



# FACT SHEET: ADVOCACY 101

State and national policy has a direct impact on how we live our daily lives. But how can you impact policy? Your representatives are elected to act on our behalf as they shape the policies that affect us. You can engage with our elected officials through advocacy. Understanding advocacy and what it means to be an advocate is key in understanding our political system and making our voices heard.

## WHAT IS ADVOCACY?

- A process of influencing key decision makers in our political system.

ADVOCACY IS BASED ON:

**1** CONNECTING WITH PEOPLE

**2** BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

## WHO SHOULD YOU CONNECT WITH?

- Identifying the elected official with who you wish to connect with is important. Is it a federal policy which you wish to advocate on? Then you would contact a member of your federal delegation. At the state level, you can connect with your governor or state senator or state representative from your legislative district. These are key players in your state's political system. To create change in your community, you need to influence these decision makers.

➤ Learn more about your elected officials and find their contact information at:  
[goo.gl/Rc3RUW](http://goo.gl/Rc3RUW)

## WHAT SHOULD YOU DO BEFORE CONTACTING AN ELECTED OFFICIAL?

- Before contacting your representatives, map out the message you would like to share on a specific issue. Develop a rough outline of the topics important to you and write down a few main points you want to deliver to your legislator. These will be your reference points if conversation moves away from your issue.

## PLAN TO SHARE

- Why is this issue important to you? Tell your story. Make sure your representative hears how this issue has affected you and those close to you. Provide data points if relevant.

DON'T FORGET TO DISPLAY:

CONFIDENCE

ENTHUSIASM

CREDIBILITY

COMMITMENT



## HOW CAN YOU SHARE YOUR MESSAGE WITH AN ELECTED OFFICIAL?

### MAKE A PHONE CALL



Begin by introducing yourself, including where you live and what you do for a living. Next, ask to speak with the legislator or his or her assistant. Share the information you prepared and be receptive to follow-up questions. Feel free to share your passion on the topic, but remember to do so in a courteous manner.

### ATTEND A COMMUNITY MEETING



This setting allows you to see your representative in action and helps you gain an understanding of where he or she stands on the issues. Often, these meetings are in a question-and-answer format. If you come with a question ahead of time or develop one as the meeting progresses, you can see your legislator reply in real time.

### SEND AN EMAIL



Email is usually the easiest way to contact an elected official, but it is often less effective than a phone call or face-to-face interaction. Provide the same information you would in a phone call and only use the email as a quick and simple platform to deliver your concerns and ask a few questions. Remember to always show respect and civility to legislators and their assistants, regardless of where they stand on the issue.

### SHARE WITH THE MEDIA



Sharing your perspective through a letter to the editor or opinion piece not only influences your elected officials but others in your community, as well. Keep your words to a minimum but remember to be persuasive. Contact your local newspaper or the Center staff for assistance with placing your article.

## HOW DO THESE ADVOCACY ACTIONS CREATE CHANGE?

- The people you are reaching out to are elected officials, and in order for them to become elected or stay in office, they need your vote. As your representatives, it is their job to shape policy on behalf of your interests. Your advocacy ensures your voice is heard on the issues that matter most to you.

