

The Power of One! Being an Effective Advocate

It only takes one person to initiate change. Everyone can impact how a legislator feels about an issue. It takes just a few moments to have a meaningful interaction with an elected official, and to begin to build a long-lasting rapport with that person and their office staff. People working together can have an even greater impact.

What is Advocacy? (*Advocacy Institute*)

Advocacy is pursuit of influencing outcomes—including public policy, economic, and social systems and institutions—that directly affect people’s lives.

Advocacy consists of organized efforts and actions to change “what is” to “what should be.” These organized actions seek to highlight critical issues that have been ignored and submerged, to influence public attitudes, and to enact and implement laws and public policies so that visions of “what should be” in a just, decent society become a reality. Advocacy organizations draw their strength from and are accountable to people- their members, constituents, and/or members of affected groups.

Paid Lobbyist	Citizen Advocate
Paid lobbyist should be the expert	Citizen advocate has the passion!
Should know all details about a bill	Doesn't necessarily need to know all of the details about a bill, but enough of the facts to make point clear
Function is to pass along information	Function is grassroots support
Shares why an issue is good public policy	Proves the issue is good public policy!
Works with multiple legislators	Contacts their own legislators

Define your message:

- What is the problem?
- What specifically do you want to have happen/change?
- Who decides?
- How will you persuade them?

Refine your message:

- Who is your target audience?
- What do you know about them?
- What do they know about you?
- What do they know about your issue?

Make your case:

- Know the facts. Use current data to discuss your issue.

- Share your **story**: stories are powerful and persuasive.
- Use positive language: give people something to be FOR, not against.
- Use research to support your issue.

***Create your advocacy strategy!**

Phone Calls:

- Are an effective means of advocating.
- Shorter versions of a face-to-face meeting.
- Ask to speak to the legislator, or their staff handling issue or program "X".
- Stick to one topic for each phone call.
- Be sure to leave your name, address, telephone number and email address.
- Remember to send a follow-up communication, reminding the legislator what was discussed.

Email:

Not the most personal means, but great for generating a substantial amount of communication and very convenient. Often the preferred method for many elected officials, as it reaches them quickly and makes it easy for them to record your contact.

- Works best if your legislator already knows you.
- Be sure to include your full name, address, phone number and email address.
- Stick to one topic.
- Email blasts not as effective. If using a "form/template" email, change the subject line and personalize the message.

Letters:

- Use the correct address and salutation (The Honorable [insert name]).
- Type or write your letter clearly.
- Use your own words and stationery.
- Letters should be short- stick to one page, and one topic.
- Be specific and know your facts.
- Be timely.
- Will take several weeks for delivery at the federal level.

Visits: Outline for Visits or Conversations with Elected Officials

These tips are based on an ideal situation; your real experience may be very different. Don't be afraid of advocacy. It is not a bad word. Most importantly, use common sense.

The "Pre-Meeting" Meeting

- Meet 10 to 15 minutes before each appointment.
- Review your talking points. What is your message?

- Review your legislative ask. Choose your words carefully, and don't share too much too early.
- Review what each person will contribute to the meeting.
- Select roles/topics that each person will address.
- Don't be afraid to take notes while in the meeting.

Introductions (2-3 Minutes) The Hook- Who You Are

- Everyone should briefly introduce themselves.
- Be sure to share if you are a constituent from the district.
- Talk about where you work, go to school, live, etc. This will help your local official get to know you.

Personal Stories (3-5 Minutes) The Line- Why You Care

- Share why you are involved in this initiative.
- Share why it is important to you.
- Share any poignant and personal stories that are relevant to this issue.
- ***This is the most powerful tool that you have at your disposal!***

The Ask (5-7 Minutes) The Sinker- What You Want That Person to Do.

- Present the issue and stay on message.
- Make your legislative "ask" very clear.
- Don't be afraid to ask for a commitment.
- Be sure to listen to all responses.
- Address any questions that arise.
- ***Remember "The Ask" is the ultimate goal of your meeting!***

Wrap Up and Thank You (1-2 Minutes)

- Point out the information in the leave behind packets or handout.
- Thank the local official for their time.
- Be sure to send a follow-up thank you via email and/or thank-you card.
- Be sure to provide any further information that may be needed with your thank you.

Post Meeting Wrap Up

Take a few moments after your meeting and review what really happened.

- Will he/she support your efforts?
- What follow up is needed? Who will be responsible for follow up?
- Was anything revealed about how his/her colleagues may feel about this issue?
- Record your relevant information, and share it as needed.

What you Can Do in 10 Minutes to Make a Difference.

- Contact your legislator about the issue at hand.
- Encourage 5 of your friends to send an email.

- Let staff at the Dept. on Aging or ADRC know what the interaction with the legislator was like.

What you Can Do in 30 Minutes to Make a Difference.

- Contact your legislator about the issue at hand.
- Encourage 5 of your friends to send an email.
- Let your staff partner at the Dept. on Aging or ADRC know what the interaction with the legislator was like.
- Send a thank you note or email to your legislator, reminding them of what you discussed.

What you Can Do in 1 Hour to Make a Difference.

- Contact your legislator about the issue at hand.
- Encourage 5 of your friends to send an email.
- Let your staff partner at the Dept. on Aging or ADRC know what the interaction with the legislator was like.
- Send a thank you note or email to your legislator, reminding them of what you discussed.
- Attend a town hall forum or in-district meeting with your local legislator.

What NOT to Do!

1. Threaten your legislator.
2. Be anonymous.
3. Pretend to speak for everyone.
4. Send form letters.
5. Be a pest.
6. Insist on immediate action.
7. Speak without doing your homework.

5 Tips for More Effective Advocacy Efforts

1. Don't be intimidated.
2. Don't assume anything- keep it simple.
3. Make it personal.
4. Share the "ask."
5. Be persistent- follow up, follow up, follow up.

How to Achieve the Highest Impact

Being a successful advocate requires more than the occasional phone call or letter. Treat the legislator as you would anyone you wish to create a lasting relationship with. Remember to send thank you cards or email messages after positive action is taken or acknowledge their good work in some sort of public forum.

Never underestimate the power of a relationship or a personal story to influence!

Contacting your Member of Congress:

To find out who your Representative is, enter your zip code in the search function at:

- <https://www.house.gov/representatives/find-your-representative> or
- https://www.house.gov/representatives#state_wa

To find out who your U.S. Senators are, enter Wisconsin in the search function at:

- <https://www.senate.gov/> or
- <https://www.senate.gov/senators/senators-contact.htm?State=WI>

To call your Member of Congress: U.S. Capitol Switchboard (202) 224-3121 or toll-free at (866) 338-1015

To write your **U.S. Senator:**

The Honorable _____
United States Senate
Washington DC 20510

To write your **U.S. Representative:**

The Honorable _____
United States House of Representatives
Washington DC 20515

Link to more information about: [Wisconsin Members of Congress - \(https://gwaar.org/api/cms/viewFile/id/2007697\)](https://gwaar.org/api/cms/viewFile/id/2007697)

For more information contact:

Janet L. Zander, Advocacy & Public Policy Coordinator, MPA, CSW
Greater WI Agency on Aging Resources, Inc.
608-228-7253; janet.zander@gwaar.org
www.gwaar.org
fb. Facebook.com/WAAN.ACTION | tw. [@ZanderWAAN](https://twitter.com/ZanderWAAN)