



Advocacy Manual:

Everyday advocacy made easy.

Prepared by





The Lee Institute's mission is to serve and strengthen the common good through the collective power of public engagement, civic leadership and collaboration. In fulfilling this mission, we achieve positive results for our clients and their communities.

Achieve Together, a project of The Lee Institute, is a community partnership that connects local residents with people, training, data and support to become advocates for positive change in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School (CMS) system. The power of Achieve Together comes from the collective energy of our community's residents pushing for constructive changes that will improve student achievement and graduation rates in CMS.



Achieve Together came to fruition with a generous grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Without their support, this movement would still be just a dream.

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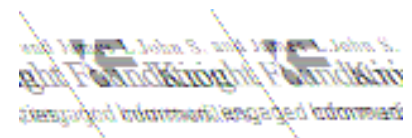




Table of Contents

| | |
|--|--------|
| 1. Introduction | - 1 - |
| 2. Everyday Advocacy | - 2 - |
| 3. Best Practices | - 3 - |
| • For students | |
| • For concerned adults/parents | |
| • For advocacy organizations | |
| • For business leaders | |
| 4. Worksheets..... | - 7 - |
| • Writing letters | |
| • Writing e-mails | |
| • Making phone calls | |
| • Scheduling and attending a meeting | |
| • Attending a town hall style meeting | |
| 5. Tips & Tricks | - 12 - |
| • Understanding collaboration | |
| • Collaboration: do these things | |
| • Collaboration: don't do these things | |
| • Working with the media | |
| • Acquiring donations | |
| • Understanding social networking | |
| 6. Resources | - 18 - |

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Introduction

ad·vo·ca·cy  [ad-vuh-kuh-see]  [Show IPA](#)

–noun, plural –cies.
the act of pleading for, supporting, or recommending; active espousal: *He was known for his advocacy of states' rights.*

Origin:
1375–1425; late ME *advocacye* < ML *advocātia*. See [advocate](#), [-acy](#)

–**Related forms**
non·ad·vo·ca·cy, noun
pre·ad·vo·ca·cy, noun

Dictionary.com's definition of advocacy is accurate, but perhaps a little... impersonal. To us at The Lee Institute:

Advocacy is getting your voice heard through spoken or written words in order to persuade others toward a particular goal, policy or decision.

We believe that in order for you to become an effective advocate for community change you need to educate yourself on the issues, explain your thinking, give examples to make your views clear, seek others' opinions, probe into others' thinking and be open to being challenged.

At The Lee Institute, we develop strategies (like this manual) to help community members like you get your voices heard. This manual was developed to aid members of The Lee Institute's Achieve Together program in advocating for their community's children in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School (CMS) system. References to Achieve Together Community Circle members indicate individuals who have participated in the Achieve Together program.

To learn more about Achieve Together, please visit www.AchieveTogether.org. If you would like to learn more about The Lee Institute and the work we do in communities, please visit www.LeeInstitute.org.

While we tailored the materials in this manual to advocacy focusing on school reform, each section can be applied to other domains. We hope you find this manual practical and inspirational as you pursue your own advocacy efforts to strengthen the common good.

Follow this list to advance your advocacy efforts EVERY DAY!

Listen & Learn

- Seek to understand the *interests* behind the *positions* that people hold. A *position* is a single answer or solution; an *interest* is a need, hope or concern that frequently can be met by more than one solution.
- Learn as much as you can through reading and watching/attending school board forums.
- Be curious – ask questions to find out what other people think and why.
- Find out what other people do to advocate for things they believe in – even if it is in a different content area or a different community.
- Seek out people who are knowledgeable about a topic that concerns you, and then PICK THEIR BRAINS!

Talk

- Talking is the fastest way to communicate your message efficiently, whether it's striking up a conversation with someone at the train stop or a formal meeting with a school board member.
- When speaking with others, keep the goals and items you are advocating for in the back of your mind; work them into the conversation when it fits.
- Look for ways to educate others through casual conversation; talking over coffee or lunch is a great way to gain perspective and knowledge.
- Be persuasive but not demanding; not everyone shares your passion around the topics for which you advocate.

Act

- Planning is great, and a written advocacy plan gets you organized and allows others to follow in your footsteps. But planning isn't enough; you have to act.
- Whenever possible, offer positive suggestions when pointing out something you don't like.
- Once you have created an advocacy plan, follow it through to completion, making necessary adjustments, as needed, along the way.
- Then, learning from what worked well or not so well, create a new plan to act on.

Follow Up

- Hold yourself and others accountable.
- Follow up regularly with people you've contacted to gently remind them of commitments or tasks.
- If you aren't the most task-oriented advocate, create a calendar for your advocacy plan implementation and use it to regularly check your progress.

Best Practices

If you are a student, you could...

Local

- Take a picture, shoot a video, keep a diary or make a list of the problems students face in your school. Share with classmates, parents/guardians, elected officials and others.
- Recruit your parents, family or other adults to join and work with you for change through your PTA/PTO/PTSA or other local education organization.
- Write to your school newspaper or local newspapers to share your ideas of how to make schools better.
- Recruit other students from your school to talk about improving your school with the mayor, county commissioners, business leaders and CMS administrators.

State

- Call, write or email members of the NC General Assembly to share your views about how to make schools better and overcome the problems you see.
- Enlist your friends and classmates to contact the Governor, Superintendent of Public Instruction and members of the NC General Assembly to improve high schools.
- Organize your friends and teachers to go to Raleigh to meet with members of the NC General Assembly.

National

- Call, write or email your US Congress members to share your views about how to make high schools better and overcome the problems you see.
- Organize your friends and classmates to contact the President and Congress to ask them to implement reforms in public education.
- Organize your friends and teachers to go to Washington, DC to meet with members of the US Congress.

If you are a concerned adult or parent, you could...

Local

- Get the facts: check graduation, drop-out, literacy and school safety rates at www.NCPublicSchools.org or visit www.SchoolMatters.org to compare schools.
- Contact your school superintendent to learn about plans for school reforms. Ask for immediate action if no specific initiatives are in place.
- Share your observations and experiences in an article for your local paper or community newsletter.
- Start or get active in your school's PTA/PTO/PTSA to increase awareness and convince your fellow members to support school reform.
- Schedule a meeting with your local school board to engage them in your efforts to improve your school. Attend meetings and demand they give more attention to school reform.
- Get all local officials involved – even if they don't have direct responsibility for schools. Reach out to the mayor, city council members and county commissioners to ask for their help in implementing strategies for raising awareness about school reform.

State

- Invite your state officials to visit your local school to talk with administrators, teachers and students about ways to improve schools.
- Share your concerns and the need for reform with elected officials. Write, email, call or request a meeting.
- Work with the PTA/PTO/PTSA or other education organization to establish or attend a lobby-day in Raleigh focused on education accountability and reform.
- Gather more information about the plan for improving schools from the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

National

- Invite your Representatives or Senators to visit your local school to talk with administrators, teachers and students about ways to improve schools.
- Share your concerns, the need for reform and increased federal funding with your Representatives and Senators. Write, email, call, and/or request meeting.
- Join with an organization to participate in a lobby-day at the U.S. Capitol focused on education accountability and reform.
- Contact the Assistant Secretary for Communications and Outreach at the U.S. Department of Education (www.ed.gov) to request more information about plans for school reform.
- Visit the Alliance for Excellent Education (www.all4ed.org) to sign up for updates about national school reform initiatives and Congressional action alerts.

Best Practices

*If you are an **advocacy organization**, you could...*

Local

- Get the facts: check graduation, drop-out, literacy and school safety rates at www.NCPublicSchools.org or visit www.SchoolMatters.org to compare schools.
- Create scorecards measuring the quality of schools in your area. Develop materials that describe your advocacy efforts.
- Issue a media release to publicize the scorecard and other information about local schools to area residents and community groups.
- Distribute scorecards and handouts everywhere you can think of -- grocery stores, malls, banks, churches and special events—to recruit supporters.

State

- Organize a lobby-day in Raleigh focused on education accountability and reform.
- Organize a letter writing campaign to state elected officials calling for education accountability and reform.
- Connect with an existing or ask the Governor to establish a council that coordinates state education from pre-kindergarten through graduate education.

National

- Organize a lobby-day at the U.S. Capitol focused on education accountability and reform.
- Organize a letter writing campaign to the U.S. Congress calling for school education accountability and reform.
- Ask your Congressional Representatives to increase federal funding support for schools.
- Visit the Alliance for Excellent Education (www.all4ed.org) to sign up for updates about national school reform initiatives and Congressional action alerts.

.....
*If you are a **business leader**, you could...*

Local

- Convene your colleagues to examine school performance in your community.
- Establish partnerships with local schools that provide internship opportunities, training resources and other supports for schools, educators and students.
- Sponsor an education leadership summit that brings together educators, administrators, parents and community leaders to discuss and develop an action plan for school reform.
- Host a meeting with the superintendent and other CMS leaders to find out whether the district has plans to implement school reforms.
- Work with the chamber of commerce, local officials and school superintendent to coordinate school curricula and activities with desired workforce skills.

State

- Convene an ongoing business roundtable examining the performance of schools.
- Host a meeting between business leaders, the Superintendent of Public Instruction and the Governor to discuss how to achieve school reform.
- Connect to or create a business/education partnership to advance school improvement.
- Work with state officials to develop a plan of action to increase graduation rates and improve the skills of the state's workforce.
- Educate state elected officials about the relationship between quality high schools and workforce preparedness and the need for school reforms.
- Connect with an existing or ask the Governor to establish a council that coordinates state education from pre-kindergarten through graduate education.

National

- Educate your Representatives and Senators about the relationship between quality schools and workforce preparedness and the need for 21st century secondary school reforms.
- Ask your Representatives and Senators to increase federal funding support for schools.
- Visit the Alliance for Excellent Education (www.all4ed.org) to sign up for updates about national school reform initiatives and Congressional action alerts.

Writing a letter...

Write to the Right Person: You must first decide on the appropriate recipient of your message. For example, if you are writing to change a school policy, write to your district representative on the school board.

Identify Yourself: If you are writing to an elected official that serves your district, tell this person who you are and how you are connected to him or her.

Make It Personal: Tell YOUR story while conveying your message. The more you can relate the issue/topic to a human experience, the easier it will be for the reader to understand and empathize with your story. However, you should remember that people can't read your tone or interpret humor in a letter. It is best to write in a straightforward manner.

Keep It to One Page: A simple rule.

Ask a Question: Asking a question shows that you expect an answer. Instead of letting the reader pass over your letter, asking the reader for a response causes them to really consider your points and remember them more easily. Try to formulate your strongest point in the form of a question.

Find a Proofreader: Have someone read your letter once you have completed the first draft. Ask them to pay specific attention to clarity, grammar, style and tone. If you cannot find a proofreader, save your letter and come back and reread it later. Reading it out loud will help you find errors and make corrections.

Follow Up: Set a date on your calendar to follow up. You may choose to call instead of writing another letter.

Letters at a Glance

- Write to the *right* person
- Identify yourself
- Make it personal
- Keep it to one page
- Ask a question
- Find a proofreader
- **Follow up!**

Writing an e-mail...

Writing an e-mail is very similar to writing a letter. However, the speed and ease at which you can draft, send and receive a response to an e-mail makes it a strong ally.

Write to the Right Person: You must first decide on the appropriate recipient of your message. If you do not have the direct e-mail for the person you are trying to reach, try searching for him or her on the internet. You can find CMS Board Members' e-mail addresses at www.cms.k12.nc.us/boe/Pages/contacts.aspx.

Be advised that if you send an e-mail to a public official, it is a matter of public record, and that e-mails can easily be forwarded to others who you did not intend to receive your message.

Identify Yourself: If you are writing to an elected official that serves your district, tell this person who you are and how you are connected to him or her.

Make It Personal: Tell YOUR story while conveying your message. The more you can relate the issue/topic to a human experience, the easier it will be for the reader to understand and empathize with your story. However, you should remember that people can't read your tone or interpret humor in an e-mail. It is best to write in a straightforward manner.

Keep It Short: Try to keep your e-mail under 250 words.

Ask a Question: Asking a question shows that you expect an answer. Instead of letting the reader pass over your e-mail, asking the reader for a response causes him or her to really consider your points and remember them more easily. Try to formulate your strongest point in the form of a question.

Find a Proofreader: Have someone read your e-mail once you have completed the first draft. Ask them to pay specific attention to clarity, grammar, style and tone. If you cannot find a proofreader, save your e-mail and come back and reread it later. Reading it out loud will help you find errors and make corrections.

Follow Up: Set a date on your calendar to follow up. You may choose to call instead of e-mailing again.

E-mails at a Glance

- Write to the *right* person
- Identify yourself
- Make it personal
- Keep it short
- Ask a question
- Find a proofreader
- **Follow up!**

Placing a phone call...

Calling is a fast avenue for making an impact; this is particularly useful when influence is needed on a swiftly moving issue/topic.

Identify Your Audience: You must first decide on the appropriate recipient of your call. If you do not have the direct phone number for the person you are trying to reach, try searching for them on the internet. (All CMS employees can be reached by calling 980-343-3000 and asking for the individual by name and title).

Communicate with Confidence & Respect: Preparation and practice will help your confidence. Curiosity and a spirit of inquiry will help you maintain a respectful tone, even if the person you are speaking with does not share your views.

Prepare: Expect that you may reach someone other than your intended person. The second best person to talk to is usually his or her assistant. If you are unable to connect with anyone, leave a brief message with your contact information and reason for calling; indicate that the conversation you would like to have can be brief, but is important.

Take the time to prepare an outline of the comments/requests you would like to make BEFORE you call. Be sure to express SPECIFICALLY what you would like for your contact to do (example: vote a particular way and why).

Comments/Requests: _____

Take Notes: Try to record the conversation as best as possible by taking notes; notes will help you follow up.

Follow Up: Set a date on your calendar to follow up with the person you called. If you made any requests, ask them how they are coming on their response. If they did not comply with your requests, ask them to help you understand their reasoning; this could be a great learning opportunity.

Placing the Call

- *Prepare first*
- Introduce yourself & reason for your call
- Go through your comments/requests
- Give your contact information
- Thank them
- **Follow up!**

Scheduling and attending a meeting...

Personal visits are the most impactful contact you can have with someone. Meeting face-to-face is a great way of conveying your personal story and request.

Learn: Before your visit, learn as much as you can about the issues you want to discuss and the individual you will be meeting with. Try to understand their role and decision making ability within the organization.

Prepare an Agenda: Brainstorm a list of topics you would like to discuss, and then reorder this list so the most important topics to discuss come first. This is your agenda.

Prepare a Summary Sheet: Create a summary sheet by succinctly filling in your key points for each agenda item. It is always good to have a *one page* document you can leave behind that has your *key points and contact information*.

Strength in Numbers: Having a group present shows the number of people involved with this advocacy effort. If more than one person is attending the meeting, designate a spokesperson or an order of speaking; a conversation can easily run astray if more than one person is trying to lead it.

At the Meeting

- *Prepare first*
- Introduce yourself with a firm handshake
- Go through your agenda systematically, keeping your messages simple and brief
- Take notes
- Give him or her your summary sheet
- Thank them for their time
- **Follow up!**

Scheduling the Meeting

Be prepared: *You may be asked to have the meeting by phone that instant, you may not be able to schedule a meeting for weeks or even months, or you may be asked to meet with a representative. Be prepared for the meeting when you call.*

- Once you have decided who is best to meet with, call their office and ask to speak with the person who manages their calendar.
- Ask for their earliest availability to discuss your agenda items.
- Once you have a confirmed meeting, thank the scheduler. If you have been speaking with the person you will be meeting with, tell him or her you are looking forward to the discussion.

Take Notes: Try to record the conversation as best as possible by taking notes; notes will help you follow up.

Thank You: Within two days, write a thank-you note and include a copy of your summary sheet.

Follow Up: Set a date on your calendar to follow up after your meeting. You may choose to call instead of scheduling another meeting.

Worksheets

Attending a town hall style meeting...

Town hall style meetings give you the chance to share your issues with policy makers and the general public. The CMS School Board holds town hall meetings twice a month that are open to the public; you can visit www.cms.k12.nc.us/boe/Pages/SchoolBoardMeetings.aspx for the schedule and agendas.

Learn: Before the meeting, learn as much as you can about the issues you want to discuss and the issues on the agenda. Also see if you are required to register before the meeting to speak. Call 980-343-5139 by noon the prior day to register to speak at a CMS Board meeting.

Prepare a Summary Sheet: Prepare a *one page* document you can leave behind with your *key points* and *contact information*. Create this summary sheet by succinctly writing down all the points you would like to make at the meeting. Bring several copies with you.

Strength in Numbers: Having a group present at the meeting shows the number of people involved with your advocacy effort. If more than one person is attending the meeting, designate a spokesperson or an order of speaking; a presentation can easily run astray if more than one person is trying to lead it. It is best to have no more than two to three people speak at any meeting.

Speaking: Practice before the meeting! Practicing will help you be more comfortable and build confidence, and it will also help you gauge your time. Be brief: at most you should use three minutes to speak, so make sure you start with your strongest points. Your summary sheet can double as a guide to your speech.

Take Notes: Try to record the meeting as best as possible by taking notes; notes will help you follow up. Also take down the contact information of anyone you may need to get in touch with later.

Thank You: Within two days, write a thank-you note to the person who helped you sign up to speak as well as the chair of the committee or group you spoke to. Also include a copy of your summary sheet with your note.

Follow Up: Write a follow-up letter to anyone who expresses interest in and/or support for your advocacy area.

At the Meeting

- *Prepare first*
- Sign in & introduce yourself to the staff
- Sit close to the front
- Introduce yourself before speaking
- Take notes & pictures
- Thank the group for their time
- **Follow up!**

.....
Understanding Collaboration...

When is a collaborative approach to advocacy most useful?

- When needs cut across communities, organizations or sectors
- When no single agency has the financial or legal capacity to meet the needs
- When solutions require a pooling of resources
- When multiple communities or organizations have a shared interest in a positive outcome

What does 'collaboration' really mean?

Collaboration is when people work together in an inclusive and constructive way to address shared concerns.

Our Theory on Collaboration...

Collaboration is based on the shared belief that:

If you bring the right people together....



in constructive ways...



with good information...



...they will create authentic visions and strategies for addressing the shared concerns of their organizations and communities.

Tips & Tricks

Collaboration: DO these things...

Good timing

Be sure that the time, energy and resources are available for working together.

A clear need

Take the time necessary to be sure people agree specifically on what they want to work on.

Well Begun is Half Done

Working collaboratively may take extra time on the front end in order to create change that lasts in the long run. Find a balance among process, relationships and results.

Clarity about the value that each person brings to the table

A collaboration benefits from the talents, knowledge, skills and resources that different people bring to the work. Utilize everyone.

Ability and willingness to build trust

Investing in the relationships among the participants in the collaboration will pay off well. Mend any breach of trust quickly and sensitively.

Strong stakeholder group

Be sure that the right people are at the table and willing to stay together.

Conflict is an opportunity to learn

Deal with conflict constructively for resiliency and creative problem-solving.

Share power and hold each other accountable

In a collaboration, you may need to give a little to get a little.

An open process

Collaboration can get messy. Take the time to assure a fair, well-designed, organized and transparent group process to keep people involved.

Find short-term wins

Collaboration is hard work, so celebrate along the way to keep people engaged.

Broad-based involvement

The people 'at the table' must know when and how to include others as needed to advance their cause.

Clarity about shared benefits and self-interests

In a collaboration, it's normal for people to have personal desired outcomes from the work they do together; be open with each other about what those interests or needs are.

The Lee Institute's Biggest "Do":

Well Begun Is Half Done.

This is a motto of The Lee Institute and a part of how we operate every day.

.....
Collaboration: DON'T do these things...

Pack the room with your own supporters

Fail to include or listen to stakeholders

Limit the contribution and distribution of data, information and analysis

Make decisions behind closed doors

Ignore or marginalize people who may block what you are doing

Fail to ask questions

Ignore or avoid dealing with conflict, turf issues, mistrust or unexplored assumptions

Use advocacy as a weapon

Limit the opportunity, time or manner that stakeholders have to organize, show up or participate

Fail to plan, plan, plan!

Fail to move from strategies to actions and accountability

Operate in a vacuum or with disregard for the realities around you

Make crisis-driven decisions

Create a parallel process that confuses and competes for people's time and energy

The Lee Institute's
Biggest "Don't":

Make decisions behind closed doors.

From your experience, which item from this list do you think is the most important to avoid?

Tips & Tricks

Working with the media...

Working with the media offers an opportunity to get your message out to a large audience and is therefore one of the most cost-effective modes of communication. However, it is not without risk. The following are some tips we recommend for working with the media.

Understand Your Part

Your story is a content generator to help the media sell advertising space. Your perspective as a representative for the information gives the story credibility. You may also be a source of expert or authoritative information.

Ask Questions

If a reporter contacts you, ask for his or her name and media outlet when responding, and ask if you are being recorded. Ask what direction he or she is taking with the story. Ask when it will be published or aired. If possible, schedule a face-to-face interview.

On the Record

No matter how casual the setting, assume all conversations with reporters are on the record—this includes casual remarks.

Honesty Is the Best Policy

Always be honest. Particularly if you aren't sure of the answer—don't make something up. If you do not know an answer to a question, say so. When you don't know or are unsure, offer to find an answer or to refer the reporter to an appropriate spokesperson. Avoid "No Comment" answers because they suggest that you are hiding information or evading questions.

Just Doing Their Job

Understand that this is the reporter's job. Make it easy for them to get your story. Ask them what they need or how you can help. Respect reporters' deadlines—return telephone calls promptly.

Speaking the Language

Avoid jargon and acronyms. Some reporters know little to nothing about the subject they are investigating, while others may know a great deal. Explain what you mean accurately in simple language and put forward what you believe are the important points. Be concise and get to the point.

Thank You

Thank reporters for the coverage. Let them know they are appreciated.

Deadlines RULE

- *Daily Newspapers*
 - Deadlines vary, so ask on an individual basis
- *Weekly Newspapers*
 - One deadline per week; memorize it
- *TV and Radio Reporters*
 - Now, right away & yesterday

Acquiring donations...

Not Tax-Deductible

Remember, any contributions to your advocacy efforts are not tax-deductible, so be very clear about that when you first make your request.

Be Specific

Determine in advance what you need, and be specific. If you need 20 lunches, ask for 20—if you only need 15, ask for 15. Be as accurate as you can so you won't need to go back and ask for something different. If you are asking for the use of a space—be sure about the exact date or dates when it will be needed.

Who's Who?

Spend time figuring out exactly who to ask. If you are unsure, you can call the organization's main line and ask who the correct person is to approach. Give them time to respond - don't wait until the last minute to ask.

Flexibility

While you need to be as specific as you can when you ask for a donation, you also need to be flexible when the person responds. If you ask for lunches but they can only supply drinks, accept courteously. Remember, anything you get moves you closer to your goal. If the space you want is available at a different time or date, consider moving your meeting.

Be Gracious

Be as helpful and as grateful as you can be. Be gracious in how you ask and how you respond; this is not to suggest that you don't have good manners. However, sometimes it is hard to be gracious when someone is saying "no" or offering you something that isn't exactly what you need. Be sure to follow any rules and/or make it as easy as possible for the person to help you. For example, if you need to pick up the donated food - offer cheerfully - even if it isn't completely convenient. If you need to put tables and chairs away after you use a space, do so willingly. This is important particularly if the person who is helping might be someone who can help in the future.

Show Appreciation

Make sure you recognize the support in as many ways as you can. If you plan on a media release or have any printed materials, be sure to recognize the donation. You don't have to make an elaborate gesture - this can be as simple as putting a sign out that says, "Thank you [Organization Name] for providing [Donation]," or including the thank you as a part of any remarks at the meeting.

Follow Up

After your meeting or event, or after the donation has been used, be sure to thank the person you first talked to with a written note or phone call. If someone other than your first contact proved to be particularly helpful, be sure to convey your gratitude for their assistance to your original contact.

Donations at a Glance

- Donations to your effort are NOT tax deductible
- Be as specific as possible with your requests
- Figure out the right person to ask within the organization
- Be gracious
- Show appreciation for ANY donation
- Follow up

Understanding Social Networking...

Nothing can replace face-to-face interaction, but now there are ways to connect with other people online—social networks. There are several avenues for online social networking:

Blogging Websites

These websites allow people to write entries that are open for anyone to see. The most successful blogs are those that a large audience can connect with.

Social networking websites

These are created by website developers and are usually open to everyone. Members get their own page to post information about themselves. Some of these sites are used more casually than others; Facebook and MySpace are more social in nature, while LinkedIn is primarily used for professional networking.

Websites that let you create your own social network

These websites allow you to create your own social network to be as small or large and restricted or inclusive as you would like. Most are not free, but inexpensive like Ning.com.

Which avenue should I use?

Consider the message of your advocacy effort.

If you have a clear and determined message...

If you have an established advocacy effort and you are looking to recruit new members, joining a social network or starting a blog is a great way to disseminate your message to a multitude of people. Joining a network lets other members of that website see the information you post or write about.

If you want to develop a dialogue with others to create your message...

If you are just starting out on your advocacy effort and you want to engage people in the development process, creating a social network like a Ning could be useful. Building a social network creates a conversation among the members instead of a one-way message from you.

Cautionary Notes

Some people are not comfortable using a social networking websites, and some choose not to use the internet at all. Before you invest your time, make sure the people you are trying to reach are familiar with the type of social network you are looking to use.

The field of online social networking is changing and growing rapidly. First decide which method is most appropriate; you could start by asking members of your target audience about the websites they use. Then research the available websites to see which you like best.

Social Networking Key Take-Away

Whatever social networking avenue you take, it is only useful if people read it (blogging), connect with it (social networking sites) or join (building your own social network).

Education Websites

Local and statewide data

- Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools (www.cms.k12.nc.us)
- Data Dashboard (<http://pmd.cms.k12.nc.us/default.aspx>)
- North Carolina Department of Instruction (www.dpi.state.nc.us)

National data

- Great Schools (www.greatschools.net)

National advocacy organizations

- Achieve, Inc. (www.achieve.org)
- Alliance for Excellent Education (www.all4ed.org)
- America's Promise Alliance (www.americaspromise.org)
- Civic Enterprise (www.civicerprises.net)
- Education Equality Project (www.edequality.org)
- Edutopia (www.edutopia.org)
- The Whole Child (www.wholechildeducation.org)
- "Primary Sources: America's Teachers on America's Schools" Scholastic Inc and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (www.scholastic.com/primarysources/download.asp)

Advocacy Websites

- The Right Question Project (www.rightquestion.org)
- The International Association for Public Participation (www.iap2.org)
- The Alliance For Education (www.all4ed.org)
- The Interaction Alliance (www.interaction.org)
- Deliberative Democracy Consortium (www.deliberative-democracy.net)
- National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation (www.ncdd.org)

Publications and Reports

- "10 Elements of a Successful High School." Source: Alliance for Excellent Education
- "Achievement Trap: How America is Failing Millions of High-Achieving Students from Lower-Income Families." Source: Civic Enterprises
- "Closing the Achievement Gap: School, Community, Family Connections." Source: Annie E. Casey Foundation
- "Dropouts, Diplomas, and Dollars: U.S. High Schools and the Nation's Economy." Source: Alliance for Excellent Education
- "The Family: America's Smallest School." Source: America's Promise Alliance
- "On the Front Lines of Schools Report: Perspective of Teachers and Principals on the High School Dropout Problem." Source: Civic Enterprise
- "The Silent Epidemic Report." Source: Civic Enterprises
- Peter Block. Community: The Structure of Belonging
- Jonathan Kozol. Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools
- Jonathan Kozol. The Shame of the Nation: The Restoration of Apartheid Schooling in America
- James Surowiecki. The Wisdom of Crowds
- Paul Tough. Whatever It Takes: Geoffrey Canada's Quest to Change Harlem and America



Notes

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|--------|
| 1. Introduction | - 1 - |
| 2. Everyday Advocacy | - 2 - |
| 3. Best Practices | - 3 - |
| • For students | |
| • For concerned adults/parents | |
| • For advocacy organizations | |
| • For business leaders | |
| 4. Worksheets..... | - 7 - |
| • Writing letters | |
| • Writing e-mails | |
| • Making phone calls | |
| • Scheduling and attending a meeting | |
| • Attending a town hall style meeting | |
| 5. Tips & Tricks | - 12 - |
| • Understanding collaboration | |
| • Collaboration: do these things | |
| • Collaboration: don't do these things | |
| • Working with the media | |
| • Acquiring donations | |
| • Understanding social networking | |
| 6. Resources | - 18 - |

The Lee Institute extends a special thank you to The Alliance for Education, the International Association for Public Participation, the Interaction Alliance and the Parkinson's Action Network for their advocacy materials adapted for this manual.

Introduction

ad·vo·ca·cy  [ad-vuh-kuh-see]  [Show IPA](#)

–noun, plural *-cies*.
the act of pleading for, supporting, or recommending; active espousal: *He was known for his advocacy of states' rights.*

Origin:
1375-1425; late ME *advocacye* < ML *advocātia*. See *advocate*, *-acy*

—**Related forms**
non·ad·vo·ca·cy, *noun*
pre·ad·vo·ca·cy, *noun*

Dictionary.com's definition of advocacy is accurate, but perhaps a little... impersonal. To us at The Lee Institute:

Advocacy is getting your voice heard through spoken or written words in order to persuade others toward a particular goal, policy or decision.

We believe that in order for you to become an effective advocate for community change you need to educate yourself on the issues, explain your thinking, give examples to make your views clear, seek others' opinions, probe into others' thinking and be open to being challenged.

At The Lee Institute, we develop strategies (like this manual) to help community members like you get your voices heard. This manual was developed to aid members of The Lee Institute's Achieve Together program in advocating for their community's children in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School (CMS) system. References to Achieve Together Community Circle members indicate individuals who have participated in the Achieve Together program.

To learn more about Achieve Together, please visit www.AchieveTogether.org. If you would like to learn more about The Lee Institute and the work we do in communities, please visit www.LeeInstitute.org.

While we tailored the materials in this manual to advocacy focusing on school reform, each section can be applied to other domains. We hope you find this manual practical and inspirational as you pursue your own advocacy efforts to strengthen the common good.

Follow this list to advance your advocacy efforts EVERY DAY!

Listen & Learn

- Seek to understand the *interests* behind the *positions* that people hold. A *position* is a single answer or solution; an *interest* is a need, hope or concern that frequently can be met by more than one solution.
- Learn as much as you can through reading and watching/attending school board forums.
- Be curious – ask questions to find out what other people think and why.
- Find out what other people do to advocate for things they believe in – even if it is in a different content area or a different community.
- Seek out people who are knowledgeable about a topic that concerns you, and then PICK THEIR BRAINS!

Talk

- Talking is the fastest way to communicate your message efficiently, whether it's striking up a conversation with someone at the train stop or a formal meeting with a school board member.
- When speaking with others, keep the goals and items you are advocating for in the back of your mind; work them into the conversation when it fits.
- Look for ways to educate others through casual conversation; talking over coffee or lunch is a great way to gain perspective and knowledge.
- Be persuasive but not demanding; not everyone shares your passion around the topics for which you advocate.

Act

- Planning is great, and a written advocacy plan gets you organized and allows others to follow in your footsteps. But planning isn't enough; you have to act.
- Whenever possible, offer positive suggestions when pointing out something you don't like.
- Once you have created an advocacy plan, follow it through to completion, making necessary adjustments, as needed, along the way.
- Then, learning from what worked well or not so well, create a new plan to act on.

Follow Up

- Hold yourself and others accountable.
- Follow up regularly with people you've contacted to gently remind them of commitments or tasks.
- If you aren't the most task-oriented advocate, create a calendar for your advocacy plan implementation and use it to regularly check your progress.

Best Practices

*If you are a **student**, you could...*

Local

- Take a picture, shoot a video, keep a diary or make a list of the problems students face in your school. Share with classmates, parents/guardians, elected officials and others.
- Recruit your parents, family or other adults to join and work with you for change through your PTA/PTO/PTSA or other local education organization.
- Write to your school newspaper or local newspapers to share your ideas of how to make schools better.
- Recruit other students from your school to talk about improving your school with the mayor, county commissioners, business leaders and CMS administrators.

State

- Call, write or email members of the NC General Assembly to share your views about how to make schools better and overcome the problems you see.
- Enlist your friends and classmates to contact the Governor, Superintendent of Public Instruction and members of the NC General Assembly to improve high schools.
- Organize your friends and teachers to go to Raleigh to meet with members of the NC General Assembly.

National

- Call, write or email your US Congress members to share your views about how to make high schools better and overcome the problems you see.
- Organize your friends and classmates to contact the President and Congress to ask them to implement reforms in public education.
- Organize your friends and teachers to go to Washington, DC to meet with members of the US Congress.

If you are a concerned adult or parent, you could...

Local

- Get the facts: check graduation, drop-out, literacy and school safety rates at www.NCPublicSchools.org or visit www.SchoolMatters.org to compare schools.
- Contact your school superintendent to learn about plans for school reforms. Ask for immediate action if no specific initiatives are in place.
- Share your observations and experiences in an article for your local paper or community newsletter.
- Start or get active in your school's PTA/PTO/PTSA to increase awareness and convince your fellow members to support school reform.
- Schedule a meeting with your local school board to engage them in your efforts to improve your school. Attend meetings and demand they give more attention to school reform.
- Get all local officials involved – even if they don't have direct responsibility for schools. Reach out to the mayor, city council members and county commissioners to ask for their help in implementing strategies for raising awareness about school reform.

State

- Invite your state officials to visit your local school to talk with administrators, teachers and students about ways to improve schools.
- Share your concerns and the need for reform with elected officials. Write, email, call or request a meeting.
- Work with the PTA/PTO/PTSA or other education organization to establish or attend a lobby-day in Raleigh focused on education accountability and reform.
- Gather more information about the plan for improving schools from the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

National

- Invite your Representatives or Senators to visit your local school to talk with administrators, teachers and students about ways to improve schools.
- Share your concerns, the need for reform and increased federal funding with your Representatives and Senators. Write, email, call, and/or request meeting.
- Join with an organization to participate in a lobby-day at the U.S. Capitol focused on education accountability and reform.
- Contact the Assistant Secretary for Communications and Outreach at the U.S. Department of Education (www.ed.gov) to request more information about plans for school reform.
- Visit the Alliance for Excellent Education (www.all4ed.org) to sign up for updates about national school reform initiatives and Congressional action alerts.

Best Practices

*If you are an **advocacy organization**, you could...*

Local

- Get the facts: check graduation, drop-out, literacy and school safety rates at www.NCPublicSchools.org or visit www.SchoolMatters.org to compare schools.
- Create scorecards measuring the quality of schools in your area. Develop materials that describe your advocacy efforts.
- Issue a media release to publicize the scorecard and other information about local schools to area residents and community groups.
- Distribute scorecards and handouts everywhere you can think of -- grocery stores, malls, banks, churches and special events—to recruit supporters.

State

- Organize a lobby-day in Raleigh focused on education accountability and reform.
- Organize a letter writing campaign to state elected officials calling for education accountability and reform.
- Connect with an existing or ask the Governor to establish a council that coordinates state education from pre-kindergarten through graduate education.

National

- Organize a lobby-day at the U.S. Capitol focused on education accountability and reform.
- Organize a letter writing campaign to the U.S. Congress calling for school education accountability and reform.
- Ask your Congressional Representatives to increase federal funding support for schools.
- Visit the Alliance for Excellent Education (www.all4ed.org) to sign up for updates about national school reform initiatives and Congressional action alerts.

.....
*If you are a **business leader**, you could...*

Local

- Convene your colleagues to examine school performance in your community.
- Establish partnerships with local schools that provide internship opportunities, training resources and other supports for schools, educators and students.
- Sponsor an education leadership summit that brings together educators, administrators, parents and community leaders to discuss and develop an action plan for school reform.
- Host a meeting with the superintendent and other CMS leaders to find out whether the district has plans to implement school reforms.
- Work with the chamber of commerce, local officials and school superintendent to coordinate school curricula and activities with desired workforce skills.

State

- Convene an ongoing business roundtable examining the performance of schools.
- Host a meeting between business leaders, the Superintendent of Public Instruction and the Governor to discuss how to achieve school reform.
- Connect to or create a business/education partnership to advance school improvement.
- Work with state officials to develop a plan of action to increase graduation rates and improve the skills of the state's workforce.
- Educate state elected officials about the relationship between quality high schools and workforce preparedness and the need for school reforms.
- Connect with an existing or ask the Governor to establish a council that coordinates state education from pre-kindergarten through graduate education.

National

- Educate your Representatives and Senators about the relationship between quality schools and workforce preparedness and the need for 21st century secondary school reforms.
- Ask your Representatives and Senators to increase federal funding support for schools.
- Visit the Alliance for Excellent Education (www.all4ed.org) to sign up for updates about national school reform initiatives and Congressional action alerts.

Writing a letter...

Write to the Right Person: You must first decide on the appropriate recipient of your message. For example, if you are writing to change a school policy, write to your district representative on the school board.

Identify Yourself: If you are writing to an elected official that serves your district, tell this person who you are and how you are connected to him or her.

Make It Personal: Tell YOUR story while conveying your message. The more you can relate the issue/topic to a human experience, the easier it will be for the reader to understand and empathize with your story. However, you should remember that people can't read your tone or interpret humor in a letter. It is best to write in a straightforward manner.

Keep It to One Page: A simple rule.

Ask a Question: Asking a question shows that you expect an answer. Instead of letting the reader pass over your letter, asking the reader for a response causes them to really consider your points and remember them more easily. Try to formulate your strongest point in the form of a question.

Find a Proofreader: Have someone read your letter once you have completed the first draft. Ask them to pay specific attention to clarity, grammar, style and tone. If you cannot find a proofreader, save your letter and come back and reread it later. Reading it out loud will help you find errors and make corrections.

Follow Up: Set a date on your calendar to follow up. You may choose to call instead of writing another letter.

Letters at a Glance

- Write to the *right* person
- Identify yourself
- Make it personal
- Keep it to one page
- Ask a question
- Find a proofreader
- **Follow up!**

Writing an e-mail...

Writing an e-mail is very similar to writing a letter. However, the speed and ease at which you can draft, send and receive a response to an e-mail makes it a strong ally.

Write to the Right Person: You must first decide on the appropriate recipient of your message. If you do not have the direct e-mail for the person you are trying to reach, try searching for him or her on the internet. You can find CMS Board Members' e-mail addresses at www.cms.k12.nc.us/boe/Pages/contacts.aspx.

Be advised that if you send an e-mail to a public official, it is a matter of public record, and that e-mails can easily be forwarded to others who you did not intend to receive your message.

Identify Yourself: If you are writing to an elected official that serves your district, tell this person who you are and how you are connected to him or her.

Make It Personal: Tell YOUR story while conveying your message. The more you can relate the issue/topic to a human experience, the easier it will be for the reader to understand and empathize with your story. However, you should remember that people can't read your tone or interpret humor in an e-mail. It is best to write in a straightforward manner.

Keep It Short: Try to keep your e-mail under 250 words.

Ask a Question: Asking a question shows that you expect an answer. Instead of letting the reader pass over your e-mail, asking the reader for a response causes him or her to really consider your points and remember them more easily. Try to formulate your strongest point in the form of a question.

Find a Proofreader: Have someone read your e-mail once you have completed the first draft. Ask them to pay specific attention to clarity, grammar, style and tone. If you cannot find a proofreader, save your e-mail and come back and reread it later. Reading it out loud will help you find errors and make corrections.

Follow Up: Set a date on your calendar to follow up. You may choose to call instead of e-mailing again.

E-mails at a Glance

- Write to the *right* person
- Identify yourself
- Make it personal
- Keep it short
- Ask a question
- Find a proofreader
- **Follow up!**

Placing a phone call...

Calling is a fast avenue for making an impact; this is particularly useful when influence is needed on a swiftly moving issue/topic.

Identify Your Audience: You must first decide on the appropriate recipient of your call. If you do not have the direct phone number for the person you are trying to reach, try searching for them on the internet. (All CMS employees can be reached by calling 980-343-3000 and asking for the individual by name and title).

Communicate with Confidence & Respect: Preparation and practice will help your confidence. Curiosity and a spirit of inquiry will help you maintain a respectful tone, even if the person you are speaking with does not share your views.

Prepare: Expect that you may reach someone other than your intended person. The second best person to talk to is usually his or her assistant. If you are unable to connect with anyone, leave a brief message with your contact information and reason for calling; indicate that the conversation you would like to have can be brief, but is important.

Take the time to prepare an outline of the comments/requests you would like to make BEFORE you call. Be sure to express SPECIFICALLY what you would like for your contact to do (example: vote a particular way and why).

Comments/Requests: _____

Take Notes: Try to record the conversation as best as possible by taking notes; notes will help you follow up.

Follow Up: Set a date on your calendar to follow up with the person you called. If you made any requests, ask them how they are coming on their response. If they did not comply with your requests, ask them to help you understand their reasoning; this could be a great learning opportunity.

Placing the Call

- *Prepare first*
- Introduce yourself & reason for your call
- Go through your comments/requests
- Give your contact information
- Thank them
- **Follow up!**

Scheduling and attending a meeting...

Personal visits are the most impactful contact you can have with someone. Meeting face-to-face is a great way of conveying your personal story and request.

Learn: Before your visit, learn as much as you can about the issues you want to discuss and the individual you will be meeting with. Try to understand their role and decision making ability within the organization.

Prepare an Agenda: Brainstorm a list of topics you would like to discuss, and then reorder this list so the most important topics to discuss come first. This is your agenda.

Prepare a Summary Sheet: Create a summary sheet by succinctly filling in your key points for each agenda item. It is always good to have a *one page* document you can leave behind that has your *key points and contact information*.

Strength in Numbers: Having a group present shows the number of people involved with this advocacy effort. If more than one person is attending the meeting, designate a spokesperson or an order of speaking; a conversation can easily run astray if more than one person is trying to lead it.

At the Meeting

- *Prepare first*
- Introduce yourself with a firm handshake
- Go through your agenda systematically, keeping your messages simple and brief
- Take notes
- Give him or her your summary sheet
- Thank them for their time
- **Follow up!**

Scheduling the Meeting

Be prepared: You may be asked to have the meeting by phone that instant, you may not be able to schedule a meeting for weeks or even months, or you may be asked to meet with a representative. Be prepared for the meeting when you call.

- Once you have decided who is best to meet with, call their office and ask to speak with the person who manages their calendar.
- Ask for their earliest availability to discuss your agenda items.
- Once you have a confirmed meeting, thank the scheduler. If you have been speaking with the person you will be meeting with, tell him or her you are looking forward to the discussion.

Take Notes: Try to record the conversation as best as possible by taking notes; notes will help you follow up.

Thank You: Within two days, write a thank-you note and include a copy of your summary sheet.

Follow Up: Set a date on your calendar to follow up after your meeting. You may choose to call instead of scheduling another meeting.

Worksheets

Attending a town hall style meeting...

Town hall style meetings give you the chance to share your issues with policy makers and the general public. The CMS School Board holds town hall meetings twice a month that are open to the public; you can visit www.cms.k12.nc.us/boe/Pages/SchoolBoardMeetings.aspx for the schedule and agendas.

Learn: Before the meeting, learn as much as you can about the issues you want to discuss and the issues on the agenda. Also see if you are required to register before the meeting to speak. Call 980-343-5139 by noon the prior day to register to speak at a CMS Board meeting.

Prepare a Summary Sheet: Prepare a *one page* document you can leave behind with your *key points* and *contact information*. Create this summary sheet by succinctly writing down all the points you would like to make at the meeting. Bring several copies with you.

Strength in Numbers: Having a group present at the meeting shows the number of people involved with your advocacy effort. If more than one person is attending the meeting, designate a spokesperson or an order of speaking; a presentation can easily run astray if more than one person is trying to lead it. It is best to have no more than two to three people speak at any meeting.

Speaking: Practice before the meeting! Practicing will help you be more comfortable and build confidence, and it will also help you gauge your time. Be brief: at most you should use three minutes to speak, so make sure you start with your strongest points. Your summary sheet can double as a guide to your speech.

Take Notes: Try to record the meeting as best as possible by taking notes; notes will help you follow up. Also take down the contact information of anyone you may need to get in touch with later.

Thank You: Within two days, write a thank-you note to the person who helped you sign up to speak as well as the chair of the committee or group you spoke to. Also include a copy of your summary sheet with your note.

Follow Up: Write a follow-up letter to anyone who expresses interest in and/or support for your advocacy area.

At the Meeting

- *Prepare first*
- Sign in & introduce yourself to the staff
- Sit close to the front
- Introduce yourself before speaking
- Take notes & pictures
- Thank the group for their time
- **Follow up!**

.....
Understanding Collaboration...

When is a collaborative approach to advocacy most useful?

- When needs cut across communities, organizations or sectors
- When no single agency has the financial or legal capacity to meet the needs
- When solutions require a pooling of resources
- When multiple communities or organizations have a shared interest in a positive outcome

What does 'collaboration' really mean?

Collaboration is when people work together in an inclusive and constructive way to address shared concerns.

Our Theory on Collaboration...

Collaboration is based on the shared belief that:

If you bring the right people together....



in constructive ways...



with good information...



...they will create authentic visions and strategies for addressing the shared concerns of their organizations and communities.

Tips & Tricks

Collaboration: DO these things...

Good timing

Be sure that the time, energy and resources are available for working together.

A clear need

Take the time necessary to be sure people agree specifically on what they want to work on.

Well Begun is Half Done

Working collaboratively may take extra time on the front end in order to create change that lasts in the long run. Find a balance among process, relationships and results.

Clarity about the value that each person brings to the table

A collaboration benefits from the talents, knowledge, skills and resources that different people bring to the work. Utilize everyone.

Ability and willingness to build trust

Investing in the relationships among the participants in the collaboration will pay off well. Mend any breach of trust quickly and sensitively.

Strong stakeholder group

Be sure that the right people are at the table and willing to stay together.

Conflict is an opportunity to learn

Deal with conflict constructively for resiliency and creative problem-solving.

Share power and hold each other accountable

In a collaboration, you may need to give a little to get a little.

An open process

Collaboration can get messy. Take the time to assure a fair, well-designed, organized and transparent group process to keep people involved.

Find short-term wins

Collaboration is hard work, so celebrate along the way to keep people engaged.

Broad-based involvement

The people 'at the table' must know when and how to include others as needed to advance their cause.

Clarity about shared benefits and self-interests

In a collaboration, it's normal for people to have personal desired outcomes from the work they do together; be open with each other about what those interests or needs are.

The Lee Institute's Biggest "Do":

Well Begun Is Half Done.

This is a motto of The Lee Institute and a part of how we operate every day.

.....
Collaboration: DON'T do these things...

Pack the room with your own supporters

Fail to include or listen to stakeholders

Limit the contribution and distribution of data, information and analysis

Make decisions behind closed doors

Ignore or marginalize people who may block what you are doing

Fail to ask questions

Ignore or avoid dealing with conflict, turf issues, mistrust or unexplored assumptions

Use advocacy as a weapon

Limit the opportunity, time or manner that stakeholders have to organize, show up or participate

Fail to plan, plan, plan!

Fail to move from strategies to actions and accountability

Operate in a vacuum or with disregard for the realities around you

Make crisis-driven decisions

Create a parallel process that confuses and competes for people's time and energy

The Lee Institute's
Biggest "Don't":

Make decisions behind closed doors.

From your experience, which item from this list do you think is the most important to avoid?

Tips & Tricks

Working with the media...

Working with the media offers an opportunity to get your message out to a large audience and is therefore one of the most cost-effective modes of communication. However, it is not without risk. The following are some tips we recommend for working with the media.

Understand Your Part

Your story is a content generator to help the media sell advertising space. Your perspective as a representative for the information gives the story credibility. You may also be a source of expert or authoritative information.

Ask Questions

If a reporter contacts you, ask for his or her name and media outlet when responding, and ask if you are being recorded. Ask what direction he or she is taking with the story. Ask when it will be published or aired. If possible, schedule a face-to-face interview.

On the Record

No matter how casual the setting, assume all conversations with reporters are on the record—this includes casual remarks.

Honesty Is the Best Policy

Always be honest. Particularly if you aren't sure of the answer—don't make something up. If you do not know an answer to a question, say so. When you don't know or are unsure, offer to find an answer or to refer the reporter to an appropriate spokesperson. Avoid "No Comment" answers because they suggest that you are hiding information or evading questions.

Just Doing Their Job

Understand that this is the reporter's job. Make it easy for them to get your story. Ask them what they need or how you can help. Respect reporters' deadlines—return telephone calls promptly.

Speaking the Language

Avoid jargon and acronyms. Some reporters know little to nothing about the subject they are investigating, while others may know a great deal. Explain what you mean accurately in simple language and put forward what you believe are the important points. Be concise and get to the point.

Thank You

Thank reporters for the coverage. Let them know they are appreciated.

Deadlines RULE

- *Daily Newspapers*
 - Deadlines vary, so ask on an individual basis
- *Weekly Newspapers*
 - One deadline per week; memorize it
- *TV and Radio Reporters*
 - Now, right away & yesterday

.....
Acquiring donations...

Not Tax-Deductible

Remember, any contributions to your advocacy efforts are not tax-deductible, so be very clear about that when you first make your request.

Be Specific

Determine in advance what you need, and be specific. If you need 20 lunches, ask for 20—if you only need 15, ask for 15. Be as accurate as you can so you won't need to go back and ask for something different. If you are asking for the use of a space—be sure about the exact date or dates when it will be needed.

Who's Who?

Spend time figuring out exactly who to ask. If you are unsure, you can call the organization's main line and ask who the correct person is to approach. Give them time to respond – don't wait until the last minute to ask.

Flexibility

While you need to be as specific as you can when you ask for a donation, you also need to be flexible when the person responds. If you ask for lunches but they can only supply drinks, accept courteously. Remember, anything you get moves you closer to your goal. If the space you want is available at a different time or date, consider moving your meeting.

Be Gracious

Be as helpful and as grateful as you can be. Be gracious in how you ask and how you respond; this is not to suggest that you don't have good manners. However, sometimes it is hard to be gracious when someone is saying "no" or offering you something that isn't exactly what you need. Be sure to follow any rules and/or make it as easy as possible for the person to help you. For example, if you need to pick up the donated food – offer cheerfully – even if it isn't completely convenient. If you need to put tables and chairs away after you use a space, do so willingly. This is important particularly if the person who is helping might be someone who can help in the future.

Show Appreciation

Make sure you recognize the support in as many ways as you can. If you plan on a media release or have any printed materials, be sure to recognize the donation. You don't have to make an elaborate gesture – this can be as simple as putting a sign out that says, "Thank you [Organization Name] for providing [Donation]," or including the thank you as a part of any remarks at the meeting.

Follow Up

After your meeting or event, or after the donation has been used, be sure to thank the person you first talked to with a written note or phone call. If someone other than your first contact proved to be particularly helpful, be sure to convey your gratitude for their assistance to your original contact.

Donations at a Glance

- Donations to your effort are NOT tax deductible
- Be as specific as possible with your requests
- Figure out the right person to ask within the organization
- Be gracious
- Show appreciation for ANY donation
- Follow up

Understanding Social Networking...

Nothing can replace face-to-face interaction, but now there are ways to connect with other people online—social networks. There are several avenues for online social networking:

Blogging Websites

These websites allow people to write entries that are open for anyone to see. The most successful blogs are those that a large audience can connect with.

Social networking websites

These are created by website developers and are usually open to everyone. Members get their own page to post information about themselves. Some of these sites are used more casually than others; Facebook and MySpace are more social in nature, while LinkedIn is primarily used for professional networking.

Websites that let you create your own social network

These websites allow you to create your own social network to be as small or large and restricted or inclusive as you would like. Most are not free, but inexpensive like Ning.com.

Which avenue should I use?

Consider the message of your advocacy effort.

If you have a clear and determined message...

If you have an established advocacy effort and you are looking to recruit new members, joining a social network or starting a blog is a great way to disseminate your message to a multitude of people. Joining a network lets other members of that website see the information you post or write about.

If you want to develop a dialogue with others to create your message...

If you are just starting out on your advocacy effort and you want to engage people in the development process, creating a social network like a Ning could be useful. Building a social network creates a conversation among the members instead of a one-way message from you.

Cautionary Notes

Some people are not comfortable using a social networking websites, and some choose not to use the internet at all. Before you invest your time, make sure the people you are trying to reach are familiar with the type of social network you are looking to use.

The field of online social networking is changing and growing rapidly. First decide which method is most appropriate; you could start by asking members of your target audience about the websites they use. Then research the available websites to see which you like best.

Social Networking Key Take-Away

Whatever social networking avenue you take, it is only useful if people read it (blogging), connect with it (social networking sites) or join (building your own social network).

Education Websites

Local and statewide data

- Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools (www.cms.k12.nc.us)
- Data Dashboard (<http://pmd.cms.k12.nc.us/default.aspx>)
- North Carolina Department of Instruction (www.dpi.state.nc.us)

National data

- Great Schools (www.greatschools.net)

National advocacy organizations

- Achieve, Inc. (www.achieve.org)
- Alliance for Excellent Education (www.all4ed.org)
- America's Promise Alliance (www.americaspromise.org)
- Civic Enterprise (www.civicerprises.net)
- Education Equality Project (www.edequality.org)
- Edutopia (www.edutopia.org)
- The Whole Child (www.wholechildeducation.org)
- "Primary Sources: America's Teachers on America's Schools" Scholastic Inc and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (www.scholastic.com/primarysources/download.asp)

Advocacy Websites

- The Right Question Project (www.rightquestion.org)
- The International Association for Public Participation (www.iap2.org)
- The Alliance For Education (www.all4ed.org)
- The Interaction Alliance (www.interaction.org)
- Deliberative Democracy Consortium (www.deliberative-democracy.net)
- National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation (www.ncdd.org)

Publications and Reports

- "10 Elements of a Successful High School." Source: Alliance for Excellent Education
- "Achievement Trap: How America is Failing Millions of High-Achieving Students from Lower-Income Families." Source: Civic Enterprises
- "Closing the Achievement Gap: School, Community, Family Connections." Source: Annie E. Casey Foundation
- "Dropouts, Diplomas, and Dollars: U.S. High Schools and the Nation's Economy." Source: Alliance for Excellent Education
- "The Family: America's Smallest School." Source: America's Promise Alliance
- "On the Front Lines of Schools Report: Perspective of Teachers and Principals on the High School Dropout Problem." Source: Civic Enterprise
- "The Silent Epidemic Report." Source: Civic Enterprises
- Peter Block. Community: The Structure of Belonging
- Jonathan Kozol. Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools
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- James Surowiecki. The Wisdom of Crowds
- Paul Tough. Whatever It Takes: Geoffrey Canada's Quest to Change Harlem and America

Notes
