



## Advocacy Toolkit

# Developing an Advocacy Plan

## Why Develop an Advocacy Plan?

Developing an advocacy plan is one of the first steps for your organization to undertake in order to become effective arts advocates. Just like any organizational strategic or operational plan, an advocacy plan will help you determine your goals, your actions and the expected outcomes for advocacy. Remember that advocacy is a continuous process based on voicing your support, establishing relationships, and providing education based on personal stories and data.

Advocacy plans:

- help you determine your goals, actions and hoped for outcomes,
- allow you to be proactive in the messaging you want to provide,
- organize what you do intentionally so when there's a call for action you have the resources to respond, and
- establish a culture of advocacy for your organization.

## Can Nonprofit Organizations Advocate for the Arts?

Nonprofits can advocate, as long as they are nonpartisan in their efforts and they observe the legal financial limits. The Internal Revenue Service definitions note that nonprofits "may advocate a particular position or viewpoint" as long as the activity is nonpartisan and objective. Organizations may conduct educational meetings, prepare and distribute educational materials, and consider public policy issues in an educational manner. For detailed information about guidelines and rules for nonprofits advocating for the arts, see the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies publication: ["Advocacy vs. Lobbying: An Arts Primer."](#)

Every organization's advocacy plan is different based on the functions, resources, and needs of the organization and the arts communities to which it belongs. The outline below serves as an organizational advocacy checklist and foundation for establishing your own advocacy plan.

# Outline for Developing an Advocacy Plan

## Planning to Plan

1. Ask your organization the following questions:

- Is advocacy part of our organizational culture?
- Does at least one of our staff members include advocacy as part of their responsibilities?
- Is advocacy part of all board member job descriptions and expectations?
- Do we have an advocacy committee representing both board and staff?
- Do we provide training or guidance to board members and/or staff about engaging effectively in advocacy efforts?
- Is advocacy an agenda item for all board meetings?
- Is advocacy included in our strategic plan?
- Is our organization actively participating in coalitions and organizations that are helping to advance arts advocacy work?
- Is our organization actively engaged in conversations with decision-makers about our organization, arts issues, and/or the policies or decisions that affect our work or our funding?
- Do we regularly discuss the implications of public policies and funding?

2. Develop a **working agenda** to help you conduct research, gather information, and set the foundation for your advocacy plan. Include a prioritized list of tasks, persons responsible, and a corresponding timeline to address immediate actions as you develop your plan. The working agenda defines what needs to be done in the short-term, organizes the tasks in manageable increments, and identifies needed resources.

3. Become familiar with and join **arts advocacy organizations**. Becoming a paid member supports arts advocacy work. Join Facebook groups, sign up to receive their newsletters and emails, and look at the resources on their websites, including policies, position papers or statements on issues, and data and research. As a member you will receive advocacy alerts and instructions on how to take action. Advocacy groups will also provide specific information and details so everyone advocating for an issue delivers the same message.

Advocacy groups include:

- **Kentuckians for the Arts** - Serves as the commonwealth's arts advocacy organization, and provides information and education about the impact and value of the arts, increases public awareness of the importance of the arts, and ensures that the arts are an ongoing part of the public dialogue.
- **Americans for the Arts** - Serves, advances, and leads the network of organizations and individuals who cultivate, promote, sustain and support the arts in America.
- **National Arts Action Fund** - Enlists citizen activists to advance the arts and arts education at the federal, state and local levels.

4. Develop an annual advocacy calendar.

- Know key dates such as local government meetings, federal and state arts advocacy days, state legislative session dates, etc.
- Watch advocacy organization communications for special calls to action.
- Include scheduled events, activities and materials for opportunities to advocate.

5. Organize your arts advocacy tools.

- Assess the materials your organization produces - annual reports, brochures, social media, etc.
- Research materials and data that are available from sources such as advocacy organizations, the Kentucky Arts Council, and the National Endowment for the Arts.
- Determine what materials need to be developed.
- Determine what research needs to be conducted.

6. Identify the players.

- Know who your elected officials are - your congressional representatives, state legislators, local government leaders, etc.
- Find out more about your officials - do they have an apparent connection to or interest in the arts, are they on caucuses or committees relating to the arts, etc.?

## Developing Your Plan

Your **working agenda** is short-term to help inform and develop your advocacy plan; your **advocacy plan** should be long-term with stated benchmarks and a timeline.

1. As you develop your plan, include goals, objectives and strategies that address the following questions:

- What do you want to achieve?
- What information do you need to make your case?
- Who do you want to influence?
- Who is your target audience?
- What is your message?
- How will you target the message?
- How will you deliver the message?
- What resources will you need?
- Who are your partners?
- How will you assess your success?

2. Use the discussions, questions addressed, and information gathered for your working agenda to help determine **objectives, strategies and action steps** to develop your plan.

3. Determine **components** to include in your plan.

- Develop relationships and partnerships; identify allies; form coalitions with:
  - Elected officials
  - Arts organizations
  - Arts education organizations and representatives
- Develop materials:
  - Your organization's advocacy story, using data and personal stories.
  - Short (15-30 seconds) advocacy statement for use by board or staff stating how the work of your organization benefits the community.
  - Constituent/audience stories that speak to the value of your organization.

4. Develop **mechanisms to stay up to date** on federal, state and local arts funding and policy issues; understand how the environment can impact the organization's work and the arts in general.

5. Prioritize resources to support **strategic engagement** in advocacy.

- Attend meetings with decision makers and elected officials.
- Participate in group advocacy efforts such as advocacy days, training events, and city meetings.
- Identify and utilize training and learning opportunities to inform and educate board and staff members.
- Develop regular communications with elected officials and stakeholders.

## **Advocating for Specific Issues**

In addition to everyday arts advocacy, issues will arise in which a call for action is required. These may be threats to policies or funding or opportunities to take advantage of changes in the landscape. They may be issues that will be resolved quickly or take a long time to resolve. It's impossible to build specific strategies for unknown events into your advocacy plan; however, being active participants in arts advocacy and having an arts advocacy plan will enable you to effectively take action when called upon.

- Become knowledgeable about the issue.
- Find out the current policies on the local and state levels relevant to the issue.
- Understand how the issue will affect your organization, and/or other areas of the arts.
- Utilize resources including advocacy organizations to develop your advocacy strategies.

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