



## LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY APPROACHES

*“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.”-Margaret Mead*

### Section Overview

Legislative advocacy is about making your voice heard and taking action that involves acting on behalf of yourself or others. Legislative advocacy can involve anything from working personally with legislative staff members on the wording of a bill, to mobilizing hundreds, or even thousands, of supporters to bombard legislators with phone calls, letters, or tweets about a particular issue. Legislative advocacy involves educating legislators, supporters, and the public about the issue; working with the media, seeking out allies, and being persistent with your message over long periods of time.<sup>1</sup>

### Practical Tips

This section is designed to assist you in conducting particular advocacy activities in the field of disability rights and to improve employment opportunities for people with disabilities. We specifically hope this toolkit can prepare you with information to help your cause gain support from local, state, and national officials. In general, there are several different types of advocacy that a person can take when working with elected officials:

- *Self-advocacy*: taking action to represent and advance your own interests;
- *Peer advocacy*: taking action to represent the rights and interests of someone other than yourself;
- *Systems advocacy*: taking action to influence social, political, and economic systems to bring about change for groups of people; and
- *Legal advocacy*: taking action to use attorneys and the legal or administrative systems to establish or protect legal rights. ([Advocacy Training Manual](#). Wisconsin Coalition for Advocacy (1996), p. 1.)

Although there are a variety of ways a lawmaker can support your cause, this support normally takes one of the following forms:

- A bill with funding attached;
- A bill with wording that supports a particular philosophy or helps to legitimize your issues;
- A bill with regulations that benefits people with disabilities;
- A local ordinance that supports your cause;
- Budget advocacy;
- Simple political, intellectual, and moral support; and

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<sup>1</sup> <http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/advocacy/direct-action/legislative-advocacy/main>



- Link with other contacts.

### **Building an Advocacy Strategy**

There are a handful of key reasons to participate in legislative advocacy:

- To gain powerful allies;
- To create positive publicity;
- To lend focus to your issues; and
- To effectively bolster a cause.

Before beginning your advocacy efforts consider the following questions: What is the problem? What is your goal? What facts support your position? These three questions should help guide your advocacy efforts and assist you in identifying solutions and outcomes in accordance with the circumstances of your situation.

### **Timing**

When it comes to creating an effective advocacy strategy the most important component to consider is TIMING! Since many of us have limited time to continually push for pro-employment policies, deciding when to mobilize a real push can be the crux to your success! In today's fast-paced world, it is important to know when the time is right to make a push for your cause.

Some consideration for timing includes:

- When the lawmakers are about to take up something crucial to your issue;
- Just before and during budget time;
- When your issue or target population is drawing attention;
- When a vote on a crucial bill is likely to be very close;
- When a bill—or the veto of a bill or budget—that hurts your cause has just been passed or signed, but can still be changed by an amendment, a veto, or an override;
- When it's important to make legislators aware that your issue exists.<sup>2</sup>

Click here for more information concerning establishing a [Step by Step Informal Advocacy Plan](#).

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<sup>2</sup> <http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/advocacy/direct-action/legislative-advocacy/main>



## **Tactics and Tips and Working in Coalitions**

For more information on working with and developing coalitions, review the information here on [Advocacy Tactics](#). For additional tips refer to pages 17 and 18 on this resource for information on [Six Practice Tips](#). Refer to additional Toolkit section for more information (e.g, Employment Topical Information, Organizing People and Planning Change, and Legislative Process)

## **Identifying Your Representatives**

Effective advocacy requires you to know who represents you in the various areas of government. These leaders work for you and you should be able to identify them. Go to the websites below to identify the people that represent you.

### ***U.S. House and Senate***

House of Representatives: <http://www.house.gov/Welcome.shtml>

United States Senate: [http://senate.gov/general/contact\\_information/senators\\_cfm.cfm](http://senate.gov/general/contact_information/senators_cfm.cfm)

### ***State Government***

State Legislator: <http://thomas.loc.gov/home/state-legislatures.html>

## **Letter Writing and Email**

You probably have written many letters before to friends, family, or long-distance pen pals; however, writing to a legislative member is a bit different. There are important things to keep in mind while drafting your letter such as length, format, etc. The more well-written your letter is, the more likely your message will be seen as powerful and lasting. Here are some suggestions to think about as you write your letter.

### ***Identify Who You Are***

Let your representative know who it is that is sending them the letter. It's important that you let him or her know that you are a constituent from their region or district. Of course, organizations and agencies can write to representatives as well, but always remember to include your name, address and telephone number, so he or she can contact you.

### ***Address Letter Appropriately***

Always address your letter to "The Honorable" (fill in name). Depending on who you are writing, you will use a different salutation to begin your letter. For the United States Congress, use "Dear Representative \*Last Name of Member\*+" if you're writing to a member of the House of Representatives. Use "Dear Senator \*Last Name of Member\*+" if you're writing to a member of the Senate. Follow similar rules when writing to a member of your State Legislature.



### ***Resources***

APSE Legislative Handbook, <http://bit.ly/1ms6uCv> pp 4-8  
CLPI Writing a Letter to Your Legislator <http://bit.ly/1fbKEAn>  
MT Non Profit <http://bit.ly/LPtVbU>, pp 11-12.

### ***Sample letters***

APSE Legislative Handbook, <http://bit.ly/1ms6uCv>, pp 16

## **Meeting Policymakers, Personal Visits, Day at the Capitol**

Constituent communication with Congress is an essential part of the legislative process. As a constituent, you have an important role to play in the legislative process. Elected officials rely on outreach from constituents to help form opinions on issues, so it is important we are at the table!

### ***How the Congressional Office Works***

Members of the House of Representatives may hire up to 18 permanent employees for their congressional and district offices. Senators do not have a limit on the amount of staff they can hire. There is a distinct hierarchy in the Members' office, which are located in one of three Congressional Office Buildings.

The following is a description of key staff positions in the Member office:

- **Chief of Staff/Administrative Assistant:** The Administrative Assistant reports directly to the member of Congress. He/she usually has overall responsibility for evaluating the political outcome of various legislative proposals and constituent requests. The Administrative Assistant is usually the person in charge of overall office operations, including the assignment of work and the supervision of key staff.
- **Legislative Director:** The Legislative Director (LD) is usually the staff person who oversees the legislative agenda for the office and makes recommendations regarding the pros and cons of particular issues. The Legislative Director usually handles the one or two major issues for a particular member, or often handles the key committee assignment for a member. The Legislative Director manages the Legislative Assistants and Legislative Correspondents.[\[2\]](#)
- **Legislative Assistant:** The Legislative Assistant (LA) specializes in a specific legislative field or fields and crafts and monitors legislation; devises strategy to pass specific legislation; and (in a Senate office) oversees the legislative correspondent working in the same legislative field.
- **Legislative Correspondent:** The Legislative Correspondent (LC) in a Senate office works in a number of specific legislative fields providing research for a Legislative Assistant



while primarily writing letters to constituents concerned about issues in the specific legislative fields in which the LC specializes. In a House office, the Legislative Correspondent writes letters exclusively.

- Press Secretary: The Press Secretary fields call from the media, writes press releases, and acts as the spokesperson for the Member.
- Staff Assistant: The Staff Assistant answers phones and e-mail in the Member office, greets visitors, sort mail, and provides tours of the Capitol.

### ***Scheduling a Meeting with a Member of Congress***

There are several ways to communicate with your members of Congress including personal visits, days on the Hill and inviting your legislators to your workplace. There are a variety of ways to schedule a meeting with your member of congress but there are a few standard practices:

- Tell the receptionist that you are a constituent, you live in [city, state], and you would like to meet with Representative X or Senator Y to discuss issues related to the employment of people with disabilities.
- The receptionist will either give you instructions on how to submit your formal meeting request or will put you in touch with the member's scheduler.
- When you speak with the scheduler be sure to say you represent your state's APSE chapter, answer questions politely but be sure to make it clear you would like a meeting with the member.
- Many times you will not be able to meet with your member of congress in person but you will be able to meet with their legislative staff.
- After filing your formal meeting request, the key to successfully scheduling a meeting is follow-up. Be persistent. Ask the scheduler or staffer when you can follow up. Most schedules are not made up more than one week in advance, so it is important for you to remain flexible. You will be successful if you are persistent and friendly.

### **Bring Your Legislator to Work Day**

As part of National Disability Employment Awareness Month, National APSE and our APSE State Chapters will be conducting a state-led Take Your Legislator to Work Day campaign. The objective of this campaign is to raise awareness and the benefits of hiring individuals with disabilities and the belief that employment and careers should be the expected and preferred outcomes of all publicly funded services for individuals with disabilities, i.e. Employment First! Essentially, we want to show our state legislators "Real Jobs with Real Wages!" For more information on this approach, check out [Take Your Legislator to Work Day Campaign Toolkit](#)



## **Additional Resources**

- **General**
  - APSE Legislative Handbook, <http://bit.ly/1ms6uCv> pp. 11-12
  - APSE Day on the Hill PowerPoint: [APSE Day on the Hill PowerPoint – June 2012](#)
- **Sample Questions to Legislators**
  - The Arc’s Legislative Toolkit: <http://bit.ly/1fbPfCB>
- **Telephoning Policymaker**
  - APSE Legislative Handbook, <http://bit.ly/1ms6uCv>, pp 9-10
  - MT Non Profit: <http://bit.ly/LPtVbU>, p. 11
- **Sample Scripts and Action Alerts**
  - APSE Legislative Handbook, <http://bit.ly/1ms6uCv>, pp 17
  - Sample Action Alert, <http://bit.ly/LPtVbU>, p. 15
- **Testifying at Committees**
  - <http://bit.ly/LPtVbU>, pp. 24-26