The Power of Advocacy

Hilary Schneider, Maine Director of Government Relations, American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network

Becky Smith, Maine Director of Government Relations, American Heart Association/American Stroke Association

September 16, 2015
Introduction

- What do you hope to get out of this session?

- Who has testified or communicated with your legislators?

- We will be focusing on the Legislature, but advocacy is important at the local and federal levels as well as with the Executive Branch.
The Maine Legislature

- 151 House members (77 Dem., 67 Rep., 3 Ind., 2 Unenrolled, 2 vacant seats were held by Ds)
  - Plus three non-voting members representing the Passamaquoddy Tribe, Penobscot Nation, and the Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians
- 35 members of the Senate (20 Rep., 15 Dem.)
- Members serve 2-year terms
- Limit of 4 terms
- Leadership and Majority Power split
**Advocate**

**Noun:** A person who supports a cause and exercises his/her **right to be heard.**

**Examples:**
- Student
- Parent
- Patient or provider
- **Anyone** who cares about an issue
- and shares why it is important to him/her

YOU are an advocate!
Why Participate in Advocacy?

Every day policy and lawmakers are making decisions that affect our lives.

For example:

• Classes students need to take to graduate from high school;
• Access to health care
• Location of tobacco products in stores; and
• Laws that determine insurance coverage for cancer screenings and treatment.

You **CAN** Make a Difference!
Advocacy vs. Lobbying

It is important to remember that every lobbyist is an advocate, while not every advocate is a lobbyist.

It is also important to remember that regardless of your position (employee of a non-profit, state grantee etc.) you are still a citizen of Maine and your representatives have a responsibility to listen to your opinions.
Advocacy vs. Lobbying

- Advocacy is a term that refers to any identification or promotion of a major cause or issue. It is about affecting change in your community through education and awareness campaigns.

- In order for Advocacy to become lobbying, certain thresholds must be met including spending resources. Certain tax exempt non-profits and government contractors have restrictions. There are many available resources to help guide you.
Effective Advocacy

As an advocate, you should make sure to:

- Keep up-to-date on bills in the legislature pertaining to the interests of your organization and community.
- Keep your elected officials up-to-date on what your organization is doing to serve their community.
- Hold events and invite your service area’s legislators.
- Know the talking points and information related to particular issue.
- Alert your boards and community when a particular issue is “on the table” and provide them with talking points related to the issue.
- Write letters to the editor and op-eds pertaining to an issue relevant to your community.
Building Relationships with Decision Makers

- Who represents you?
  - Your district
  - Issue champions
  - Key committees
  - Leadership
  - Don’t forget about the executive branch

- Get to know them **before** you ask them to do something

- Communicate regularly through multiple channels

- Always be respectful even when you agree to disagree
Tactics to Build Relationships

- Find out if they have “office hours”
- Attend networking events
- Send them a holiday card and a note to congratulate them on being elected
- Let them know when you’re in the area
- Follow them on Facebook or Twitter
- Sign up for their mailing list
The Power of Your Story
The Power of Many Stories
The Power of an Individual
The Power of a Movement
Meeting with Lawmakers
Who are you?
Where are you from?
What are you here to talk about today?
What issue are we talking about?
Does evidence support our position?
What is your QoL story?
What is your specific and actionable “ask”? 
(Did you follow up afterward to thank them or urge them to complete your ask?)
HOOK LINE & SINKER
There are many opportunities to advocate for Accepting Federal Funds

- Legislative meetings
- Events
- Relay for Life, Heart Walks & other signature events
- State Lobby Days
- Your kitchen table
- Church
- Rotary Club
- Anywhere you have the opportunity to talk about health care
Inviting Legislators to Events
Tips for Inviting Lawmakers to Events

- Provide plenty of advanced notice
  - At least 2 weeks, if possible
- Be creative
  - Video viewing
- Prepare a “leave behind” one-pager with facts and ask
- Start and end on time
- Follow-up with a thank you and reiterate your key points
Emailing Lawmakers

**ME: Don’t Cut Funds that Protect Maimers Against Cancer**

**Recipients**
- Your State Senator or Senators
- Your State Representative or Representatives

**Contact**
- **Title:**
- **First Name:**
- **Last Name:**
- **Your Email:**
- **Address 1:**
- **Address 2:**
- **City:**
- **State / Province:**
  - Choose a State
- **ZIP / Postal Code:**
- **Phone Number:**

**Message**
- **Subject:**
  - Don’t make shortsighted cuts, protect cancer prevention
- Dear [Decision Maker],

As you prepare to come back into session, please think about how the Fund for a Healthy Maine (FHM) is protecting our children and others in our state.

- **Personalize your message**
  - As a constituent and an American Cancer Society volunteer, I strongly value the Fund for a Healthy Maine and its programs.

The FHM is not only helping Maimers stay healthy, it also is saving our state in future health.
Social Media

Student Led Protest March; April 12th

Going (88)

Seth Berry

Recent guests (20 + new)

Maybe (106)

Travis (1,900)

Student Led Protest March around the Capitol

Friday, April 12, 2013 at 9:00 a.m. rain or shine

You, your friends and family are invited to participate in a statewide student-led march to oppose Governor LePage’s severe budget cuts to Maine public schools. The Governor has proposed a 40 million dollar cut to fund our public schools as well as another tax shift for local towns to fund teacher retirement. This is detrimental to the public schools, our education, and the ‘middle class’.

See More
Tips for Effective Advocacy

- Align yourself with advocacy organizations or individuals who can help:
  - Determine when you can make biggest impact
  - Guide you through legislative process
  - Identify landmines or goldmines
- Do your research
  - Know the issues and facts
  - Anticipate your opposition
- Use multiple strategies over time to keep drumbeat going
- Don’t get discouraged – sometimes change takes time
10 Informal Rules for Advocacy

- **Consider yourself an information source.** Legislators have limited time, staff and interest in any one issue. They can't be as informed as they might like on all issues—or the ones that concern you. You can fill the information gap.

- **Make the legislator aware of any personal connection you may have.** No matter how insignificant you may feel it is, if you have any friends, relatives, and/or other colleagues in common, MAKE THAT KNOWN.

- **Tell the truth.** There is no faster way to lose your credibility than to give false or misleading information to a legislator.

- **Know who is on your side.** It is helpful for a legislator to know what other groups, individuals, state agencies and/or legislators are working with you on an issue.

- **Know the opposition.** Anticipate who the opposition will be. Tell the legislator what the opposition arguments are likely to be and provide him/her with answers and rebuttals to those arguments.
10 Informal Rules for Advocacy

- **Don't be afraid to admit you don't know something.** If a legislator wants information you don't have or asks something you don't know, acknowledge that and then offer to get the information.

- **Be specific about what you are looking for.** If you want a vote, information, answers to a question—whatever it is—make sure you ask for it directly and get an answer.

- **Follow up.** It is very important to find out if your legislators did what they said they would do. It is also very important that you thank them or ask for an explanation as to why they did not vote as you would have liked them to.

- **Don’t burn any bridges.** It is easy to get very emotional over issues you feel strongly about. Be sure that no matter how difficult your conversation might be, you leave on good enough terms that you can go back to that legislator later. Remember that your strongest opponent on one issue may be your strongest ally on another.

- **REMEMBER YOU ARE THE BOSS!!** Your tax money pays the legislators’ salaries, and also pays for the paper they write on and the phone they call you on. You should be courteous, but don’t be intimidated. They are responsible to you, and nine out of ten legislators are grateful for your help.
“Individual actions may seem insignificant but together the small steps of many people can have an astonishing impact.”
Q&A