

AYLEE ADVOCACY TOOLKIT

What is Advocacy?

Advocacy is the organized process of influencing those who make policy. Advocacy can involve the creation, modification, implementation and enforcement of policies. The term “policy” includes government legislation, but can have a much wider meaning.

Advocacy is a process or an action to ensure community rights are respected and effective. Anybody can start an advocacy action, but the more it is structured and organized, the higher the chance of success. Lobbying and campaigning are part of advocacy. Lobbying is undertaken by a small number of experts in a specific issue. Campaigning is a series of initiatives, which aim at raising public or political interest on a specific issue. We can define advocacy as a coordinated set of actions to concretely influence a decision-making process.

Research and analysis

- ▶ Define a solid base from which to start

Create alliances, identify people and organizations with the same or similar goal

- ▶ Benefit from their expertise and collaborate

Campaign

- ▶ Present the idea to a wide audience to raise awareness and/or mobilize

Lobby

- ▶ Approach policy makers in a targeted way, highlight the importance of the issues

Building an Advocacy Strategy

Effective advocacy, of any kind, requires building a solid strategy or plan and practicing skills to help you feel comfortable and confident in reaching your advocacy goals.

Why is having a plan so important? Because it allows you to take action as an advocate in a thoughtful way. By really thinking about what you want to advocate for and how you will take action, you are more likely to resolve the problem as quickly as possible.

This section focuses on building a strategy to identify what you want to advocate for, and four things you should do before you begin.

This planning process takes time. Sometimes even the best laid plans fail to achieve the identified goal. It requires that you clarify your goal, identify who you will communicate with to achieve your goal, determine what methods or strategies you want to employ and figure out what steps you need to take for follow-up.

Advocacy Plan – Step by Step

Step 1: Problem Analysis

Questions to ask yourself: What is the problem or issue? If there is more than one, focus on one at a time. What is my goal? What facts do I know?

We all have been overwhelmed at one point or another by something or somethings that we want to change in our lives. All good advocacy starts with a good understanding of the problem. You have to understand what you want before you can do anything about it. It sounds simple, right? Well, not necessarily. Sometimes the problems can be complicated to break down.

Step 2: Information Gathering

Questions to ask yourself: What additional facts or information might you need regarding this situation, such as laws, rules or policies? How can I go about gathering this information? Who are the decision-makers that I need to influence to solve this problem? Are there other people who can help me?

In order to be able to effectively advocate, you must have a clear understanding of the facts that you know, and also a firm grasp of what information you might need to gather. Educate yourself about the laws, rules, and, policies that apply to your situation.

Step 3: Solution Analysis

Questions to ask yourself: What are some possible solutions to this problem/issue? (be specific) What are some barriers to these solutions? What do I expect the other side to do?

After you've figured out what your rights are and have broken down the problem, then you're ready to look for a solution. An old adage says that each problem has a unique solution. By using a systematic approach, you're more likely to find the solution that fits your problem.

A sample Advocacy Plan Worksheet follows and can help you develop your action plan for a specific self-advocacy goal you identify.

ADVOCACY PLAN

What is the problem or issue? If there is more than one, focus on one at a time:

What is your goal?

What facts do you know?

What additional facts or information might you need regarding this situation, such as laws, rules or policies?

How can you go about gathering this information?

Who are the decision-makers that you need to influence to solve this problem/issue?

What are some possible solutions to this problem/issue (be specific)?

What are some barriers to these solutions?

Pick one solution and discuss the strategies and tactics you will use to achieve this solution. Complete the information below to assist you in initiating your action plan.

Initiating Your Action Plan

I will call/meet with/write to _____ by the following date: _____.

If this person does not _____ by the following date _____, then I will call/
meet with/write to _____.

Documentation that I will need:

Other people who can help me:

What I expect them to do:

Strategies for what's next:

Debriefing:

Keep in mind that the strategy you use to obtain the advocacy goal may not be successful. It is helpful to think about what you will do if you don't get what you want the first, second, or even third time around.

If your plan does not work, you may need to review your strategy, what went wrong and alternative ways to resolve your concern. You may want to revisit some of the information-gathering questions listed above and consider asking yourself the following questions:

What will I do if the strategy doesn't work? What is the backup plan?

What went wrong? Why didn't the strategy work?

Advocacy Skills

This section is a brief overview of some basic tools to help you to become a better advocate. You will find worksheets and tools to assist you in developing advocacy skills and taking action to address your concern.

You will learn how to:

- ▶ Stay organized,
- ▶ Properly document and keep records, and
- ▶ Be an effective advocate on the phone, in writing, and in-person.

By understanding, practicing and using these skills, you will be better organized, prepared, and able to respond to unexpected things that come your way.

Writing Letters

One of the simplest ways to influence government decisions is to write a letter to your MLA and explain what is happening in health care.

Writing Effective Letters

- ▶ Add any additional information as an attachment or enclosure.
- ▶ Be brief and to the point. Letters should be no longer than 1 – 2 pages.
- ▶ Check your spelling and punctuation. In particular, ensure that you have correctly spelled the name of the individual you are writing to.
- ▶ Address your letter properly.
- ▶ Focus the letter on only one issue (two at the most).
- ▶ Identify the issues clearly as well as your concern and your recommended course of action.
- ▶ Write the letter in your own words and personalize it with local facts.
- ▶ Personalize, if possible, the relationship with the individual to whom you are writing.
- ▶ Request a response to your letter.
- ▶ Call or write to follow up if you do not receive a response within three weeks.
- ▶ Ask specific questions in the letter to discourage a response by form letter.
- ▶ Type the letter, if possible; if handwritten, ensure that it is easy to read.
- ▶ Include contact information such as return address, e-mail address and telephone number.

- ▶ Send copies of the letter to the health critics from other political parties, other influential leaders and/or the local news media. However, whenever possible send personalized letters to the other interested parties.
- ▶ Keep a copy of the letter.

Emails

Email is an effective way to communicate directly with elected officials, including MLAs and MPs. It is fast and inexpensive and it is easy to copy or forward messages to a variety of recipients. The volume of email received by elected officials is increasing dramatically and your email messages may be lost in the overall volume of email. In addition, email is often not read personally by the elected official and a member of the office staff usually responds.

Writing Effective Emails

- ▶ Email messages should be shorter and more concise than letters
- ▶ Identify yourself as a constituent when emailing your own MLA or MP since a response is more likely if it is a constituent who is corresponding with the elected official
- ▶ Include your full name, address, and telephone number at the bottom
- ▶ Avoid attaching documents to your message because software is not always compatible. Hyperlinks, however, are ok.
- ▶ Remember that email is not always secure, so do not include confidential information

Phone Calls

Telephone calls are especially useful when time is of the essence. In many cases you will not get to talk directly to the elected official you are calling. You will often be required to leave your message with a member of the office staff. However, most elected officials keep track of the number of calls on a particular issue and the concerns expressed. Don't underestimate the influence of an official's staff.

Advantages of phone calls are that they are inexpensive; allow for immediate conversation; easy for individuals or large groups; and you connect personally.

Making Effective Phone Calls

- ▶ Write down your key points prior to making the call; possibly write out the entire script for your call.
- ▶ Keep the messages brief and concise.

- ▶ Leave your name, number and mailing address and request a response to your call.
- ▶ Call a number of elected officials, not just your local MP or MLA, as the total volume of calls will likely be recorded by government.
- ▶ Follow-up with a letter if appropriate.

Social Media

These days, one of the most effective ways to reach a government official or decision-maker within an institution is through social media – specifically, Twitter and Facebook.

Twitter and Facebook advocacy is different from the other three tactics due to the fact it is public and interactive. Any comment you make online is able to be seen by a large number of others, and they are able to instantly share your message with their followers or respond to you. Because comments are public, authority figures are more likely to pay attention and respond to them than a private letter or email. If you make a mistake, posts can be deleted, but remember that anything that goes online has the potential to be saved by someone else before you have a chance to delete it.

Social media can be risky, but when used correctly and appropriately, can be one of the most effective advocacy tools.

Writing Effective Tweets

- ▶ Create your own Twitter account and find the Twitter accounts of your recipients.
- ▶ Research popular hashtags (#) that have to do with your issue (ex, #ableg or #EnergyEfficiency).
- ▶ Craft tweets that incorporate the Twitter handle of your recipient, your message, hashtags and links.
- ▶ Preferably, create tweets that are less than 110 characters, so others have room to re-tweet you or respond to your tweet and add their opinion.
- ▶ Much like letters, include either a call for action or question within your tweet to elicit a response.
- ▶ Respond to any replies or tweets directed at you within a few hours, one day maximum.
- ▶ Check for spelling and grammar before posting.

Writing Effective Facebook Posts

- ▶ Find the Facebook accounts of your recipients and follow them/like them.
- ▶ Draft your Facebook post much like you would a letter, but more concisely.

- ▶ Use photos, videos or links to make your posts more eye-catching.
- ▶ Tag (by using the @ symbol) your recipients in your Facebook posts.
- ▶ Ask a question or for a call to action to help elicit a response.
- ▶ Respond to any comments made on your post within one day.
- ▶ Check for spelling and grammar before posting.

Effective & Proactive Social Media Engagement

- ▶ On Twitter or Facebook, if the person you are trying to advocate to posts about the issue you are concerned about, you can reply to their post with your key messages and ask for a response.
- ▶ Like, share, retweet, and favourite posts of the decision-makers that you agree with – this increases your online presence and visibility.

How to find contact information

In addition to obtaining contact information, these resources may help you determine if a specific person is the appropriate decision-maker for the issue you wish to advocate.

- ▶ [Search for an Alberta MLA](#)
- ▶ [Contact Ministers and Associate Ministers of the Alberta Government](#)
- ▶ [Contact a staff member of the Alberta Government](#)
- ▶ [Contact a Member of Parliament](#)

Deliver Your Message

Learn how to effectively deliver your key messages. Here are **10 tips for effective advocacy**:

1. **Understand the environment.** Know the existing fiscal, political and social context of the government you wish to influence. Know their issues and challenges.
2. **Know the desired outcome.** Understand what is trying to be achieved, whether that is to educate, raise awareness or change laws, policies or behaviours.
3. **Have a strategy.** Plan what is going to be done and how it is going to be done; don't be haphazard or unfocused.
4. **Be regular and consistent.** Don't just appear sporadically when there is a major issue to deal with. To be an effective advocate one must be a regular advocate.
5. **Know your audience.** Understand who the individual decision-makers are how much influence they have in a specific area. Identify issues and solutions that fall within their specific sphere of influence.
6. **Make it personal.** Wherever possible meet face-to-face and get personal involvement from the individuals within the governments or organizations you are attempting to influence.
7. **Focus on solutions, not problems.** Everybody has problems; try to present specific options to addressing issues rather than focusing on the issues themselves.
8. **Be certain of the facts.** Nothing diminishes the effectiveness of an advocacy effort faster than basing the case on inaccurate information.
9. **Use many approaches.** Don't rely on one particular tool or tactic to get the message to the government or organization you are trying to influence.
10. **Be persistent.** If the approaches being used aren't working then try some different ones. Don't give up. Remember that advocacy is a long-term proposition.
11. **Advocate!**

Self-Awareness Tool

Think about some of the obstacles that you've faced recently. How do you react to obstacles? This isn't a test and there are no "right" answers! The purpose of this exercise is to help you learn more about yourself.

1. Check one. When I face a problem, I usually:

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Blame myself | <input type="checkbox"/> Get teary eyed and feel down |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Investigate who's responsible | <input type="checkbox"/> Blame no one |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Blame others | <input type="checkbox"/> Get motivated to resolve it |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Feel numb | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Blame the system | _____ |

2. Check all that apply. When I face a problem, I usually:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Try to find solutions | <input type="checkbox"/> Can't concentrate |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Feel sad or discouraged | <input type="checkbox"/> Feel overwhelmed about what to do |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Feel angry | <input type="checkbox"/> Turn to others for help |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Try to ignore it | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: |
| | _____ |

3. Check all that apply. When a teacher, government employee, or service provider tells me something, I usually:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Believe the person | <input type="checkbox"/> Ask someone else |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Look for information on my own | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ask them additional questions | _____ |

4. Check all that apply. When I face a problem, I make lists of:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Important facts | <input type="checkbox"/> What I want |
| <input type="checkbox"/> What I will do | <input type="checkbox"/> I don't make lists, I |
| <input type="checkbox"/> People to contact | _____ |

5. Check all that apply. When I use the phone to solve a problem:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I am confident | <input type="checkbox"/> I don't lose my temper or shout |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I give up if my calls are not returned | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I am nervous | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I sometimes ask to speak to a supervisor | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I usually get good results | |

6. Check all that apply. When I need to write a letter:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I am confident | <input type="checkbox"/> I ask for help to write it |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I ask a friend to proofread the letter | <input type="checkbox"/> I give a deadline for the person to write me back |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I am nervous | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I send copies to other people | _____ |

7. Check all that apply. When I hold a meeting to solve a problem:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I am confident | <input type="checkbox"/> I have a written plan for the meeting |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I bring a friend along | <input type="checkbox"/> I don't lose my temper or shout |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I am nervous | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I send a letter afterward | |

8. Rank 1st , 2nd , and 3rd . My top three choices for resolving a problem are:

- | | |
|------------------------|----------------------------|
| Using the phone _____ | Scheduling a meeting _____ |
| Writing a letter _____ | Other: _____ |

9. Check all that apply. If a problem isn't solved right away:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I get motivated and continue to advocate | <input type="checkbox"/> I get angry |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I give up or put it off | <input type="checkbox"/> I try to get more information |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I talk to people's supervisors | <input type="checkbox"/> I ask someone for help |

I feel hurt, blame myself, or assume
I did something wrong

Other:

10. Check all that apply. When someone makes a promise to me but doesn't keep it:

I give up

I get angry

I contact the person

Other:

I contact the person's supervisor

11. List ways I feel effective solving a problem by....

12. List your goals. Based on what I learned from this self-awareness exercise, I would like to focus my advocacy skills on:

Reflecting on what you learned in the Self-Awareness Exercise

Look over your answers to the Self-Awareness Tool. Think about the following questions as you review your answers:

When do you feel most effective when trying to solve a problem? Would you like to build on that identified strength?

How satisfied were you with the way you react when something goes wrong? Would you like to work on this?

How confident do you feel in analyzing the problems that you face? Would you like to work on this?

Do you feel like you know how to solve the problems that you face? Would you like to work on problem-solving skills?

Do you feel like you follow through until a problem is solved? Would you like to work on this skill?

Many of the strategies and skills contained within this Advocacy Tool Kit will assist you to build on your personal strengths and enhance your problem-solving skills. Again, there is not one way or “right” way to solve problems. The most important concept to remember from the Self Awareness exercise is learning about what works for you and how you can build on those identified strengths to become an even more effective advocate.

