

Dr. Christine Davis, Editor

## 16 LEGISLATIVE TIPS for state art education associations and members

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**Form an effective association advocacy/government relations committee**, with a clear job description and responsibilities for the committee members. Chaired by a board member, the committee should include knowledgeable, influential leaders in the state/community and volunteers to identify and carry out the advocacy strategies and make policy recommendations to your association's board. [For example: use the expertise of retired art supervisor members.]

### Five Reasons People [Members] Don't Get Involved

**Reason 1: They Don't Know There Is An Issue**

Unless your issue is front page news, you can bet your rank and file supporters don't know about it, so they don't act on it.

**Reason 2: They Don't Know Who To Contact**

Surprisingly few people know who represents them in Congress or their State Legislature, so they don't know who to contact when there is an issue.

**Reason 3: They Don't Know What To Say**

Many people care deeply about issues, but aren't familiar with the political jargon or the legislative process that ultimately determines laws.

**Reason 4: They Think It Will Be Difficult**

Ever since "Mr. Smith Goes to Washington," many people think it takes enormous effort to participate in a grassroots campaign.

**Reason 5: They Think It Won't Matter**

Even after the last Presidential election many people still don't think their voice will be heard.

Source: [www.capitoladvantage.com](http://www.capitoladvantage.com)

**Conduct an annual briefing** on arts education policies/issues for staff in the governor's/mayor's office, or for new legislative staff. Encourage and train members to do the same for district office staff, school board members, principals, department heads and officers/committee members of parent and community groups. Orient audiences with your programs and the policy issues important to your program or association. Present the briefing annually. Encourage members to do the same in their districts.

**Write a monthly/quarterly column, update, or fact-sheet** on legislative issues important to the arts education in your state. Distribute the column to other organizations in the state and ask that they run it in their newsletters. This circulates important arts education advocacy messages to wider audiences throughout the state rather than to only your members.

**Generate public service announcements and print flyers** to reinforce the message that tax money spent on the K-12 arts education programs provide the most efficient way to provide access for the entire student population in your state or district. It reaches ALL students. To create PSAs— get technical support—in partnership with a district media center or communications department at a university or community college.

**Meet your elected officials** whenever you can, even at events that aren't about the arts or education. Introduce yourself to legislators or other public officials, and identify your connection with arts education in your community.

**Create a good reason to contact your legislators** when you are not proposing something. Send your legislators a copy of your newly published convention catalogue, a new program guide to your programs, or recent brochure or flyer on arts education. Seize the opportunity to show your legislators what you do and to remind them who you are, establishing a basis or context for future meetings.

**Legislators prefer face-to-face contact** such as site-visits in their districts at local nonprofits or suggest nonprofits visit the state capitol. They report a preference for speaking with their own district nonprofits and other nonprofits whose interests are related to their committees. Most legislators do not like mass mailings and complain about emails clogging their systems. Democrats are more supportive of nonprofits' use of lobbyists than Republicans, but both recognize the need for nonprofits to hire lobbyists as part of their overall advocacy strategy.

Source: Deborah Sturtevant, *Influencing Social Policies: Legislators Speak to Nonprofits: Highlights of Research Findings. Snapshots.* Michigan Nonprofit Research Program. Michigan Nonprofit Association, Lansing, MI. May 2003.

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**Start with the legislator/staffer you know best** to advocate for your cause with legislative colleagues whose support is essential. Persuade your legislator to seek support for your legislative/policy issues from politicians outside your district; elected officials often listen to the people they represent *and* to their fellow legislators.

**Welcome new legislators/administrators/school board members** to office by writing to offer assistance on questions about arts education issues. Send information about your association and the status of the arts education in your state/district. Get to know your decision makers from the beginning, many of whom are new to issues of support for arts education, and some of whom will be appointed to committees that handle arts education legislation.

**Organize a group visit** to your legislator's office to discuss the impact of arts education support in your district or state. Gathering a small diverse group of interested and knowledgeable people can demonstrate the breadth of concern among your legislator's constituents such as businesses, parents, and civic leaders.

**Invite a legislator to give a keynote address** at your next convention. Ask them to speak on what members can do to advance arts education policies, or to provide updates on current legislation that will affect arts programs. If they do not wish to speak, invite them to simply attend and be recognized. This should be done with state board members, superintendents and other state government decision makers also. Provide any background information on statistics, demographics, and other research that will assist them. Don't forget to point out the policy deficiencies.

**Invite a legislator to write an article** in your newsletter. Offer some visibility through your publication and possibly build a stronger advocate at the same time. Help them to become better informed about your work by providing data, research, and/or issues briefs and having them write an article on arts education issues/policies in your state.

**Ask legislators** to assist communicating about association and member programs. Many legislative offices distribute information about events, conferences, exhibits etc., in the state and towns. Ask legislators to distribute your program brochures to visitors in their offices, and help to promote your organization at the same time. Do the same for school district offices, Chambers of Commerce, real estate offices, and others throughout the state. (See the *Flyer Series* on NAEA's publication list as examples.)

**Operate as a reliable source** for information, an advocate's prime commodity. Respond to all inquiries, even when asked a question you cannot answer. Tell the legislator you will get back with the information, or, if appropriate, refer the query to someone who can respond. (See NAEA's *Status of the States* charts at [www.naea-reston.org](http://www.naea-reston.org) as national data format examples.)

**Communicate clearly and concisely** with legislators what you want and what you are doing. Avoid using jargon. Keep your message simple and clear, because while you are the expert, many politicians may not be informed about the specific nuances and issues of programming for arts education.

**Organize and prepare your facts.** Most importantly focus your data upon the effects of student learning in the arts. For example: identify the number/percentages of students who will be denied arts instruction; identify the results of proposed cuts on the future of the arts program, (i.e., curtailing elementary arts programs results in a xx% loss of students at the middle and high school levels.); identify how reductions or elimination of instructional time, materials, or space, reduces access (number/percentages) to student arts learning.

**Recognize decision makers** for their good work and thank all those who helped you. Be sure to end your advocacy campaign with a letter of thanks. By giving credit where it is deserved, you are reminding legislators that arts education programs are important to their constituents and their children.

### **Organizing Data, Facts, and Information**

#### **Preliminary Information:**

1. Know who is served by your district! Student demographics, socio-economic levels, academic achievement/AP scores, parent education levels, Title I schools. Know the district's financial resources and how they are used.
3. Know the local revenue-raising capacity of the community/district.
4. Identify the success/failure rate of parcel taxes or bond elections.
5. Have accurate figures on the number/percentage of students served by every level of the [arts] program at every school in your district.

#### **Understanding the budget process:**

1. Understand budget terminology.
2. Understand how administrators and the school board manipulate the budget process.
3. Cuts in the [arts] program may create the illusion of saving money, but do they?
4. Review all line items in the budget and propose plausible alternatives to cutting [arts].
5. Lobby administrators/board members who are sympathetic.
6. Identify the real issues underlying the proposed budget cuts.

*Source: Saving Local Visual & Performing Arts Programs* by Dr. Deborah Mitchell. California Coalition for Music Education Chair and CMEA Advocacy Representative.