

# ADVOCACY 101

All citizens have the right, responsibility, and privilege to be involved in policy making. Advocacy plays a key role in our democracy, allowing groups of people to come together to share a united voice with their elected representatives, and all should feel comfortable petitioning policy makers. Public participation is key to ensuring that these local, state, and national leaders know your perspective.

As a part of the broad arts community—whether an artist, performer, organizational leader, parent of children in schools, audience member or just a lover of the arts—you know the impacts and importance of a creative South Dakota first hand. Combine this with the tools and tactics in this guide to talk to your school board, city council, state and national legislators, and others to help make your voice heard.



## PREPARE

### 1 GATHER INFORMATION

- ▶ What specifically is impacting your issue? A bill being passed, funding being cut, a possible policy change you want to encourage, or just general support? It is often better to have a specific request like “Please support continued funding from the city for the XX project”, not just “support the arts”, but “support the arts by ...”
- ▶ Where is this taking place, or where can a change be made? Is it in the state legislature, school district, city council, ect? Sometimes it’s not obvious or what you’d expect.
- ▶ Who can best make an impact or change? Is it the mayor, someone’s communications director, city councilors?

### 3 CREATE RELATIONSHIPS

- ▶ Create relationships with policy makers before you need them. Invite them to your events, send press releases, updates, etc.
- ▶ Send emails to thank them for policy you support. Policy makers are often approached critically, but not often thanked when they do something their constituents agree with. This helps build a trusting relationship.
- ▶ Find out how they’ve voted or acted in the past, so you don’t assume they will or won’t be sympathetic to your cause. Negative messages to those who already support you can sometimes damage relationships you’re building.

### 2 GATHER THE TEAM & IDENTIFY KEY MESSENGERS

- ▶ Get your core community mobilized.
- ▶ Find “outsiders” — people who are impacted but not part of your group directly (for example, if you’re a performing group, find audience members, youth impacted by programs, and so on).
- ▶ Identify influential members of the community sympathetic to your cause. Even if they won’t directly advocate, would they at least cosign onto your communications?
- ▶ Try to have as many of the policy maker’s direct constituents as possible involved—legislators respond quicker to their own voters.
- ▶ Identify who is best to deliver the messages to the media, public and policy makers. They may be different people.

# TELLING THE STORY

## FRAME YOUR STORY

No data without story, no story without data. Always pair an impact story with data about that impact.

Why does this issue matter? Don't assume the person you're addressing knows why this is important.

You're the mentor and expert. You have the knowledge and can help them solve a problem in the community, in their campaign, better support their constituents, etc.

Create a short elevator pitch of a couple of sentences to quickly spread the message. Craft a common set of talking points for everyone to draw from. Let each constituent speak in their own voice, but with consistent messaging.

Consider tying your issue into the other goals, passions, or projects of who you are talking to (e.g. economic impacts, workforce development, education, tourism, etc).

Practice giving your elevator pitch and messages, so you can be quickly effective when the time comes to spread the word. Listen as much as you speak, and keep your message positive.

Request specific answers to policy questions, not just vague support, to really get them on record as supporting a specific issue.

## ACTIONS TO TAKE

Generally, when communicating, start with your elevator pitch. You can then follow up with additional data and stories, using similar messaging across all the communication channels to reinforce your message. Follow-up with thank you notes where appropriate after meetings or communications.

- ▶ Write a letter or email
- ▶ Call policy makers or their staff
- ▶ Request to meet with policy makers - they love to talk to voters.
- ▶ Write a letter to the editor to your local paper
- ▶ Targeted social media posts. Be careful and positive—cite sources with the goal to rally additional support and attention for your issue.
- ▶ Talk to the media (local TV / radio / newspapers /etc)
- ▶ Show up! (Go to city council meeting, lobby days, legislative coffees, rallies, etc)
- ▶ Vote smART! Keep the arts in mind when you pick your candidates.
- ▶ Run for office and make the changes you want to see.

# TOOLS TO TAKE ACTION

- ▶ Find more information, including arts impact infographics, links to South Dakota voter registration, advocacy alerts, candidate arts surveys, and much more, at: <https://artssouthdakota.org/arts-advocacy/>
- ▶ Webinars, including one-hour advocacy session done in collaboration with LEAD SD, at: <https://artssouthdakota.org/webinars/>
- ▶ Arts & Social Impact Explorer (AFTA): <https://www.americansforthearts.org/socialimpact>
- ▶ Advocacy Toolkit (AFTA): <https://www.americansforthearts.org/by-program/reports-and-data/legislationpolicy/legislative-issue-individuals-and-organizations>
- ▶ South Dakota Legislative Calendar, Bill Tracking, Legislator Lists, and more provided by the Legislative Research Council at: <https://sdlegislature.gov>