Children’s Advocates in Action:

Becoming an Advocate for Idaho’s Next Generation

Advocacy Definitions

* **Public policy**: Decisions we make at every level of government that direct how we will care for one another, our communities, and the land.
* **Advocacy**: Broad term used to describe attempts to influence decision-making systems.
* **Lobbying**: A specific advocacy process of influencing public policy at federal, state, and local levels; can be referring to direct or grassroots lobbying.
* **Grassroots Organizing or Collective Impact**: Collaboration across government, business, non-profits, and citizens to achieve social change.
* **Social Change**: The transformation of culture values, norms, and social institutions over time.

Get Involved and Take Action!

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| Join our ‘Children’s Advocates in Action’ group on the Idaho Voices for Children’s Facebook page or visit: **idahovoices.org/advocatesinaction/** |  |

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Conveying Values-Based Messaging with Elected Officials

Values-Based Messaging TIPS

1. **Be Aspirational**

* Hope and optimism are more motivating than cynicism. If we suggest that this will be an uphill battle or unlikely to happen, we give elected officials permission to ignore the issue.

1. **Values First**

* We feel first and think second. Values are our moral compass.

1. **Elevate Our Public Systems**

* We can’t give the government or public systems a black-eye, while calling on our government to invest in safety net programs and protect our health and well-being.

1. **Focus on ‘We’**

* Messages of interdependence are more relatable and guide us toward a community solution. Focus on the ‘our,’ the ‘we,’ and foster a sense of connection. This is about all of us and our communities, not just a small group.

1. **Choose Stories Wisely**

* Your story is one of the greatest tools you have to let others know why an issue is important and how it connects to peoples’ lives. Select stories that are relevant and emphasize community, not just individuals.

Values-Based Messaging TRAPS

1. **Don’t Repeat Unhelpful Stereotypes**

* Avoid repeating generalizations, assumptions, and stereotypes to make a point. Even if you are trying to debunk a stereotype, repeating one normalizes the stereotype and perpetuates a divide. Be sensitive when choosing words you use.

1. **Don’t Step into the Other Side’s ‘Frame’**

* Keep away from frames that could damage your argument. Stay on message and stick to your rehearsed talking points.

1. **Don’t Use Language that ‘Otherizes’**

* We don’t want to stigmatize a group of individuals, especially when we want to create a feeling of interdependence and community well-being. Talking about ‘families working hard to gain financial stability’ (a phrase we call relate to), rather than ‘those living in poverty.’

1. **Use Statistics Sparingly and Don’t Use Jargon**

* One or two simple statistics or numbers per paragraph is probably a maximum. No decimal points are ever necessary. Remember, stories illustrate our values better than statistics.

Tips for Talking with Elected Officials

* You can make a difference and be an agent of change.
* Elected officials want to hear from you.
* There are a variety of opportunities and ways to communicate with your officials.
* ‘What’ you want to communicate is as important as ‘how’ you communicate.
* Establish short-term and long-term goals.
* You are unlikely to agree on every issue.
* You aren’t expected to know everything.
* Always say “thank you.” If you visited in person, don’t forget to send a follow-up note.
* Become as involved and informed as possible!

Understanding Nonprofit Lobbying and the Law

Public Charities CAN Lobby

Much advocacy work, including efforts to influence executive branch actions, does not constitute lobbying. Yet contrary to popular misconception, 501(c)(3) public charities—including houses of worship and public foundations—can lobby. In fact, the Internal Revenue Service has stated that public charities “may lobby freely” so long as lobbying is within generous specified limits.

Federal tax law controls how much lobbying 501(c)(3) organizations can engage in. Public charities can choose to measure their lobbying under either the insubstantial part test or the 501(h) expenditure test. While lobbying is not defined under the insubstantial part test, this fact sheet provides an overview of how lobbying is defined for organizations that measure their lobbying under the 501(h) expenditure test.

Understanding Types of Lobbying

In order for an action to be considered direct lobbying or grassroots lobbying it must contain all of the below elements. It is not lobbying if one or more of the required elements is missing. Understanding the meaning of each element is key.

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| Direct Lobbying:  Communication with a legislator that expresses a view about specific legislation. | Grassroots Lobbying:  Communication with the public that expresses a view about specific legislation and includes a call to action. |

* **Communication:** A conversation (in person or by phone), letter, email, fax, or other creative mechanism to convey a message.
* **Legislator:** A member of a legislative body or her staff. In addition, executive branch officials who participate in the formulation of legislation are considered legislators (such as the governor or mayor when vetoing a bill or an agency secretary when helping the legislature write a bill). Members of administrative bodies, however, such as school boards, sewer and water districts, housing authorities, zoning boards, and other special purposes bodies, whether elected or appointed, are not considered legislators.
* **Public:** Anyone but a legislator or member of an organization. Communications to an organization’s members are treated more favorably, so a communication to an organization’s members that urges them to contact legislators to express a view about specific legislation is considered to be direct lobbying. For this purpose, a member is someone who has given more than a small amount of time or money to the organization.
* **Expresses a view about specific legislation:** A bill or resolution that has been introduced in a legislative body or a specific proposal to solve a problem. Specific legislation includes budget appropriations and taxes, and attempts to influence the confirmation of judicial and executive branch nominees. A proposal may qualify as specific legislation even if it has not yet been introduced, been written down, or even fully fleshed out. Specific legislation does not include rulemakings / promulgation of regulations, executive orders, litigation, or attempts to enforce existing laws.
* **Call to action:** A specific means of encouraging the communication’s recipient to take lobbying action. A call to action must comprise one of the following actions: 1) tell the recipient to contact a legislator; 2) provide information on how the recipient can contact his legislator, such as providing the phone number or address; 3) provide a mechanism for enabling the recipient to contact his legislator, such as a postcard, petition, or email form; or 4) identify a legislator who will vote on the legislation as being opposed to or undecided about the organization’s view on the legislation, a member of a legislative committee who will vote on the legislation, or the recipient’s legislator. Ballot measure activity is considered direct lobbying. Although ballot measures, such as referenda, bond measures, and ballot initiatives, are determined at the voting booth, efforts for or against them are considered direct lobbying, not impermissible electoral activity. Efforts aimed at convincing the public to support or oppose ballot measures are direct lobbying since the voting public serves as the legislature.

Not Lobbying

There are four principal exceptions to these definitions. Any communication that meets one of these exceptions does not count as lobbying:

* Nonpartisan analysis, study or research that presents all sides of an issue. The communication must provide a full and fair exposition of the underlying facts and it must be made available to the general public, a segment of the general public, or to governmental bodies or employees. The document should provide enough information to allow readers to draw their own conclusions about the issue, even if the report itself contains a specific conclusion. For example, an organization might write a paper discussing the need for access to healthcare by low-income children, which might conclude with a recommendation for increased funding for state child health insurance.
* Responses to written requests for assistance from committees or other legislative bodies. The communication must be in response to a written request by a legislative body, committee, or subcommittee (not an individual legislator), and it must be made available to all members of the requesting body. As an example, the executive director of a public charity, in response to a written request from the chair of a legislative committee, could testify in support of a clean indoor air bill, without counting the expenses toward the organization’s lobbying limits.
* Challenges to or support for legislative proposals that would change the organization’s rights or its right to exist. The communication must be with a legislative body regarding possible actions of that body which could affect the organization’s existence, powers, duties, tax-exempt status, or the deductibility of contributions to the organization. For instance, proposed legislation to eliminate the tax-deductibility of contributions to 501(c)(3) organizations would fall within the so-called “self-defense” exception.
* Examinations and discussions of broad social, economic, and similar problems. Communications on general topics which are also the subject of specific legislation must not refer to specific legislation or directly encourage the recipients to take action.

*Source: Bolder Advocacy: “Public Charities CAN Lobby” and “What is Lobbying Under the 501(h) Election?”*

Generating Earned Media for Policy Advocacy

Elements of Media Advocacy

* Learn about the media available to you, traditional and new media.
* Identify and build working relationships with members of the media who cover your issue area, government, and politics.
* Present your organization as a resource to the media on issue in which you have expertise.
* Prepare your key messages and adapt them for many forms of earned media: letters to the editor, opinion editorials, social media, web postings, and other available outlets.
* Provide the media with contacts 24/7. Their deadlines may not coordinate with your usual working hours.
* Build and maintain good media lists and communications systems for reaching media.

Writing a Guest Opinions/Opinion Editorials (Op-Eds)

Guest opinions (op-eds) are a great opportunity to get your message across to a publication’s readership. It is preferable to placing a Letter to the Editor, as they are given a more prominent placement and are allowed a larger word count. Placement of guest opinions is more difficult than a letter to the editor, but following a few guidelines can increase the chances of it being run by a paper.

**Is it timely?**

* Press cycles can move quickly, and so you want to make sure to have your piece submitted while the issue is still ripe in the eyes of the media. It is recommended that the author submit a guest opinion when the issue is still getting traction in the press.

**Is the author the right messenger?**

* Editors do not typically run guest opinions by just anyone. Having the right author is key to getting a guest opinion placed. An expert on the subject, someone with a unique perspective on an issue, or a prominent figure in the community will have a better chance of getting an op-ed placed. But do not sell yourself short! A lot of people do not think they have the proper credentials, but if you can speak with knowledge and authority on an issue and your position gives you a unique perspective, go with it.

**Is your angle unique?**

* Editors are unlikely to run the same guest opinion subject twice. Look at previous guest opinions to see what has already been covered in a publication. Various perspectives and authors such as providers, board members, legislators, clergy, or a consumer can offer interesting perspectives in guest opinions.

Writing a Letter to the Editor (LTE’s)

Letters to the Editor (LTE’s) are an excellent way to keep your issue in the news and hold legislators accountable. They are also a good venue to thank elected officials and other community leaders for their support.

**Helpful Tips for Writing and Submitting LTE’s:**

* Write a brief outline of the main points you want to make before writing the letter to make sure your themes go together well.
* Most publications have a maximum word count of **200 words** for an LTE. Check the word length requirement before writing your LTE. Keep your message short and to the point, and don’t go over the maximum word count.
* Proofread your letter before submitting.
* Do not use inflammatory language or engage in personal attacks.
* Keep it local. Submit your LTE to papers in your general area (listed below).

Local Media Outlets for Op-Ed & LTE Submission

Below is a list of media outlets by region. Local papers typically accept LTE’s and op-eds online or by email. Contact your local outlet to specify submission preferences, due dates, and word count limits.

**NORTH**

* Bonner County Daily Bee, Sandpoint
* Coeur d’Alene Press, CDA
* Lewiston Morning Tribune, Lewiston
* Moscow-Pullman Daily News, Moscow
* Shoshone News Press, Kellogg
* St. Maries Gazette Record, St. Maries

**WEST/SOUTHWEST**

* Boise Weekly, Boise
* The Courier NEWS, Fairfield
* Idaho Mountain Express, Ketchum
* The Idaho Press Tribune, Nampa
* Idaho Statesman, Boise
* Mountain Home News, Mountain Home
* The Star News, McCall
* Times-News, Twin Falls

**EAST/SOUTHEAST**

* The Aberdeen Times, Aberdeen
* Blackfoot Morning News, Blackfoot
* The Challis Messenger, Challis
* Idaho State Journal, Pocatello
* The News Examiner, Montpelier
* Post Register, Idaho Falls
* The Power County Press, American Falls
* Standard Journal, Rexburg
* Teton Valley News, Driggs