A Guide to Successful Advocacy

Prepared by:

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The purpose of Californians for the Arts (CFTA)’ “A Guide to Successful Advocacy” is to provide delegates with advocacy tools to ensure a successful meeting with your California legislator and/or their legislative staff. California elected officials and their staff want to understand the effects of the issues that are important to their constituents, and who better to convey information than arts, creative & cultural advocates from their district.

This guide will help you navigate through a legislative visit and provide tips for success during and after your meeting, including pertinent information to enhance the content of your message.

What is advocacy?

- Building a relationship with your legislator.
- Issue identification, research, and analysis.
- Educating your legislator and their staff on issues of concern.

Advocacy is all of the above. It can be a simple “drop in” to your legislator’s office, or as complex as providing detailed analysis on how a piece of legislation could negatively impact a community. Any activity that supports an idea or cause is advocacy, relationship building, and educating legislators and the public.

Steps for Setting up a Meeting with Your Legislator

For the purpose of Arts, Culture & Creativity Month, CFTA will set up your legislative visits and assign you a delegation and captain. You DO NOT have to arrange the meeting with your legislator as CFTA will take care of arranging the meetings.

Please register for the ACCM Advocacy Day before April 10 HERE:

I. Call your legislator’s office and ask to speak with the Scheduler. Generally, this request is most effective if done at least one month in advance. Most offices require that you send a “Meeting Request” via email to the Scheduler. If that is the case, the office will provide you with that individual’s name and their email address.

II. Put “Meeting Request” and a specific date in the subject field of your email. In the body of your email:
- Share the exact date of your visit. The more meeting times you provide for that day, the more likely you will get a meeting with your legislator. Be flexible with your schedule.
- Let the scheduler know exactly how many people will attend your meeting and provide their names.
- Provide a brief synopsis of the issues you would like to discuss. Limit this list to three topics.

III. If you do not hear back within a couple of days, resubmit your request and state that you are “just checking back in regarding your meeting request for DATE/TIME.” But don’t be too aggressive.
Prior to Your Meeting

I. Learn your legislator’s committee assignments as well as any general biographical information which is usually available on their web page. You never know what you might have in common – high school, college, military, etc. A personal connection is invaluable.

II. Determine if your legislator has been supportive of arts, cultural or creative issues.

III. If your legislator has been supportive, you want to thank him or her. If not, you want to educate them on these issues and ask for their support.

During a Legislative Visit

I. Prepare a one to two-minute brief introduction of yourself and/or your group. Then allow the group to introduce themselves and where they are from.

II. Start with a positive note by finding some common ground. If your legislator has supported a priority issue for the arts (i.e., voted for or co-sponsored a bill), thank them for that support.

III. Please keep in mind your meeting will only last 15 to 20 minutes so you want to avoid getting distracted with non-essential conversation. Provide a brief overview of the issues (maximum three) you would like to discuss and your position. You want to focus only on a few issues to avoid overloading the legislator or their staff with too much information. Keep the conversation simple and polite. While legislators and their staff are educated on most issues, they are typically “generalists” unless it pertains to specific issues within the jurisdiction of their committee assignment. For instance, a legislator that sits on the Budget Committee will have a much better understanding of funding issues (and perhaps allocations related to the arts), than a legislator that sits on the Health Committee.

IV. When discussing specific topics, it is important to use personal stories to explain why the issue needs action. Explain a position with facts and use personal stories to back it up.

V. Be positive and avoid partisanship. It is also extremely inappropriate to discuss political contributions, whether personal or from an Arts Political Action Committee (PAC). Also, it is illegal to give your elected officials a campaign contribution in their official legislative office.

VI. Ask the legislator to take a specific action, such as co-sponsoring a bill or committing their support for increase in funding. If a legislator agrees to support an issue (i.e. co-sponsor a bill or vote in favor of that bill) move on to the next issue. Once they have said “yes,” move on the next “ask.” Do not waste valuable time rehashing an issue they have already agreed to support.
VII. Show openness to counterarguments and politely respond to them if it seems appropriate to do so. Do not argue with the legislator or their staff.

VIII. If the answer to a question from the legislator or staff is not known to you, it is okay to say so. Simply reply that you are not sure of that answer, offer to get an answer and follow up with that answer. This actually provides a good opportunity to keep the conversation going after you have returned home.

IX. If you are unable to meet with your legislator, do not underestimate the influence of their staff! While they may be young (the average age of a legislative staffer is usually 27), they are educated, well informed, and help provide direction to the decision-making process of the legislator.

X. If there is time, it is appropriate to ask the legislator for a picture. If you use Twitter, Facebook or Instagram, post your picture with a nice comment, making sure to include your legislator’s Twitter handle or hashtag so they see your positive feedback and can share your post with other constituents.

XI. Thank them for their time upon leaving.

**Meeting Logistics**

I. Be prepared to not necessarily meet in an office, as oftentimes a legislator’s office is small, so some meetings are held in hallways outside the office. If they are a veteran legislator, they may have a larger office which has a conference room/area.

II. Bring business cards and offer your cell phone number to the legislator or staff. Ultimately, you want to build this relationship, so provide a direct contact number.

III. Allow time for long lines at the entrance of the State Capitol for security screening. Wear comfortable shoes and leave metal objects — change, keys, etc. — in your hotel.

IV. If you are running late, call the office and let them know. The same goes if you need to cancel your meeting.

**After Your Legislative Visit**

I. Write a thank you letter or email summarizing your visit. Thank the legislator again for his or her support on your issues and most importantly, if there was a certain bill they agreed to co-sponsor or issue they committed to support, remind them.

II. Maintain ongoing communication with the legislator and their staff through letters, emails, or calls. Offer to serve as a resource to them on issues related to arts and culture.

III. Find out when the legislator will be back in their district and offer to host a visit to your organization.
Tips for an Effective Legislative Visit

**DOs**

♦ Thank the legislator and/or staff for taking time to meet with you and the delegation.
♦ Thank the legislator and/or staff for considering your viewpoint.
♦ Be forthright and informative in your communications.
♦ Stick to an agenda.
♦ Keep it simple and brief.
♦ Provide an “Ask.” Tell the legislator or staff what you would like them to do.
♦ Provide the legislator and/or staff with a persuasive argument.
♦ Cite specific issues and data and use personal anecdotes.
♦ Offer to provide additional background information on the issue(s) you are discussing.
♦ Offer to assist the legislator and/or their staff in any way possible.
♦ Let the legislator and/or their staff know why you care about the issue. Again, share personal stories.
♦ Tell the legislator and/or their staff how the issue affects you and his or her constituents.
♦ Expect your legislator and/or their staff to be responsive to your views.

**DON'Ts**

♦ Don’t be narrowly ideological.
♦ Don’t be argumentative or confrontational.
♦ Don’t be close-minded.
♦ Don’t be overly technical. Simplify when necessary.
♦ Don’t lose track of time. Just like you, legislators and their staff are extremely busy and you should be respectful of their time.
♦ Don’t expect your legislator to drop everything and focus solely on your concerns.
♦ Don’t

**REMEMBER:** your elected officials want to be helpful if they can. If you follow the above tips, you should be able to have a productive visit with your legislators and/or their staff and be well on your way to establishing a good working relationship into the future.
Mobilize Using Social Media

☑ Tag @californiansforthearts and use hashtags #artscreateimpact, #ACCM, and #CAisTheStateoftheArts

☑ Post/Tweet photos and positive comments about your experiences on Social Media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter)

☑ Share CFTA’s posts and tweets

☑ “Like” CFTA on Facebook, and tag us as “Californians for the Arts” or @californiansforthearts (https://www.facebook.com/CaliforniansfortheArts/)

☑ Follow CFTA on Instagram - CAfortheArts

☑ Follow CFTA on Twitter, and tag us as @CAforthearts

☑ Like and follow your legislators and agencies that support the arts

☑ Be sure to tag your legislators accurately

☑ Do your research -- find your legislators’ Facebook pages and Twitter handles
10 Reasons to Support the Arts in California

1. **Arts improve individual well-being.** 69 percent of the population believe the arts “lift me up beyond everyday experiences,” 73 percent feel the arts give them “pure pleasure to experience and participate in,” and 81 percent say the arts are a “positive experience in a troubled world.”

2. **Arts unify communities.** 72 percent of Americans believe “the arts unify our communities regardless of age, race, and ethnicity” and 73 percent agree that the arts “helps me understand other cultures better”—a perspective observed across all demographic and economic categories.

3. **Arts improve academic performance.** Students engaged in arts learning have higher GPAs, standardized test scores, and college-going rates as well as lower drop-out rates. These academic benefits are reaped by students regardless of socio-economic status. Yet, the Department of Education reports that access to arts education for students of color is significantly lower than for their white peers. 88 percent of Americans believe that arts are part of a well-rounded K-12 education.

4. **Arts strengthen the economy.** The production of all arts and cultural goods in the U.S. added $804 billion to the economy in 2016 (including a $25 billion international trade surplus), a larger share of the nation’s economy (4.3 percent) than transportation, tourism, and agriculture. In California, arts & culture is a $186 billion industry—7.0 percent of the state economy (source: U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis). The nonprofit arts industry alone generates $166.3 billion in economic activity annually—spending by organizations and their audiences—which supports 4.6 million jobs and generates $27.5 billion in government revenue.

5. **Arts drive tourism and revenue to local businesses.** Attendees at nonprofit arts events spend $31.47 per person, per event, beyond the cost of admission on items such as meals, parking, and babysitters—valuable commerce for local businesses. 34 percent of attendees live outside the county in which the arts event takes place; they average $47.57 in event-related spending. Arts travelers are ideal tourists, staying longer and spending more to seek out authentic cultural experiences.

6. **Arts spark creativity and innovation.** Creativity is among the top 5 applied skills sought by business leaders, per the Conference Board’s Ready to Innovate report—with 72 percent saying creativity is of high importance when hiring. Research on creativity shows that Nobel laureates in the sciences are 17 times more likely to be actively engaged in the arts than other scientists.

7. **Arts drive the creative industries.** The Creative Industries are arts businesses that range from nonprofit museums, symphonies, and theaters to for-profit film, architecture, and design companies. A 2017 analysis of Dun & Bradstreet data counts 103,191 businesses that employ 545,627 people in California involved in the creation or distribution of the arts—5.1 percent of state businesses and 2.9 percent of all employees.

8. **Arts have social impact.** University of Pennsylvania researchers have demonstrated that a high concentration of the arts in a city leads to higher civic engagement, more social cohesion, higher child welfare, and lower poverty rates.

9. **Arts improve healthcare.** Nearly one-half of the nation’s healthcare institutions provide arts programming for patients, families, and even staff. 78 percent deliver these programs because of their healing benefits to patients—shorter hospital stays, better pain management, and less medication.

10. **Arts for the health and well-being of our military.** The arts heal the mental, physical, and moral injuries of war for military servicemembers and Veterans, who rank the creative arts therapies in the top 4 (out of 40) interventions and treatments. Across the military continuum, the arts promote resilience during pre-deployment, deployment, and the reintegration of military servicemembers, Veterans, their families, and caregivers into communities.

www.AmericansForTheArts.org   www.californiansforthearts.org