

Report to MCA
June 26, 2011

Strategies for Building Arts Support

(Based upon information provided by the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies)

Access to Power: Building Political Clout for the Arts

Access to power is the path to success in politics. Arts advocates need that entrée to their legislative leaders, politicians and policy makers to move an arts agenda forward. Through time and effort spent building relationships with legislators and other public officials, advocates for the arts can enjoy real access to power in politics. It is a long-term investment. Relationships developed over months and years create supporters who will take the initiative on your issues—not simply those who will vote favorably on those issues, but who will step out in front and make things happen. (*The NASAA Advocate*)

- Campaign for your friends

Your first friends in government are those you helped get elected to office.

If you have contact with candidates running for office—individuals whose candidacy you support—provide them with policy positions on the arts and give them background information they need to speak as a supporter of public arts funding during the campaign.

Recruit candidates to run for office who share your values.

- Start early (especially in states with term limits)

In at least one state, the arts agency contacts all primary election winners running for an open seat to explain about the importance of the arts in their state and the essential role played by public funding of the arts. In another state, arts advocates distribute a legislative survey to all candidates running for office, with questions on cultural tourism, arts education and other public policy issues intertwined with the arts.

Begin working with legislators soon after they are elected and educate them on your issues. Advocates should get their information packets to all the new legislators before they are sworn in, and then reeducate them on a periodic basis. The information kit might include an invitation to join the legislative arts caucus where that is appropriate.

Introduce them to their arts constituents. (The arts world has contacts to offer politicians as much as the arts want to connect with the political world.)

Emphasize the programs that serve the arts in their communities.

Offer each legislator a visit to a performance/exhibit/show in their home district.

Plan a reception with your local arts council for state legislators and city government officials.

Another strategy is to invite a legislator to write a column for a newsletter. The topic might be a description of a memorable arts experience, which serves to remind legislators that they in fact participate or participated in the arts.

- Pick your legislative targets

In addition to committee chairs, party leadership, and major players in party caucuses, don't forget the members of special interest caucuses where the arts intersect with their policy issues. Position your special interest to complement theirs.

Don't overlook the importance of legislative staff.

- Power may move upward

Involve city and county officials in your activities; politicians holding office at the local level often move up to the state level and state-level office holders often move up in the state hierarchy, or go on to hold a national office.

- Keep in touch

Discover common interests, but avoid (if you can) asking for something. The next time you come before that legislator to discuss your issues, you will be seen more as a colleague and friend than as a supplicant.

- Bring the legislator's spouse into your advocacy
- Play to a politician's special interest

Don't focus too much on the intangible benefits of your issue. Understand what matters most to that politician and how the arts relate to their agenda.

- Don't ignore or give up on your opponents

- Hire a lobbyist

Don't expect this person to do all the work for us.

What can I do?

The MCA Executive Director and Lobbyist are merely facilitators/organizers/leaders, the only way that our advocacy efforts will be successful is if each MCA member takes an active role in the process.

- Attend annual meetings
- If elected to the Board of Directors, actively participate in this group's activities
- Respond to messages and call for assistance from our Executive Director
- Work with your regional Vice President in building stronger "grassroots" involvement in MCA
- Assist in fund raising activities and membership dues collection for MCA
- Attend **Citizens' Day at the Legislature (Wednesday, February 8, 2012)**
- When in doubt or eager to help, just ask for guidance or an assignment