ADVOCACY SKILLS WORKSHOP
FOR HEALTH PROFESSIONALS
MARCOEM 2019
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YOUR ADVOCACY EXPERIENCE

How many of you . . . ?
- Have advocated for something in the past?
- Have lead/participated in advocacy initiatives?
- Are confident about doing advocacy?
- Know your local/state/federal legislator/aide?
Dr. Alice Hamilton
(1869-1970)

"Physician,
Scientist,
Humanitarian,
Social Reformer..."
What is advocacy?

Drawing attention to an issue, and directing decision makers toward a solution.
WHY

- What has health to do with policy?
  - Can you translate?
- How prevalent is burn out in the health care community?
  - Why did you become a health professional?
- Who do people trust the most?
WHY HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY TO LOBBY

Public perception of honesty and ethical standards by profession

(Gallup Poll, 2011)
WHAT ROLE DO YOU HAVE?

The Reformer

The rebel

The organizer

The citizen
WHAT TACTICS ARE THERE?

- Meetings with policy-maker
- Public hearings
- Writing for change: LTE/Op-Ed
- Media Events
- Public educational forums
WRITING LTE
NEWS HIERARCHY:

- Editorials and front-page news
- Staff-written columns (i.e. by the newspaper’s own columnist)
- Locally-written op-eds (up to 600 words)
- Syndicated columnist
- Inside news stories
- Editorial cartoons
- Letters to the editor (up to 150 words)
IMPORTANCE OF LETTERS TO THE EDITOR (LTEs)

- **Newsworthy**
  - The newspaper prints letters it considers “newsworthy” and important in the community
  - Indicates to our elected officials and others that this is an important topic

- **Volume**
  - Separately, the volume of letters submitted indicates the communities’ level of interest

- **Pulse**
  - Even in today’s digital world, our elected officials use letters to the editor to get a “pulse” of what’s happening in the district, so they review the letters in their hometown papers every day, especially those that mention that elected official by name.

- **Visibility**
  - Letters to the editor also provide your cause visibility in the community and provide a way to find new supporters
LTE or Op-Ed?

- LTE-short in response to an article
- Opposite Editorial 500-750 word article or viewpoint on a timely news topic
FUNDAMENTALS OF LTE

- State your issue
- Build your case
- Call to Action
ABC’s of Letters to the Editor

- **About** = refer to a recent article
  - Best bets: editorial, op-ed, or front page story
  - Cite headline, date and author
- **Brief** = keep it short
  - Common limits are 100-250 words
  - Check the paper’s policy
- **Concise** = get to the point fast
  - Just one point
  - Can the reader draw a clear conclusion
STATE THE ISSUE

- Refer to the issue as reported in the newspaper, then say why you agree or disagree

  OR:

- Stating the situation as you see it
  - “Climate change is happening, it’s happening now, and it’s hurting our community.”
  - “Climate change is not just about polar bears any more. It’s harming our children’s health.”
BUILD YOUR CASE

2) Build your case
   • Use your own voice as a health professional
   • Connect to local angle
   • Use emotion

Photograph by: Spencer Platt, Getty Images Files
CALL TO ACTION

What can the reader do?
- Be specific
- Legislation related?

Praise or call out a legislator, corporation
If published consider sending to target policy maker
**Structure:**

- Put the title of the referenced article in the subject line of the e-mail.
- Reference the story or a specific part (line, thought, etc.) of the story.
- Transition into how it relates to your issue.
- Identify a solution.
- Present a call to action.
- Close creatively by employing a rhetorical device such as repetition, a play on words or closing the circle from the letter’s beginning.
- Try to incorporate the use of metaphors and wit, but always be respectful.
THINGS TO AVOID

- Don’t overstate/exaggerate
- Don’t insult your opponents
- Avoid jargon or acronyms
- Never use all capital letters or bold text
SUBMITTING ONLINE IS EASY!
WASHINGTON POST LTE GUIDELINES

- Prefer letters that are fewer than 200 words and take as their starting point a Post article
- Receive more than 1000/week
- Edited for clarity and fact checked but opinions are always the writer’s own
- If you haven’t hear within 2 weeks it is safe to assume the letter won’t be published
ACTIVITY: FIND YOUR OWN LOCAL PAPER’S SUBMISSION GUIDELINES
**Final Helpful Hints**

- Time sensitive -> submit by email
- Use local connections!
- Include:
  - Full name, credentials, home address, email, phone #, personal or financial interest
- Subject to editing
- Not more than one in 60 days
- Unique submissions (not elsewhere)
SPEAK TO POLICY MAKERS
**WHY LOBBY?**

- Influence specific legislation.
- Provide in-depth information on your issue.
- Convey the views of many constituents.
- Learn about what is happening with your issue in this Congress.
- Build a relationship with your legislator.
GOAL: BUILDING A LONG-TERM RELATIONSHIP WITH POLICY MAKERS

- Addressing Multiple Issues and Needs – doing the research
- Serving as a Resource, Building the Policy Maker’s/Staff’s Expertise
- Proactive Communication, not solely when an issue is “hot”
- Developing Staff /Committee Relationships
WHAT ARE THE MOST EFFECTIVE MEANS OF INFLUENCING LEGISLATORS?

- Congressional staffers say:
  - Visits from constituents
    - Citizen lobbyists are more effective than professional lobbyists.
  - Phone calls
  - Individualized emails or letters
  - Computerized letters, petitions
  - It is not just what you know,
  - but who you know that counts.
ADVOCACY PROCESS

- Framing the problem – stories, pictures, metaphors, and data depicting the urgency & impact
- Creating the vision – what it would be like if . . .
- Describing the solution(s) – examples
- Requesting the action(s)
- Confirming the response
- Follow-up
WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW FIRST...

- Probably will meet with a staffer
- Call or email the legislative aide who works on your issue
- Schedule 2 weeks ahead
- Federal: Members are generally in DC Tue-Thu
- Meetings are generally 30 minutes
WHAT DO YOU NEED TO DO TO GET READY?

- Better Know a Congressperson
- Better Know a District
- Build your team
- Formulate a focused ‘ask’
- Be well informed about your subject
BETTER KNOW A LEGISLATOR: GOVTRACK

Overview

FEDERAL LEGISLATION

Use GovTrack to research and track legislation in the United States Congress, including Members of Congress, bills and resolutions, voting records, and committee activity.

MEMBERS of CONGRESS

Use our Congressional directory to research current senators and representatives and all members of Congress dating back to the founding of our nation.

We also compute statistics such as ideology, leadership, and missed votes.

BILLS & RESOLUTIONS

GovTrack follows the status of all bills in Congress from introduction to enactment.

Our database of bills goes back to 1799, the 1st Congress. It is updated daily.

Read the text of bills and see how bills change through their life cycle.

VOTING RECORDS

The votes database tracks the votes of Members of Congress on bills and procedural motions from 1789 to the present.

COMMITTEES

Congress divides its work into committees and subcommittees where most of the policymaking process occurs. Use the committees database to see where legislation is being debated.
ORGANIZE YOUR MEETING

- Assign roles-choose a leader
- What questions to ask the staff?
- Organize your information
- Determine who makes the ask
- Assign a note-taker
- Create a one page sheet outlining your position-offer at the end of the meeting
- PRACTICE
AT THE MEETING

- Arrive early
- Introductions
  - You are a constituent
  - You have experience with the issue
- Start out positive, make a connection
- Find out how much your staffer is familiar with the issue or their position on your request
- Treat them with respect (whether you agree with them or not), follow structure, and say “thank you”
AFTER THE MEETING

- Leave a business card and/or your information (max 1 page)
- Copy of sign-on letter if appropriate
- Follow up with a thank you email (staffer will then save you as a contact)
- “Circle back” the next week or so with a phone call to follow up on action ask
- Always leave with some sign of support
  - “We want to be a resource for you”
IN SUMMARY

- Learn the Language
- Know your issue, role, audience, and message
- Communicate the connection between your work and the big picture
- Participate in policy action
- Figure out your preferred medium: letters, emails, in-person, social media
- Leave your comfort zone!