

FORTY ACTION STRATEGIES

“What’s working in your state?” Typically, this is one of the first questions asked when arts advocates get together. While the answers are often as varied as the states, there are many common strategies.

Here are 40 proven strategies used by volunteer and professional arts advocates from around the country to help increase the visibility of the arts and strengthen support for the arts among the public and with public officials. While it is likely that you are already employing some of these strategies, there may be some new ideas that you can put to work in your state.

1. Identify candidates in advance of elections, and become involved in state and local politics. Get to know the candidates and their campaign aides early in the game. The aides often become top policy advisors after the election, and you will already be familiar with your new governor, mayor, state legislator or city council member.

2. Lead an orientation briefing on arts issues for staff in the governor’s or the mayor’s office, or for new legislative staff. Familiarize them with your programs and the public policy issues important to your organization. Present the briefing annually.

3. Link public arts funding to issues in education, social concerns, and economic and commercial development. Give a larger dimension to your advocacy for the arts by broadening the discussion to embrace other topics. Demonstrate how the arts can address urban problems; how the arts improve student performance in other academic subjects; how school drop-out rates decline when students are involved in the arts; and how the arts add to the economy of the state.

4. Generate public service announcements to reinforce the message that tax money spent on the arts provides programs for the entire community. Create your PSAs—and get technical support—in partnership with a media center or communications department at a university or community college.

“Becoming involved in a visible way with a candidate’s campaign will most certainly assure easier access after the election. Conversations with the candidate from the very beginning about the benefits of public support for the arts in his or her district create an awareness of the strength of the arts constituency and the benefits of working with them. And the newly elected official becomes more comfortable with talking points in our favor.”—*Tog Newman, chair, North Carolina Arts Council*

5. Institute a legislative committee on the arts—a select committee or joint committee of both houses of the state legislature. Help to ensure a dedicated base of arts supporters by creating a home for the arts in your legislature. Bolster the legislative committee to build arts interest in the legislature and create alliances with other public policy interests.

6. Foster and employ a statewide coalition of advocates that organizes events locally and on the state level, and that emphasizes direct contact with legislators, local officials and community leaders.

7. Establish an effective advocacy committee within your organization, with a clear job description and responsibilities for the committee members. Chaired by a board member, the committee should be made up of influential leaders in the community and grassroots volunteers to set up the advocacy operation and make policy recommendations to your organization's board.

8. Recognize politicians for their good work and thank the people who helped you win. After all the letters have been written to legislators asking for their support, wrap

“Trade, political and other advocacy groups need to see that many arts advocates are their own members and supporters as well, and are also part of the local or state business community.”—*Bill Frazier, chair, Montana Arts Council*

up your advocacy campaign with a letter of thanks. By giving credit where it is deserved, you are reminding legislators that the arts are important to their constituents.

9. Promote alliances between arts advocates and non-arts advocacy groups, such as teachers' organizations, travel and tourism groups, organizations serving youth, chambers of commerce and business groups. Develop collaborative lobbying strategies with these groups on issues of mutual interest.

10. Cultivate legislative friends for the arts. Guarantee that the arts have at least one strong advocate in the legislature and as many friends as possible. Build legislative friendships over the long term by providing legislators with information that they can use to promote the cause. Show them how their support for the arts can help them achieve their other legislative goals.

11. Meet your elected officials whenever you can, even at events that aren't about the arts. Introduce yourself to your legislator or other public official in attendance, and identify your connection with the arts in your community.

12. Develop advocates in other organizations by encouraging a board on which you serve or an organization to which you belong—including those outside the arts—to adopt a policy statement in support of public arts funding. Have the organization

encourage its leaders and members to speak on behalf of the arts when meeting with public officials.

13. Involve legislators personally with the arts in your state. Invite legislators to performances and exhibitions; ask them to attend board meetings of your arts organization. Provide art for display in legislators' offices. Allow legislators to announce publicly the grants awarded by public agencies to their constituents.

“At all of our Arts Across Minnesota touring and festival events, we present the community with a recognition certificate, in the form of a curtain speech or at the kick-off of a festival. During the presentation we invite local legislators to join us on the stage. I can't tell you the effect this has on these individuals when they look out onto a packed house and are given the chance to 'please the crowd' with a few words about their support of the arts. You know, it even works with those legislators who have not been great supporters but respond to the invitation to attend the ceremony. I now introduce those folks as 'a new friend to the arts.'”—*Bob Booker, executive director, Minnesota State Arts Board*

14. Get the votes for arts issues by asking your legislators directly if they will vote for your position. It is critical that you ask, “Will you vote to support this bill?” The worst they can do is say “no.” If they are not sure, offer to provide more information, and do it right away. If they say “yes,” thank them for their support and move on to get the next vote.

15. Make advocacy an agenda item at every board meeting of your organization with a regular report on arts-related legislation and policy issues. The time spent discussing advocacy will help to keep your board members better informed about current issues and encourage all board members to fulfill their roles as advocates for the arts.

16. Draft your legislators to assist you in spreading the word about your programs. Most legislative offices distribute information about attractions and events in their states and towns. Ask your legislators to distribute your calendar or program brochures to visitors in their offices, and help to promote your organization at the same time.

17. Write a monthly column on legislative issues important to the arts in your state. Distribute the column to other organizations in your state and ask that they run it each month in their own newsletters. This broadcasts important arts advocacy messages around the state to a wider audience than you would be able to reach yourself.

18. Arrange a group visit to your legislator's office to discuss the impact of public arts support in your community or state. Gathering a diverse group of interested and knowledgeable people can demonstrate the breadth of concern among your legislator's constituents.

19. Enlist the legislator you know best to advocate for your cause with legislative colleagues whose support is essential. Persuade your legislator to seek support for your legislative issues from politicians outside your district, because elected officials listen to the people they represent and also to their fellow legislators.

“During Maryland’s three-year campaign to increase arts council funding to eight, then nine, then ten percent of arts organizations’ operating budgets, the advocacy groups developed a “language”—“8-9-10 percent for the arts.” This phrase, used repeatedly in written materials and meetings, became a recognizable shorthand for this major effort, requiring increases of over \$2 million for three consecutive years. It succeeded in the first and second years, and we hope to reach the 10 percent goal next spring.”—*Ardath Cade, immediate past chair, Maryland State Arts Council*

20. Communicate simply and concisely

in discussing with your legislators what you want and what you are trying to do. Avoid using jargon. Keep your message clear, because while you are the experts, most politicians are laypeople when it comes to discussing the issues of funding for the arts and public programming for the arts.

21. Organize a statewide advocacy day

each year in the state capital to provide the staff and trustees of arts organizations throughout the state with data and information about arts issues to bring to their legislators. Set aside part of the day’s program for tips on being an arts advocate

in the community. Dedicate the major share of the day to time for advocates to meet with their legislators.

22. Acknowledge your funding sources by giving credit in all advertising, news releases, printed programs, posters and calendars of events. Crediting your public funders especially lets your audience know the value of public support for the arts, raising the visibility of public arts funding to enhance your advocacy.

23. Stand up at election time and begin educating politicians before they take office. Participate in candidate forums, town meetings and “meet and greet” parties in your neighborhood. Confront the candidates on issues of public arts support and educate them on the role the arts play in their communities. Ask the candidates where they stand on issues of public arts policy.

24. Distribute an advocacy kit to interested people in your state. Be certain the advocacy kit makes it easy to identify the important elected officials and decision makers to contact, when to contact them and how to contact them, and provides templates for advocates’ letters and calls. Also include material on how to keep informed about legislation on a regular basis during the year.

25. Welcome new legislators to office after an election by writing to offer assistance on questions about arts issues. Send along information about your organization

and the status of the arts in your state. Get to know your legislators from the beginning, many of whom are new to issues of public support for the arts, and some of whom will be appointed to committees that handle arts legislation and budget.

26. Use politicians as presenters by offering to bring performing artists or exhibitions to the state capitol for special occasions. Connect the arts at home with opportunities to present the arts where your legislators work.

27. Operate as a reliable source for information, an advocate's prime commodity. Respond to all inquiries, even when asked a question you cannot answer. Tell the legislator you will get back with the information, or, if appropriate, refer the query to someone who can respond.

28. Create a good excuse to contact your legislators when you are not asking for something. Send your legislators a copy of your newly published annual report, a new guide to your programs, or your calendar of events. Seize the opportunity to show your legislators what you do and to remind them who you are, establishing a good basis of understanding for that time when you need something from them.

29. Recruit board members to work as advocates for public funding of the arts.

Include advocacy in the job description of board members. Bring extra clout to arts advocacy by identifying community leaders who have backgrounds beyond the arts, as they are often individuals recognized by and known to politicians.

“The local point of view is the point of view heard. Recruiting board members as advocates is essential. They are the ones who can tell the story. With a little coaching, specific data and brief talking points, board members can be very effective advocates. They learn quickly that public support doesn't just come; we earn it with clearly defined outcomes.”—*Tog Newman, chair, North Carolina Arts Council*

30. Ask a legislator to write a column in your newsletter. Offer some exposure through your publication to that senator or representative and build a stronger advocate at the same time. Help that politician

to become better informed about your work and more cognizant of your position in the state by having to put together some thoughts for an article on the arts in your state.

31. Meet regularly with arts organizations in your state to discuss legislative issues. Collaborate to eliminate duplication of effort and avoid surprises that can split the arts community.

32. Send out a legislative memo to your members. Communicate with arts advocates in your state when there is something to tell. Write an update on the progress of the arts budget and other legislation. Alert advocates when votes are coming and

action is needed. Remind advocates that their legislators would appreciate hearing from them about arts issues.

33. Build a vocal and informed local constituency to support your advocacy efforts. Persuade your colleagues in other arts organizations to rally their members and audiences to advocate for the arts. Explain to the grassroots consumers the importance of public funding for the arts programs that you present and they enjoy.

34. Invite a legislator to address a conference on the arts. Your request will force that politician to focus thoughts on your issues and, in the process, become better informed about the arts in your state.

35. Contribute to the campaigns of legislators you support and who support the arts. Your financial contributions can help to elect public officials who are advocates for the arts. Enlist other contributors who are also involved in the arts to join you in your advocacy for public arts funding.

What is advocacy?

Advocacy means pleading a case, presenting information and persuading others to support your cause. Most of the strategies listed here are examples of advocacy activities, not lobbying.

What is lobbying?

Lobbying is an activity involving communications with a legislator or other public official to influence their support of your position on specific legislation. Lobbying also includes appeals to an organization's members urging them to contact legislators, or communications to influence legislation through an attempt to affect public opinion.

36. Orient new board members to your advocacy program. Provide training to develop the advocacy skills and involvement of your entire board. Board members should be prepared to articulate the personal value and the public benefit of the programs offered by your organization.

37. Show your appreciation for the public funding that supports your performances and exhibitions by announcing when legislators are present that the event received federal and state funding. Recognize and thank the legislators for their help.

38. Assist the development of an advocacy network in your state for

addressing federal and state issues in the arts. Keep the network of advocates informed about federal and state legislation that affects the arts.

39. Collect funding examples and anecdotes with data in support of the major arguments for funding the arts in your community or state. Produce visual documentation to support the points you make. Keep these presentation examples and materials up-to-date and available for advocates to use.

40. Convene a meeting each year near the start of the legislative session for arts advocates to discuss the issues with key legislators in your state and in Congress.