

# Creating An Effective Arts Education Advocacy Plan

Change doesn't occur by chance. When it does occur, two related conditions are usually present. First, there is a broad-based organized coalition working in conjunction with policy-makers who support change. Second, the actions of the coalition are guided by a strategic plan consisting of an honest and realistic appraisal of the political "lay of the land."

An advocacy plan answers these questions:

- What is the issue?
- What is your goal? What are you trying to achieve?
- What information do you need to make your case?
- Who do you want to influence? Who is your target audience?
- What is your message?
- How will you target the message?
- How will you deliver the message?
- What is your timeline? What resources will you need?
- How will you assess your success?

As you work through this section of this Advocacy Tool Kit, answers to these questions will become clearer, your plan of action more complete, and your advocacy more effective.

*An issue is not the same as a message. It is critical to determine the issue before jumping to the message.*

## What is the Issue?

An advocacy plan begins with a focus on the issue. The issue can be overarching (such as the importance of arts learning for all students in a state) or it can be specific (such as loss of arts education programs in a particular school, a district policy on graduation requirements, education or arts education legislation, or a need for after-school arts programs). Find out the current policies on the local and state levels relevant to the issue.

Keep in mind that an issue is not the same as a message. It is critical to determine the issue before jumping to the message.

## What is Your Goal?

### What Are You Trying to Achieve?

In the advocacy plan, goals—what you hope to achieve—are articulated. You may have substantive goals (e.g., secure a policy change) or process goals (e.g., introduce a bill for purposes of organizing support and solidifying the cohesiveness of a newly-formed coalition).

Identifying the goal gets the advocacy campaign started, unifies the members of the existing network, forms the basis for expanding the network, helps guide the coalition on the appropriateness of a given strategy or tactic, and serves as the basis for judging success. It is essential that the coalition identify and reach consensus on the "prize." At the end of the advocacy campaign, what does the coalition hope to accomplish? For example, is the "prize" an incremental step that lays the foundation for subsequent action; a new or expanded program; increased funding for an existing program; a more informed and supportive community; a bill or a public law; a policy change; securing enactment of an existing policy; getting the issue on the policy radar screen; or ensuring implementation of a law?

## What Information do You Need to Make Your Case?

The next step in the advocacy plan is to gather objective information that will help make the case. Collect specific data (e.g., numbers of students affected, costs) and results from studies and research. The information should be evidence-based as opposed to opinion-based. Gathering information about successful programs in other communities may also be helpful for comparison purposes. Also collect relevant information about the current status and past history of policies and programs as well as the likely opposition to your goal.



### CURRENT STATUS

#### Local Level

- What opportunity for arts learning is offered in the school? School district?
- What is the duration and frequency of these offerings?
- Which/how many students are reached? Not reached?
- Are arts classes taught by certified/licensed arts educators?
- Is there an arts graduation requirement in your district?
- Are there any arts education policies at the school district level?
- Is arts learning assessed at a school district level?
- Are arts grades counted in the students' GPA?
- What are the current and past funding levels?

#### State Level

- What are the arts education policies at the state level?
- Are arts education programs assessed at the state level?
- What are the current and past funding levels?

### PAST HISTORY

- What is the history of arts education curriculum and programs in the community? Have they increased or decreased over the years?
- What caused the change?
- What were the strengths/challenges in prior arts programs?
- What were the previous funding levels?

### LIKELY OPPOSITION

- What will be the likely opposition to your goal? What are the arguments?
- What information is needed to counter the arguments?

## Who Do You Want to Influence?

### Who is Your Target Audience?

An arts advocacy plan identifies the policy-makers that have the power to make decisions about your issue. The potential audience of local, state, and federal decision makers is broad. It encompasses any appointed or elected official representing the community such as school district administrators, school board members, local, state, and federal legislators, and the governor. The plan identifies key power brokers who have the respect of and can influence the policy-makers for or against your position, as well as influential public figures and members of the media.

Policy-makers are inundated with constituents and interest groups that identify problems and proposed solutions. Getting a policy-maker involved does not occur by chance. It takes a concerted effort. Help policy-makers get involved:

- Describe how arts learning connects to a keen personal interest of the elected officials or staff members.
- Convince elected officials that sponsorship or involvement will result in positive publicity and will transform them into a heavyweight—a “player.”
- Organize interest groups to contact elected officials to endorse your proposal for action.
- Obtain an endorsement from experts and opinion leaders respected by elected officials.
- Arrange for constituents who have political power, personal relationships or are campaign contributors to make calls to policy-makers.
- Ask constituents to send handwritten correspondence, and to attend and speak at open forums in policy-makers’ home districts.

## What is Your Message?

Advocates can cite countless reasons why a quality arts education is essential for every young person. The challenge is to select which information is the most appropriate to support each advocacy message.

All messages should be crafted with the following principles in mind:

- **Messages should not assume prior knowledge of arts education.** Messages help inform and educate your target audiences. Be aware that audiences may or may not be aware of the importance of arts education or the status of the arts at their child’s school or district. They may be unaware of what a quality arts education entails and may have never been engaged in the arts. Avoid using special terms/jargon that may be unfamiliar.
- **Messages must be simple and direct and state what you want.** The message must be easy to understand and remember, and communicate what you are asking for. For example, do you want your Senator to sponsor a new piece of legislation to support arts education funding? Do you want the president of your Chamber of Commerce to sponsor an arts education forum for other business leaders?
- **Messages should personalize the issue.** Messages should inspire audiences by using personal profiles that help advance the goal. By including authentic voices and real life stories, you can personalize the issue and mobilize target audiences to take action.
- **Messages should communicate that the change is do-able and reasonable.** Be clear that the desired outcome is reasonable (not radical), viable, and can be implemented.
- **Messages must reflect current priorities.** Ensure your message reflects current values, concerns, priorities, and trends. This enables advocates to frame and deliver arts education messages more effectively in a larger context.

### RESOURCES

- Idaho Commission on the Arts  
*Key Messages for Advocacy*  
[www.arts.idaho.gov/advocacy/atool.aspx?pg=3](http://www.arts.idaho.gov/advocacy/atool.aspx?pg=3)
- *California Arts Advocacy Toolkit*  
Public Service Announcement  
[www.californiaartstoolkit.com/\\_doc/sample\\_psa.pdf](http://www.californiaartstoolkit.com/_doc/sample_psa.pdf)



### How Will You Target Your Message?

Each audience requires a message that is targeted for their interests and needs. Your research, planning, and preparation are critical. Invest the time to know and understand each distinct audience. According to Ben Cameron, Program Director for the Arts of the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, advocates should “speak from where your audience is listening,” tapping into key priorities, interests, opinions or needs to make your case. You must know what information—data, quotes from influential people, personal stories, images, performances, research, etc.—will be convincing and memorable to a particular audience.

#### TARGETING MESSAGES

Consider these guiding questions when you begin to target your message:

- Who is the target audience?
- What matters most to this audience? What do they care about?
- What arts education messages will be most important to them?
- What supporting information do they need to hear?
- Where do arts education goals/interests intersect with theirs? Could arts education be important to them?
- What are we asking of them?

#### TARGETING MESSAGES TO POLICY-MAKERS

Since much formal advocacy work is ultimately directed at policy-makers, do your homework to determine which message will resonate. Knowing their background and personal interests gives you clues about ways to target the message. From their perspective, how would arts learning help them reach their goals? Are they concerned about issues beyond education? Can you make the connections between arts education and other issues such as economic recovery, creative industries, artist communities, or entertainment zones?

In framing messages for policy-makers, the trick is standing out in a crowd of important and sometimes competing concerns. Remember, policy-makers are concerned with the entire city, school district, state or region that they represent. The ability to connect your messages on arts education with other interests and needs will help policy-makers help you. They rely on facts. Be prepared to share data on the impact of arts learning. This will help policy-makers envision the results of their decision-making and leadership.

#### TARGETING MESSAGES FOR PARENTS

Parents are interested in their children’s future. Your message should help parents draw connections between quality arts learning and their children’s future success.

#### TARGETING MESSAGES TO STUDENTS

Students are interested in being successful. They aspire to improve their lives, build on the success of their families, use their talents, and have opportunities to express their unique vision. Your message should stress how full and equal access to all the possibilities of arts learning will help students reach their full potential.

### TARGETING MESSAGES TO BUSINESS AND COMMUNITY LEADERS

Business leaders may be particularly interested in connection between arts learning and workforce development. Make the school-to-work bridge evident. As employers who see the “end product” of our educational system, business leaders will be interested to learn about the ways the arts build 21st century workforce skills, creativity, and innovation. Business leaders want quality schools so they can attract the best employees. Business and community leaders are interested in how the arts contribute to the local economy and how the arts improve the quality of life in communities.

### TARGETING MESSAGES TO THE MEDIA

Media outlets work in a competitive market where the public has many choices for obtaining news, information, and entertainment. By helping the media uncover the kinds of stories that will appeal to their audiences, you can gain the kind of coverage your messages deserve. Arts education programs can yield fascinating personal interest stories that embody important community issues. They connect with a range of areas—arts and culture, education, entertainment, community, community development, business, youth, and personal interest news. Research the target audience for media outlets in your community and target your messages accordingly.

### How Will You Deliver Your Message?

There are many ways to deliver a message. Some delivery mechanisms reach a wide audience while others are more targeted. Some messages are strongest when they are delivered face-to-face; other messages are best delivered in print, on the Web, or on film. Many times, messages are strongest when multiple delivery mechanisms are planned. Your challenge is to select the most appropriate, powerful, and effective delivery method.

### THE MEDIA

Gaining access to the general public through the media is always a key component of any advocacy effort for several reasons.

The media can help create a positive impression about your issue and they can help garner the attention of policy-makers. If elected officials read an article in the newspaper or see an issue on television, they are more apt to pay attention to it. Additionally, the media have the power to move the arts education agenda into the public arena and affect public opinion.

Today’s media includes print (newspapers, magazines, reviews, etc.) and increasingly online sources (Web sites, Podcasts, and blogs). Your media contact list should also include professionals working in television and radio. Like policy-makers, most media sources have staff members assigned to arts, education and/or cultural issues. Writers, reporters, editors, bloggers, and radio and media personalities have many options for stories, features, and interviews, but must manage many competing priorities.

*Many times, messages are strongest when multiple delivery mechanisms are planned.*

### Some delivery strategies to consider:

#### Personal delivery

- Telephone calls
- Meetings
- Workshops
- Presentations to groups
- Messages connected to attendance at arts performances and exhibits

#### Print/Newspaper

- Letters to decision-makers
- Newsletters
- Letters to the editor
- Articles for newsletters of potential allies
- Media releases
- Annual update reports

#### Radio

- Public Service Announcements (PSAs)
- Media releases
- Interviews

#### Electronic

- Emails
- Newsletters
- E-news alerts
- Media releases
- Web sites
- Blogs
- Social networking sites
- Podcasts

### RESOURCES

Templates for Media Releases, Media Alerts, and Photo Captions

- [www.supportmusic.com/kit/contents/6](http://www.supportmusic.com/kit/contents/6).  
MediaCommunicationsTemp.doc (English)
- [www.supportmusic.com/kit/contents/6a.SP\\_MediaCommunications.doc](http://www.supportmusic.com/kit/contents/6a.SP_MediaCommunications.doc) (Spanish)

Sample Public Service Announcements (PSA)

- [www.californiaartstoolkit.com/\\_doc/sample\\_psa.pdf](http://www.californiaartstoolkit.com/_doc/sample_psa.pdf)
- [www.supportmusic.com/kit/](http://www.supportmusic.com/kit/) (focused on music)  
Six 30-second PSAs on the benefits of music education featuring students and musical artists. Not for TV Broadcast



### What is Your Timeline?

#### What Resources Will You Need?

To get an advocacy plan up and running, three factors must be taken into account:

- the timeline for message delivery
- the timeline for local, state or federal budget decisions
- the resources—financial, personnel, range of expertise—needed to implement the strategies

Developing a timeline and gathering resources will vary from community to community and state to state. In planning your timeline, refer to the information available on government Web sites about sessions, bills, and budget timelines as well as procedures related to the policy-making process. The State Alliance's calendar will impact your planning process as meetings are scheduled, goals and messages formally adopted, and public statements are made.

## How Will You Assess Your Success?

### ALONG THE WAY

Throughout the course of any advocacy effort, it is necessary to continually review the effectiveness of strategies and tactics in relationship to the overall principles and goals. Once a strategy is in place, coalition members should be open to change, but at the same time, resist overreaction. The major question should be whether strategies for reaching the goals are still appropriate and timely.

### AT THE END

You did it. You planned, conducted research, gathered your friends and made new ones, and took action, either personally or as part of a network. Now it's time to celebrate your success, thank your supporters, and reflect on your experience.

To what extent were you able to meet your goal? For example, did you accomplish:

- Passage of a bill just as you would have it written?
- Inclusion of language in a policy that supports arts learning?
- Education of a key group of stakeholders to better understand the value of arts learning?
- Development of new partnerships and advocates for arts learning?
- An increase in financial support for arts learning initiatives?
- Movement towards achieving a policy change?
- Placement of an issue on the public radar screen?
- Engagement of new allies?

### BEFORE YOU BEGIN AGAIN

Remember that success does not always come in a neatly wrapped package. In fact, it often comes with a new set of issues to be resolved. Before you begin on the next task, take some time to strengthen the relationships that have been built. Remember to say thank you to those who helped with the work—the advocates, the behind-the-scene workers, and the policy-makers. Many times after the passage of legislation, legislators report that no one calls or writes to thank them. Express your gratitude. Remember, even if you didn't get what you asked for, you educated people, made connections, and found opportunities to promote arts education.

Consider helping others by sharing what you've learned from your experience.

- Share results of your work with other State Alliances as a replicable effort.
- Capture your successes in a document that can inform future work.
- Write about your success for inclusion in a newsletter, such as the Kennedy Center National Partnerships *UPDATE*.

### RESOURCES

- *Smart Chart*, a free online tool to help non-profit organizations create and implement communications plans (Spitfire Strategies, Washington, DC) [www.smartchart.org](http://www.smartchart.org)
- *Arts Education Advocacy Kit*, New Mexico Arts, Sante Fe, NM [www.nmarts.org/pdf/artsedadvocacy\\_kit.pdf](http://www.nmarts.org/pdf/artsedadvocacy_kit.pdf)
- *Let's Make A Plan to Support Arts Education!*, Ohio Alliance for Arts Education <http://www.oaae.net/download/ADVOCACY/Let's%20Make%20a%20Plan.pdf>

## Conclusion

This Advocacy Tool Kit was prepared to help State Alliances plan, strategize, and carry out effective advocacy on behalf of young people in their states. Now more than ever, as arts education continues to face challenges to its survival, we must develop and sustain a network of advocates to work at the local, state, and national levels to deliver the message about the importance of arts learning for all young people.

As you move from the planning table, to networking meetings, and to the public podium, make use of the habits of effective advocates, develop strong networks, and plan and implement effective advocacy plans. The ideas and resources included in this Tool Kit will support your efforts to make arts education a reality for all young people—today and in the future.

**A companion video for this toolkit is available at  
[www.kennedy-center.org/education/KCAAEN/resources/home.html](http://www.kennedy-center.org/education/KCAAEN/resources/home.html)**