves.

What Should I Say?

Here is a sample note of congratulations to a newly elected state legislator. Personalize the communication by mentioning issues pertinent to your community or by enclosing materials from your organization.

Dear Representative Jones:

Congratulations on your election to the state legislature. As a resident and voter in House District 14, I want to thank you for your service to our great state and to Springville, a town we're both proud to call home.

I also am writing to express appreciation for the support the legislature has provided for the arts in Springville. I'm a board member of Vivid Youth Corps, which recently received a grant from the State Arts Council. The funds helped our students (mostly low-income middle schoolers) channel their energies into creative community service. They restored the fading trim on our downtown bandstand and completed a new mural on the playground of Tidings Elementary School. I've attached a photo. Look at those kids grinning and standing tall!

I know you face a full legislative agenda that includes many issues important to our whole community. The arts can help with those goals, especially improving education and attracting more businesses to Springville, in a way that respects our quality of life. I'd be happy to serve as a resource on these topics.

Congratulations again and best wishes for the legislative session ahead.

Sincerely,

Jane Gordon

2. Extend an Invitation

Arts events allow politicians to directly experience what your organization does. Events also make tangible the broad base of support that the arts have. Legislators see the impact of your work firsthand and may also spot friends and supporters in the crowd.

- **Invite an elected official** (and his or her spouse) to attend a performance or exhibition, a community arts event, a school activity or a training program.
- **Acknowledge** the presence of the official at the event.
- **Thank** him or her for funding your state arts council.

The best time for an invitation is when your legislature is out of session, when most politicians are present in their home districts. If your event includes any special activities for donors (such as a reception, backstage tour or introductions to performers), consider including the legislator.



Oregon 3rd graders share their love for the arts and STEAM learning with Congresswoman Suzanne Bonamici.

3. Give Prominent Credit

If you are a state arts agency grantee, your award will come with requirements for acknowledging support from the state through use of a logo or special language. This is far more than a bureaucratic exercise—it's an essential way of showing that public arts funding is important to your community. Securing public funding is an achievement, so **wear it with pride!** Place the state arts agency's logo in a prominent spot on your website and materials. (Don't bury it at the back.) Consider celebrating your award in your newsletter or via social media channels.

Engage in Ongoing Advocacy

When you follow the steps above you gain dual influence: you are a *constituent* with a *relationship* the legislator recognizes. This makes your participation in later advocacy efforts doubly meaningful. Pathways to further participation:

- Sign up to receive regular communications from your [state arts agency](#) and keep them apprised of interactions you have with elected officials.
- Most states have **citizen arts advocacy groups** that follow legislative action and notify the field of important developments. Stay in the loop by following your advocacy group's Facebook page, Twitter feed or e-mail bulletins. Show your support by becoming a member.
- Attend your state's **arts day** at the state capital.



Handy Resources

[Who's Who in Government Arts Funding](#) shows how federal, state and local funding works; who benefits; and how arts advocacy is organized.

[Why Should Government Support the Arts?](#) answers tough questions about public support for the arts. It includes research citations backing up the key arguments.