

make an impact!

Developing an Effective Advocacy Message

An Effective Advocacy Message:

- **Informs** the audience about the advocacy issue or problem.
- **Persuades** the audience that the problem needs to be addressed, that the benefits of addressing the issue outweigh any risk, and that the proposed solution(s) are appropriate and effective strategies.
- **Moves the audience to action.** A successful message is one that gives a clear call to action and inspires the audience to actually take the action or actions that are proposed.



Effective messages also:

- Use facts and figures
- Use real-life, human examples
- Are appealing on a personal level
- Are simple, concise
- Use appropriate language
- Use a credible messenger
- Use tone and language that are consistent with message (ie. serious, humorous)
- Provide a clear call to action
- Are tailored for a target audience's degree of familiarity with and support for your issue
- Anticipate opposition arguments

Source:

Family Care International. "Mobilising Communities on Young People's Health and Rights: An Advocacy Training Guide." 2008. http://www.familycareintl.org/UserFiles/File/Anglo_TrainingGuide_June2008.pdf

make an impact!

Craft Your Message: In a Box!

How to use Message in a Box:

- Messages should be tailored to your target audience (i.e. legislator, business person, activist)
- Use the box to develop basic messages to repeat and keep repeating!
- Use the long lines to write in the main points
- Use the bullets to fill in anecdotes, statistics, and sound bites that reinforce this message

Target Audience: _____

The diagram is an envelope-shaped box divided into four quadrants by a central horizontal line and a central vertical line. In the center of the box is a smaller rectangle labeled Issue. The top quadrant is labeled Problem Statement and contains a horizontal line and three vertical dots. The bottom quadrant is labeled Policy Proposal and contains a horizontal line and three vertical dots. The left quadrant is labeled Proposed Action and contains three vertical dots. The right quadrant is labeled Relevance and contains three vertical dots.

Problem Statement: What is the current state of affairs? The problem you want the society to pay attention to. The things that are wrong or could be improved.

Relevance: Why is it relevant for the target audience or the wider society? You have to prove that this problem needs to be a priority and that it is relatively important compared with numerous other burning issues competing for attention.

Policy proposal: What is your solution? Increased funding, new legislation, training requirements, administrative change, reporting guidelines, etc.

Proposed action: For primary targets, what should decision makers do? For secondary targets, what should citizens, families, activists, or business leaders do to pressure the decision makers to take action? Sign a petition! Come to the rally! Write to the editorial boards! Call your legislator!

Communicating with Elected Officials

Once you understand how the political process works, who the key players are, and how to craft an advocacy message, you'll need some tools for effectively communicating your issues and priorities to elected officials. Legislators will never know that your issue is a priority unless **you** make sure that they hear your message. Many elected officials will say that it only takes a few calls or emails from constituents on a specific subject to gain their attention. One Missouri lawmaker told Partnership for Children that it took only 5 phone calls to make her vote against most of her party on an important children's issue! Realizing that your advocacy efforts really do have an impact is the first step to communicating effectively with elected officials.

This guide will provide advice on the best way to communicate with elected officials in many forms — whether it be by email or phone or in person during a lobby visit, testifying at a committee hearing, or facilitating an in-district site visit. Regardless of the form of communication, however, there are some general rules that you should always consider in order to be a respected and effective child advocate.

General Legislative Communication Tips for all Occasions:

- **Be honest and truthful.** Do not give legislators false information or embellish facts in order to help your case. This can not only damage your personal relationship with a legislator but also your credibility with all elected officials.
- **Be respectful.** Acknowledge differences of opinion but respectfully communicate around your different views. Be polite and friendly with elected officials. Don't make threatening or disparaging remarks and don't interrupt legislators or staff when they're speaking.
- **Don't wear your party on your sleeve.** This is meant both figuratively and literally. Children are not born red or blue and their needs should not fall victim to partisan debates. When speaking with elected officials, especially those with different political views from yourself, leave your partisan opinions and your political buttons back at home.
- **Talk personal, not policy.** Personal stories are usually more effective with legislators in gaining their attention and support. Even if you are a policy expert on the issue, don't expect legislators or staff to know every single detail.
- **Don't be afraid to ask.** Legislators have to take hundreds of positions on hundreds of issues during every legislative session. Don't be afraid to be clear about what you are asking for.
- **Always say thank you.** In every communication, at every meeting. Even if the legislator is not going to support the issue discussed at this time, s/he could be supportive of other children's issues in the future if you keep the lines of communications open. For official meetings in the capital or in the district, send a follow up written thank you note as well.