

Effective Strategies for Legislative Advocacy

- ***Don't be a stranger to your elected officials and their staff.*** The most persuasive messages come from familiar faces. Know them by name, and make sure they know you by name. Anonymity is the antithesis of effectiveness.
- ***Introduce yourself at every opportunity,*** hand out your business card like candy at Halloween – always have extras. Invite officials to your programs for conversations and photos. Seeing is believing.
- ***Always say “Thank you” before you say “please.”*** Even if you disagree with your elected official's positions on some (or even most) issues, they are more likely to listen to you if you've found some way to praise them. If nothing else, thank them for the courage to be a public office holder.
- ***A well-written, brief thank you note is always appreciated.*** Remember, officials get 25 complaints for every compliment.
- ***Concentrate on principles of policy, rather than the specifics.*** Trust that your “every day professional advocates” know the details; your job is to set the stage with your elected officials to improve access for other advocates. The hometown connection is essential to help them listen with both ears.
- ***Be concise and to the point.*** The history of your issue or program needs to be a paragraph or a two-minute presentation. The key to influence is not volume, but precision. Elected officials are not experts, but don't need to be overwhelmed with your knowledge. Have them trust you as someone to turn to.
- ***Engage the media*** who have the power to send your message far and wide. An expert source is golden to every reporter and editorial/opinion writer – but be careful: they should not perceive you as seeking “publicity.” Once you're viewed as an accessible expert when they're on deadline, you can pitch them ideas anytime.
- ***Write Letters to the Editor,*** submit guest op-ed columns and encourage allies to do the same. The opinion pages are read word-for-word by every public official. You have their attention if your case is made in print. Never attack, always attract.
- ***Advocacy is focused on the art of compromise, never expect it all.*** While we strive for unanimity, we work for majority. There's a difference between compromising principles and compromising in policy discussion.
- ***While there's strength in diversity, there's power in unity.*** Bring as many diverse voices to your cause as possible, but reach a unifying message. Agree on the important goals and success will be achieved.

Credit: Center for Florida's Children