

# ADVOCATING FOR THE ARTS

Anyone who cares about arts and culture can learn to advocate for their importance – artists, patrons, volunteers, cultural supporters, participants and youth.

Art advocates can help elected representatives, institutions, service groups, community leaders and fellow citizens understand the economic and social impacts of the arts and cultural sector and show how increased arts opportunities and activities benefit their communities. They can persuade members of decision-making bodies to enact decisions favourable to their cause or to defeat or rescind unfavourable decisions.

Because there are many competing requests for public and private funding, facilities, resources and support within a community, it is important that those who care about the arts create a strong voice at the community level. Decision-makers need to know the views of their constituents in order to set priorities and plan for the future.

Arts advocates should remain confident and unapologetic knowing that support of arts and culture is an investment in community development – not a handout.

“ [It] is time that all of us who care about the arts – both within and outside the arts community – join together and take action. ... [It] is not enough to preach to the converted. It is not enough to talk about this at arts conferences. The only way we will succeed in obtaining sustained investment in the arts – from all levels of government and the private sector – is by bringing the evidence and the arguments directly before the people who hold the purse-strings. ”

**John Hobday**  
Director, Canada Council for the Arts, 2004 Chalmers Conference (Feb 27, 2004)



An advocacy plan will help you set goals, consider your options, develop your messages and evaluate the results of your actions.

“ Advocacy is the act or process of supporting a cause or issue. An advocacy campaign is a set of targeted actions in support of a cause or issue to: build support for that cause/issue, influence others to support it, or try to influence/change legislation that affects it. ”

*IPPF Advocacy Guide 1995*

# 1 Define your Goals and Objectives

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Consider the issue or problem that your community is facing and clearly articulate your aspirations. This is your goal – a broad statement of what you want to achieve over time. Be realistic. Phrase it in the positive rather than the negative. From your goal, develop shorter-term objectives.

For example, the Saskatchewan Arts Alliance Equity for Artists Initiative used the following:

**Goal:** To advance the economic and social position of Saskatchewan artists and to ensure equity for all artists.

**Objective:** Appointment of the Advisory Commission proposed in the 1993 Minister's Advisory Report on Status of the Artist.

Issues must be seen to be in the public interest in order to garner support from decision-makers, so set a goal that is feasible at the community level.

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# 2 Understand your Opportunities and Challenges

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Knowing how decision-making cycles work will help determine the most appropriate method and time to make your case for support of the arts. Are there upcoming events or campaigns happening in your region, grant deadlines or other community initiatives that could work to your advantage?

Identify the resources you can direct towards your advocacy efforts. These should include knowledge and expertise, existing advocacy information, financial resources and volunteers. Be specific. Remember, your most valuable resource is a committed and determined network of like-minded individuals.

Understand your challenges. What roadblocks are in the way of achieving your objectives? These could include opposing views within the community, competition for limited funds and facilities, tight time-lines or lack of resources or expertise.

Understand all sides of the issue, not just your own. In order to affect change, you must be aware of the challenges and competing interests that decision-makers are faced with and assist them in overcoming roadblocks.

*See [Becoming Advocacy-Ready](#) on page 8*

### 3 Create an Advocacy Statement

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It is essential to have a key statement encompassing the most important thing that you want people to know. It should be easy to say and remember and be no longer than 15 words. This statement should be used consistently and tailored so that it can be used in conversations, interviews and presentations.

Your advocacy message should spark a feeling or an emotion and motivate people to act. Your message must be of importance to your target audiences, otherwise they will tune it out.

Canadian Conference of the Arts used “Arts for Life” as their banner for an awareness building campaign.

Americans for the Arts launched a campaign to keep support for the arts in the economic recovery bill and used the slogan “Arts = Jobs”.

### 4 Identify your Target Audiences

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Knowing whom you want to target with your message is essential in designing a strategy. Identify the decision-makers and those who influence them.

Remember that many people are involved in the decision-making process. Develop a list of targets and learn about their background information; get to know their assistants and employees as they are key resource people. Don't forget the opposition – political winds shift regularly.

Include the media. They are an important part of any public awareness effort and can assist you in garnering support and influencing your target audiences.

See *Becoming Advocacy-Ready* on page 8

### 5 Make a Plan

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In order to achieve your objectives you will need a plan. Identify the various tasks and activities that will move you towards your goal.

Prioritize them. Establish time-lines and set deadlines. Identify the resources and support you will need. Build a budget identifying both income and expenditures. Decide on leadership, spokespeople and individual and group assignments. Determine how you will measure your success as you move towards your goal. Monitor your progress regularly.

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## 6 Develop a Communications Strategy

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While your ultimate target is to reach the decision-makers, there are many other audiences you will want to reach out to for support. Each will have slightly different needs and interests that you will have to cater to in order to be effective.

Tailor and refine your messages for each target audience identified in your advocacy campaign. Identify who you are communicating with, what you are communicating, when and where you will deliver your message, why you are targeting them, and how much it will cost you in time and resources.

Develop points, stories, examples and statistics that support your key message. Focus on the solution – not the problem. Be specific in your message and request for action. Give clear reasons why decision-makers should support your issue.

Incorporate the many benefits of the arts into your advocacy messages. These could include related issues such as economic and community development, tourism, educational opportunities and benefits to youth.

Build credibility by communicating an articulate, courteous and reasonable message that is sensitive to the realities of the decision-making process.

See *Getting Your Message Out* on page 14 and the inserts *Statistics and Information & Resources*

## 7 Cultivate Allies

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There is strength in numbers. Decision-makers are more likely to support your issue when a broad cross-section of the community is involved. The more people that you are able to reach and move with your campaign, the more support you are likely to gain.

First, target those that are most likely to be supportive. Ensure grassroots arts consumers understand the importance of supporting the arts programs they enjoy. Focus efforts on those who can help you reach your goals. Link the arts to other issues like education, social concerns and economic and commercial development.

Effective and trusted working relationships with decision-makers can build goodwill for the future. It is much easier to obtain help when it is really needed if a relationship has already been established.

See *The Arts in Your Community* on page 12

# 8 Advocate

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Now that you have identified your target audiences, developed a work plan and clarified your messages it's time to put the plan into action.

Be cooperative and prepared to make compromises. Never burn bridges, even with those that do not agree since they could become important allies in the future. Separate partisan politics from your advocacy efforts.

Bear in mind that decisions do not happen overnight, it can take many months or years to reach your goal. Be patient and determined. Incorporate follow-up activities that will help reinforce the importance of the issue.

During election campaigns, inform candidates of your positions on arts issues, invite candidates seeking public office to attend your meetings, recruit candidates who share your values and support campaigns that will advance your cause.

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# 9 Monitor & Evaluate

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It is important to continuously monitor and evaluate your efforts. What worked? What didn't? Why? Keep track of which initiatives are effective and which ones are not. This will be useful when planning future efforts.

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# 10 Celebrate your Successes

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Celebrate each success and recognize your supporters as you progress towards your goal.

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# 11 Renew

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Now that you have achieved initial successes, it is time to set new goals and objectives. Learn from your campaign and plan for additional opportunities for the arts in your community.

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Details & Tips

# BECOMING ADVOCACY-READY

"Advocacy is speaking up, drawing a community's attention to an important issue, and directing decision-makers toward a solution. Advocacy is working with other people and organizations to make a difference."

*CEDPA: Cairo, Beijing and Beyond: A Handbook on Advocacy for Women Leaders*

## Be Informed

Be informed of arts issues, current policies and practices. Subscribe to provincial and national arts e-news bulletins.

Whether you are dealing with municipal, provincial or federal governments, their departments or agencies or other decision-making bodies, become familiar with their rules, processes and structures. Do your homework. You must have a working knowledge of the process in order to affect it.

## Educate

Help decision-makers understand how support for the arts helps them to achieve other goals in areas like economic growth, educational and community development. Position the arts as a part of the solution to larger problems.



Attend candidate forums, town meetings, city council, and committee meetings. Use them as a forum to learn as well as to discuss the importance of support for arts and culture, and to generate interest among community members.

Become a credible resource for advice and information.

Communicate with decision-makers on a regular basis, not just when a crisis occurs. Keep them informed of both concerns and successes. Provide them with annual reports, research and studies on arts issues, guides to programs, arts attractions and a calendar of events.

Invite them, their staff and family members to attend arts events, performances and exhibitions. Connect them with board members, artists and creators. Offer them backstage tours and an insiders look at the arts.

Send out advocacy information to your network of supporters and organizations.

### **Build an Audience of Allies**

Keep your audiences, participants, patrons, arts consumers and their families up to date on advocacy issues.

Credit funders in advertising, news releases and printed programs to raise the visibility of arts funding and to let audiences know the value of public and private support for the arts.

When recruiting volunteers to work as arts advocates, include community leaders who are active in the arts and those who know the decision-makers personally.

Be sure to join with others, including unusual partners - do not just preach to the converted.

## Support Grassroots Advocacy

Work collaboratively with neighbouring communities and other arts practitioners to maximize support and influence for the arts. Rally their members and audiences as advocates for support of arts programs and initiatives.

Participate in a province-wide coalition of advocates to advance public support for the arts. Contact the Saskatchewan Arts Alliance for more information.

Promote alliances between arts advocates and non-arts advocacy groups with mutual or related interests.

Communicate with a network of advocates to keep current about federal, provincial and municipal legislation affecting the arts. Make them aware of your issues and concerns.

# THE ARTS IN YOUR COMMUNITY



Benefits of the arts extend into many aspects of our lives and our communities. Use these benefits to support your messages and involve other sectors of society.

## Education

Many studies have shown that exposure to the arts improves academic performance and basic skills and attitudes. The arts help students learn other subjects and enhance their academic performance. Music translates into better math skills. Drama is correlated to stronger reading, writing and language skills. School attendance increases and dropout rates decrease among those that participate in the arts. The arts challenge people to think critically and to solve problems creatively, skills that are now in high demand.

## Tourism

The arts attract tourists by defining and enhancing a community's unique characteristics. Artistic and cultural activities attract tourists and encourage them to stay longer in an area.

## Economic Development

The arts create employment for a significant number of people across Canada, generate tax revenue and increase consumer spending. It is a growing sector that creates and attracts new businesses. The arts are an essential element in the new global economy – not only for their entertainment value, but also for the skills that they develop within individuals.

## Diversity

Cultural heritage is preserved and diversity is expressed through the arts. The arts can bridge barriers between cultural, racial and age groups and create respect for cultural distinctiveness. They build social bonds and improve self-image and tolerance.

## Youth

The arts provide motivation, self-discipline, self-criticism and the ability to work in a team. The development of social skills helps to keep youth out of trouble, which contributes to a more civil and enriched society. The arts help maintain and attract a young population.

## Healthy Communities

The arts can increase individuals' mental and physical health and well-being, while reducing stress and anxiety. They foster a positive atmosphere and motivate residents to gather their energies and skills in order to create their own art and crafts.

## Intrinsic Factors

The arts help individuals identify and define themselves and the communities in which they live. The arts move, inspire and challenge individuals. They generate enjoyment, lifelong learning opportunities and enhanced ways of living.

## Community Revitalization

Downtown areas and small towns are revitalized by the arts, making communities more active, interesting, attractive and pleasant places to live. Arts and culture can help put a community "on the map".



Use a variety of methods to get your arts advocacy information and messages to your target audiences.

### Word of mouth

- › Give people a reason to talk about artists and arts issues.
- › Identify when, where, and how opinions are being shared. Listen and respond to supporters, detractors, and neutrals.
- › Provide supporters with the information and tools that will assist them in spreading the message.
- › Talk to community leaders, like-minded groups, patrons, suppliers, families and youth.
- › Networking is one the cheapest, fastest, and easiest ways to get your message out and build critical mass.

### Face-to-face visits & meetings

- › Meetings with decision-makers are most effective and help to establish a solid working relationship.
- › You may only get 15 minutes, so be prepared and respect the time allocated. Present your key issues and provide appropriate depth.
- › Provide a short briefing paper that clearly outlines your position.

## Town hall meetings & public forums

- › Raise arts issues at public forums and ask key questions specific to your issues. Your messages will involve and educate other members of the community as well as the decision-makers.
- › Talk about success stories. Demonstrate how the arts improve the quality of life in your community.

## Partnerships & Coalitions

- › Meetings with decision-makers are most effective and help to establish a solid working relationship.
- › You may only get 15 minutes, so be prepared and respect the time allocated. Present your key issues and provide appropriate depth.
- › Provide a short briefing paper that clearly outlines your position.

## Newsletters, website and email lists

- › Use your existing communications tools to inform, enlighten and build support within your network.
- › Social networking sites and blogs are quickly becoming an important and effective means of distributing information and encouraging participation.

## Brochures, fact sheets, flyers...

- › Distribute promotional and advocacy material to members, patrons, arts advocates and affiliated networks. Leave copies at town hall, community centres and tourist booths.
- › Post copies on your website and distribute via email.

## Position Papers

- › A formal position paper or briefing document for decision-makers clearly states your case, its history, statistical and financial information and proposed solutions.
- › Incorporate visual reminders.

## Banners, Posters, Displays

- › Use in high traffic areas and at events.
- › Develop a record system to keep them up-to-date and utilized.

## Handouts/Giveaways

- › Visual reminders reinforce awareness.
- › Buttons, stickers and other promotional material can be used to build goodwill, be an incentive for action, communicate a message or simply create awareness.
- › Make sure that they are unique and creative – you want people to use them

## Mailings

- › Direct mailings must capture the reader's attention fast and prompt them to take action.
- › Personalize your message as much as possible.
- › If applicable, use a P.S. as it is one of the most frequently read parts.

### Letter-writing campaigns

- › Encourage supporters to send letters to decision-makers.
- › Prepare a draft letter clearly stating your case and desired outcome. Keep it short, not more than one page. Keep the tone courteous but firm. Encourage supporters to personalize or customize the letter.
- › Provide clear instructions to supporters regarding the purpose and destination of the letter and the timeline for sending it.
- › Distribute widely and ask people to let you know how many letters are being sent and from whom.

### Petitions

- › Petitions that include signatures from a broad cross-section of the local population carry weight with decision-makers.

### Public Gatherings

- › Kick off your campaign with a rally. Celebrate successes. Gather supporters to help recover from a setback, show sudden improvement or to raise funds.

### Media

- › The media are key to any public awareness effort.
- › Focus on specific media that will reach your target audiences. Ask about the opportunities they offer and information they require.
- › Meet with editorial boards and producers to discuss arts issues and public support of the arts.
- › Get to know the reporters, announcers and hosts most likely to be interested in your issue. Call them to discuss your ideas.
- › Keep track of deadlines. Provide information well in advance.
- › Know what's news – and what's not. News means there is new information. Provide factual information. Avoid jargon.
- › Be available. Respond to all media calls promptly but do not over-react.
- › Remain non-partisan – avoid making statements concerning the positions of, or your support for, specific political parties or candidates.
- › Respond immediately to negative press on arts-related issues.



## **Media Releases**

- › Media releases should have the most critical information in the first paragraph with facts of lesser importance in descending order. They should be concise - no more than 2 pages. Include contact information and the date. Be sure to cover the 5Ws and include details about local impact and background information. Check websites for guidelines.

## **Public Service Announcements**

- › Most media print or air community calendars and public service announcements free of charge for non-profit community groups. PSAs are run at the discretion of the station when free airtime is available. Check their websites for guidelines. Target your message - don't bother sending an announcement geared to seniors to the local rock station.

## **Media events or news conferences**

- › Hold a news conference or briefing only if you have an announcement of such magnitude or urgency that it is best released collectively to all media. They work particularly well if you are a big fish in a small pond or if it's a slow news day.

## **Newspapers**

- › In addition to local and regional newspapers, don't overlook smaller papers, university presses, community and organizational newsletters; many are happy to print feature stories and articles.
- › Opinion pieces and letters to the editor can be easier to get in print than you might think, especially if you can tie some current local news to your issue. Ensure that they are brief (under 300 words), well written and pithy, contain accurate information, and are non-defamatory. Send a copy of your printed editorial/letter to influential decision-makers. Even if it does not get published it can still be valuable; it may be considered later on when an editorial board is reviewing an issue.

## **Radio & TV**

- › Identify programs that would be most interested and open to your stories or a balanced discussion of the arts.
- › When calling talk shows, be patient, it is not unusual for callers to be on hold for 30 minutes to get through.
- › Add to your television appeal by using good visuals such as performances and exhibitions.
- › Weekends are usually slow news days for most local stations and a good time to solicit coverage. Be aware of and expect "breaking news" stories to supersede coverage of your activity.

# ADVOCACY CHECKLIST

## ● Define your advocacy goal clearly and concisely.

- What are you trying to achieve?
- .....

## ● Why is this a goal?

- What difference will achieving your goal make in the community?
- .....

## ● Understand your organization and its strengths and weaknesses as well as outside challenges and opportunities related to the advocacy goal.

- Are people in the organization committed to the advocacy goal?
- How “connected” are people in your organization?
- Can you involve individuals outside of your organization in the effort?

- Are there other groups you can collaborate with?
  - Do you have all of the information/statistics you need? Do you have real-life local examples (stories) that demonstrate the benefits of the arts?
  - What kinds of resistance might you face and how will you overcome resistance?
  - What opportunities could arise as a result of the campaign?
- .....

## ● Define your advocacy message and a list of positive outcomes that will result from you advocacy goal being achieved.

- What is the key message of your campaign? (The message is ideally one line that tells what you are doing, why, and the overall result).
- From various points of views (e.g. educational, community impact, business, tourism, etc.) what are the positive outcomes of achieving your goal?

## ● Develop an inventory of resources available to you.

- Who are your allies in this advocacy effort?
  - How can they assist you?
- .....

## ● Identify the audiences (individuals and groups) that the advocacy effort will be aimed at.

- Who are the primary decision makers?
- Who influences these decision makers and should they be included as part of your target audiences? (Look back on the outcomes to gain hints as to individuals and groups that might be approached).

## ● **Research each target audience segment to motivators for support.**

- Do you know what will trigger a positive response from each target audience? (e.g. community cohesion? development of youth? economic gain? etc.)
  - Are there people in the community that can help you to understand the motivations of your target audience?
- .....

## ● **Research stories and statistics that support each type of motivation.**

- Can you gather real-life stories that support your advocacy goal?
  - Do you have the statistics you need for presentations?
  - Will you need any visual materials like pictures or graphs?
- .....

## ● **Determine the resources (financial and human) that will be put towards your advocacy effort.**

- How many people in the organization will be involved and what will their role be?

- Are there other individuals that would help you and who will approach them for help?
  - How much money can you put towards your print materials and special initiatives/activities?
- .....

## ● **Determine the ways in which the advocacy message will be delivered.**

- What methods will be used to approach your target audience (One-on-one meetings? Written and/or verbal presentations to groups? Activities involving the public? Partnering with organizations on special initiatives? Approaches to the media? Direct mail or posters? etc.)
  - What is the cost of each of these methods?
- .....

## ● **Tailor your advocacy message to the motivators of each audience segment.**

- What will trigger a positive response from each target audience segment?
- Does the case for support and projected outcomes match their primary interest area? Does the case for support align with the overall advocacy goal?

## ● **Develop a detailed action plan.**

- Has a detailed action plan been created and shared with all of the people involved in the campaign? Who is your leader / primary spokesperson?
  - Does the action plan include how your allies can assist you?
  - Does the action plan include who is being targeted and who will deliver the advocacy message and when?
  - Does the plan include what will motivate each listener?
  - Does the plan include how information or stories will be gathered?
  - What follow-up / other contact is required?
  - Does the plan include how progress will be monitored and documented?
- .....

## ● **Evaluate the outcomes. Learn from what works or not and revise your plan accordingly.**

- What is the deadline for results?
- How will you evaluate your successes?
- How will you celebrate your success and recognize all of those involved?

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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- Canada Council for the Arts, Making the case for arts and culture: [www.canadacouncil.ca/aboutus/advocacy](http://www.canadacouncil.ca/aboutus/advocacy)
- Alliance For The Arts: [www.allianceforarts.com](http://www.allianceforarts.com)
- Canadian Conference of the Arts, The Advocacy Primer: [www.ccarts.ca/en/advocacy/publications/toolkits/](http://www.ccarts.ca/en/advocacy/publications/toolkits/)
- Creative City Network of Canada, Making the Case for Culture: [www.creativecity.ca/resources/making-the-case/](http://www.creativecity.ca/resources/making-the-case/)
- SaskCulture Inc., *Advocacy Alert*: [www.saskculture.sk.ca/Advocacy](http://www.saskculture.sk.ca/Advocacy)
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- The National Assembly of State Arts Agencies, *Access to Power: Building Political Clout for the Arts*: [www.nasaa-arts.org/publications/advocate\\_access.pdf](http://www.nasaa-arts.org/publications/advocate_access.pdf)
- Hill Strategies Research Inc., Research for the Arts: [www.hillstrategies.com](http://www.hillstrategies.com)

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