Policy and Advocacy Communications 101

December 7th, 2022
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Ice Breaker

Share in the chat: What is one thing you’ve learned through the Advocate Academy so far?
Theory: Basics of Policy and Advocacy Communication
Strong and Persuasive messages consider...

- **Who** is delivering the message – effective messengers
- **What** the advocate is sharing – research and evidence
- **Why** the advocate is sharing it – storytelling
- **Where** the advocate is sharing it – in what setting
- **How** the advocate delivers the message – through what medium
Who is delivering the message

Elected officials place a high value on groups and citizens who have built relationships with the official and their staff.
Elected officials look for certain particular information, including: number of constituents affected; estimated economic impact; success stories from the community.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How helpful is it for messages from constituents to include the following?</th>
<th>How frequently do messages from constituents include the following?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Information about the impact the bill would have on the district or state</td>
<td>91%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Constituent’s reasons for supporting/opposing the bill or issue</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific request or “ask”</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal story related to the bill or issue</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Helpful/Helpful</td>
<td>Very Frequent/Frequent</td>
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(n = 198-207)

Source: Congressional Management Foundation 2015 survey of congressional staff, including Chiefs of Staff, Communications Directors, Legislative Directors, and Legislative Assistants.
Citizen advocates are more influential and contribute to better public policy when they provide personalized and local information to elected officials.

How helpful is it for messages from constituents to include the following?

- Information about the impact the bill would have on the district or state: Very Helpful/Helpful 91%, Very Frequent/Frequent 9%
- Constituent’s reasons for supporting/opposing the bill or issue: Very Helpful/Helpful 90%, Very Frequent/Frequent 50%
- Specific request or “ask”: Very Helpful/Helpful 88%, Very Frequent/Frequent 59%
- Personal story related to the bill or issue: Very Helpful/Helpful 79%, Very Frequent/Frequent 18%

(n = 198-207)

Source: Congressional Management Foundation 2015 survey of congressional staff, including Chiefs of Staff, Communications Directors, Legislative Directors, and Legislative Assistants.
Where the advocate is sharing it

COVID has shifted this advocacy message delivery dramatically, and many more elected officials and their staff expect to their work to expand virtually.
How the advocate delivers the message

Direct constituent interactions have more influence on lawmakers’ decisions than other advocacy strategies.

If your Member/Senator has not already arrived at a firm decision on an issue, how much influence might the following advocacy strategies directed to the Washington office have on his/her decision?

- In-Person Issue Visits from Constituents: 94%
- Contact from Constituents’ Reps: 94%
- Individualized Email Messages: 92%
- Individualized Postal Letters: 88%
- Local Editorial Referencing Issue Pending: 87%
- Comments During Telephone Town Hall: 87%
- Phone Calls: 84%
- Letter to the Editor Referencing Your Boss: 84%
- Visit From a Lobbyist: 83%
- Form Email Messages: 56%

(n = 190-192)
Source: Congressional Management Foundation 2015 survey of congressional staff, including Chiefs of Staff, Communications Directors, Legislative Directors, and Legislative Assistants.
When communicating with elected officials, effective messages:

- **Have a specific ask and clear goal in mind**
- **Discuss the impact/importance and urgency for constituents**
- **Are addressed with a lens that would be appealing to their perspective and passions**
- **Connect to humans; have an emotional appeal**
- **Respond to what the opposition has to say**
Theory to Practice: Personalizing your Advocacy Communication
### Determining your ask

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Policy asks (ideal)</th>
<th>Relationship-building asks</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mostly for Legislative branch; sometimes Executive or Judicial</td>
<td>Apply to Executive and Legislative branch officials; helps get to wins on policy asks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduce, vote for, or vote against legislation</td>
<td>Visit people or places in the community that relate to the issue (i.e. a school-based mentoring program celebration; mentoring conference)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Send a letter to a government agency about a specific concern</td>
<td>Write an article for your newsletter or local/national media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Draft or sign onto <strong>Dear Colleague Letters</strong> (or other formal methods of communication)</td>
<td>Share a message on social media to communicate support for your issue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help you find and gather information from agencies and research services</td>
<td>Make a speech on the House or Senate floor about the issue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submit a statement to the official record</td>
<td>Hold a town hall/community meeting on the issue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For Executive branch: request to change agency rules, such as <strong>grant preferences</strong></td>
<td></td>
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</table>
What **not** to ask for

- The official to take action for the specific purpose of benefitting you
- Anything related to money or support for their campaign
Impact: Research, Data, and Talking Points

- **Consume quality media** that reports on the latest research
Impact: Research, Data, and Talking Points

- Review websites of organizations you trust
  - MENTOR’s Advocacy Resources page
  - General mentoring talking points

- Research the officials you’re advocating to
  - Scan their legislative record, committees, party
    - MENTOR’s legislative scorecard
  - Google their name with key words to see if there are past statements on the topic
  - Look for connections with their life experience and those close to them

- Bring data of your own community and industry impact
  - Number of constituents affected; estimated economic impact; success stories from the community
Connecting to Humans: Articulating your Personal Story

These questions can help shape your story:

- Why did you become an advocate for this issue?
- How does this issue you are advocating for affect you?
- Do you have friends, family, clients, customers, or colleagues with compelling stories that you can lift up/share?
ACTIVITY: Your Personal Story

-5 minutes to share in the chat-

- Share ~3 sentences about your personal story: why you want to advocate for an issue you care about
  – Could be connected to policy you chose in your memo

- Example: I decided to become an advocate for mentoring because I personally experienced how a school-based mentoring program helped me and my get on track academically and eventually the first in my family to enroll in college. Before I had a mentor and enrolled in the mentoring program, I lacked positive outlets, connections, and motivation to stay engaged in my academics. I want to be able to give to others the relationships that helped get me to where I am today, as someone who is directing a mentoring program.
Responding to the Opposition

- Identify potential opponents

- Research and think about why they might oppose your policy ideas
  – Hint: you might be able to find this explicitly!

- Be prepared with responses to the question of who opposes your ideas
Advocacy Communications to Action – Examples from the Real World
Meetings with Elected Officials and Staff

- Determine if it might be helpful to invite others to your meeting - Who
- Do your research on the official; look for areas of connection – What and Why
- Contact the office to request a meeting (virtual or in person) - Where
- Prepare your asks and talking points (specific to this office) – What and Why
  – Remember: they’re people too; you’re the expert!
- Ask if they have taken a position on the issues you are advocating for - How
  – Be diplomatic 😊
  – You don’t have to know all the answers
- Follow up with contact info and a brief, locally specific (if possible) leave behind materials
  – Follow up again 3-4 weeks later
Giving Public Testimony

- Determine who is best to deliver your message (who)
- Make sure you have research and data to back up your position in your testimony (what)
- Make the policy personal (why)
- Check ahead of time to understand the public body’s rules (where)
- Keep your message concise; generally 3-5 mins. is the rule of thumb (how)
Building Coalitions and Community Organizing

- Determine leaders/deliverers (who)
- Create a shared agenda/asks and talking points (what)
- Use stories from different constituencies to connect with others (why)
- Determine in what settings the tactics are taking place (where)
- Identify the specific tactics and activities that will be employed to advance the work forward (how)
Next Steps
Final assignment!

- Worksheet through Google Forms
  - Impact
  - Connecting to Humans
  - Communicating with a Lens
  - Responding to Opposition
  - Evaluation
Upcoming Opportunities

- Graduation from the Academy!!
- [MENTOR’s Capitol Hill Day](#) – registration is live!
- More to come next Spring…
Questions?