

What is advocacy?

Advocacy is promoting what is important to you, and persuading others to support your cause. Advocacy is informing policy-makers and decision-makers about what you contribute to your communities and their constituents.

The most convincing advocate for the arts is the individual who can talk about a personal experience in the arts, and can explain how the arts can make a difference in someone's life and benefit the community. Advocacy is not to be left to the experts. Remember, **you** can have an impact on decision-makers. It is important to let them know your position on issues that affect the arts.

Ten Action Steps that Make a Difference

1. **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.
2. **Orient new board members** to your advocacy program. Provide training to develop the advocacy skills and involvement of your entire board. Every board member should be prepared to articulate the personal value and the public benefit of the programs offered by your organization.
3. **Make advocacy an agenda item** for every board meeting, with regular reports on what actions board members have taken to promote the arts, both formally and informally. Review current legislation and arts policy issues. Hold every board member accountable for advocacy.
4. **Develop a simple, but effective message** that all members of your board and advocacy committee can communicate consistently to decision-makers. Focus on a few key points about the importance of the arts in society and how you contribute.
5. **Promote alliances** between your organization and non-arts advocacy groups such as teachers' organizations, travel and tourism groups, organizations serving youth, chambers of commerce and business groups. Develop collaborative strategies to promote issues of mutual interest.
6. **Meet your elected officials** whenever you can, even at events that aren't about the arts. Introduce yourself to your legislators or other public officials in attendance, and identify your connection with the arts in your community.
7. **Cultivate legislative friends** for the arts. Identify at least one legislator to educate about your organization, its programs, and your impact on the community. Show them how their support for the arts can help them achieve their other legislative goals (economic development, reduced unemployment, improved education, better quality of life).
8. **Involve legislators personally.** Invite legislators to performances and exhibitions; invite them to attend board meetings. Acknowledge them publicly when they attend. Provide art for display in legislators' offices. Allow legislators to announce publicly the grant awarded by public agencies to your organization.
9. **Arrange a group visit to your legislator's office** to discuss the impact of public arts support in your community. Gathering a diverse group of interested and knowledgeable people can demonstrate the breadth of interest in the arts among your legislator's constituents.
10. **Generate public service announcements** to reinforce the message that public dollars spent on the arts provide 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.

If you believe in great things, you may be able to make other people believe in them, too. *~Oliver Wendell Holmes*