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YWCA IN ACTION

**Blueprint for Successful
State Legislative Advocacy
Campaigns**

Updated June 2026



02 Introduction

- a. A Note to Local Association Leaders and Staff
- b. Why Legislative Advocacy?

05 Fundamentals

- a. 501(c)(3) Nonprofit Organizations and Lobbying Tracking
- b. State-Specific Lobbying Rules
- c. The Anatomy of a State Legislative Campaign

10 Working with State Legislatures

- a. Introduction
- b. The Executive Branch: Governors, Lt. Governors, Secretaries of State, and State Attorneys General
- c. State Agencies: Common State Agencies and Administrative Advocacy
- d. State Legislators: Common Elements
- e. State Legislators: Engagement, Committees, and More
- f. Tips for Establishing Relationships with Elected and Appointed Officials

35 Building External Support and Influence to Advance Campaigns

- a. Advocacy Coalitions: Benefits of Engagement, Guidance, and Examples
- b. Advocacy Communications Tactics: Goals, Types, and Examples

Introduction

Advocacy is not a single activity conducted only during legislative sessions – it is an ongoing organizational strategy for creating durable change, strengthening community voices, and advancing public policy that requires leadership, intention, strategy, planning, and sustained engagement.

While no two states or political environments are exactly alike, successful issue and legislative advocacy campaigns consistently share many of the same characteristics.

This guide is designed to provide a blueprint – the core elements of effective campaigns, best practices, and tips to support Local Association leaders and staff seeking to strengthen state advocacy capacity and engagement.

When the YWCA network's service model, our shared values and mission, organizing strategy, and legislative advocacy work unite, we can improve both short and long-term structural and societal change. **This guide is focused on the legislative advocacy aspect this work.**

A Note to Local Association Leaders and Staff

- **The goals of this guide** are to support your **participation** and **planning** when considering engaging in a state legislative campaign, **deepen your understanding** of this work, and to provide a **reference tool** and source of ideas that can help inform decisions around engagement in different aspects of state legislative advocacy.
- **You can think of this guide as a menu of options and tactics common to legislative advocacy campaigns** that you can choose or draw inspiration from based on your capacity, goals, and the role you want to play in a larger advocacy effort.
- **To make meaningful, valuable contributions to an advocacy campaign, you DO NOT need to engage in everything** represented in this blueprint.

In fact, many successful advocacy campaigns don't utilize every strategy or tactic described.

- **This guide outlines many strategies and tactics that you already engage in every day** when deploying marketing strategies, working with community members, or briefing and appealing to donors and funders. Legislative advocacy, for all intents and purposes, is a marketing or PR campaign.
- **This guide is not exhaustive.** Local Association leaders and staff can expect periodic updates over time and are invited to share feedback with the YWCA Public Policy and Advocacy team to help shape future editions by emailing advocacy@ywca.org.



Why Legislative Advocacy?

Society is a mirror reflecting public policy, and policy doesn't happen by accident. Policy is always a choice. That means there is both enormous opportunity and responsibility – especially keeping our YWCA mission and values in mind – to engage in influencing the outcomes.

Legislative advocacy, which includes multiple elements, is the mechanism we use to influence policy decisions and outcomes.



For more on why state advocacy is even more critical in our current political landscape and more, check out this podcast and accompanying notes from Alliance for Justice's Bolder Advocacy team: [**Rules of the Game: State Advocacy**](#)

State legislatures shape our everyday lives by deciding on funding, access to services, civic and civil rights, public health, education, economic opportunity, and protections from discrimination and violence and countless other issues that YWCA and other nonprofit organizations work on every day.

Whether pursuing new legislation, defending or increasing state budget dollars that invest in the workforce, programs, and services YWCAs provide across the country, or responding to threats against our democracy, Local Associations can play pivotal roles in shaping how community needs are met today and the ways society is shaped by policy.





Fundamentals

- a.** 501(c)(3) Nonprofit Organizations and Lobbying Tracking
- b.** State-Specific Lobbying Rules
- c.** The Anatomy of State Legislative Campaign

YWCA IN ACTION:
Blueprint for Successful State Legislative Advocacy Campaigns

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Fundamentals

What Does it Mean to be a 501(c)(3) Nonprofit Organization

501(c)(3) is an [IRS tax classification](#) that is a designation for businesses aimed at contributing to the public good, including (not limited to) “charitable” organizations.

The IRS tax code specifies that “charitable” includes goals like eliminating discrimination, defending human and civil rights, and relief of the poor, the distressed, or the underprivileged”, which is why YWCAs are categorized as 501(c)(3) public charities.

Lobbying as a 501(c)(3)

Organizations designated as 501(c)(3)s are permitted to engage in lobbying up to certain limits that are measured by expenditure. Lobbying activity related to municipal, state, and federal legislation must be reported to the federal government and must be within limits to maintain 501(c)3 status. There are two ways nonprofit charitable organizations measure those limits to ensure they remain compliant.

1. **Insubstantial Part Test:** Using this process, which is the default unless action is taken to opt in to the 501(h) Expenditure Test described below, means that a nonprofit charitable organization may lobby as long as those activities are an “insubstantial” part of their overall work.

Because there is little explicit guidance around how “insubstantial” and “lobbying” are defined, using this method may leave nonprofits open to subjective interpretations by the federal government. In the absence of clear definitions, it is usually recommended that an organization may remain in compliance if they keep any time spent on lobbying activities to between 3% and 5% of their overall work.

Organizations that very, very rarely engage in lobbying are typically the best fit for the Insubstantial Part Test.

2. **501(h) Expenditure Test:** This method, which organizations must request to use by submitting a form to the federal government, assesses lobbying limits based only on the expenditure in relationship to an organization’s overall budget. Those costs must be clearly documented and include everything related to a lobbying activity, including travel, planning, preparation, content drafting, and more in addition to the act of lobbying itself and must be clearly documented.

TOOLS YOU CAN USE:

Alliance for Justice’s Bolder Advocacy team developed this [guidance and downloadable “calculator”](#) to help nonprofits assess their expenditures in relationship to their limits and this helpful [nonprofit compliance self-assessment resource](#) to help you make sure your Local Association keeps everything in order.

Organizations that know they will be participating in lobbying activities are best served using the 501(h) Expenditure Test because it provides a much more straight forward and clearly defined way to assess limits.

RESOURCE

Alliance for Justice, Bolder Advocacy: [What is Lobbying Under the 501\(h\) Election?](#)

This resource provides **straightforward definitions** and examples of **direct lobbying and grassroots lobbying**, both of which must be documented by 501(c)(3) organizations that have opted in to the 501(h) Expenditure Test.

State Rules Around Lobbying Activities

In addition to these federal guidelines, states also impose rules around lobbying activities related to their individual state governments. **It is critical that Local Associations engaging in lobbying activities stay up-to-date and fully understand the requirements in their states.** This [series of state by state guides](#) is a helpful, thoroughly researched, resource that provides the lobbying and nonpartisan voter engagement rules along with key considerations and additional information for each state.

However, these rules can be changed through the state legislative process. Interpretations and guidance for enforcement can be shifted by state bodies like ethics commissions or by elected leaders like state secretaries of state who typically oversee enforcement.

Therefore, its **extremely import** to ensure that you confirm key information directly with your state and periodically check to make sure your Local Association's understanding is up to date. This is especially important in today's context as efforts to restrict nonprofit organizations' activities continue to increase.

Example: State Rules Around Who Must Register as a Lobbyist

As **one** example of the kinds of nuances 501(c)(3)s must keep in mind, rules around who must register as a lobbyist vary from state to state but are critical for Local Associations to understand if engaging in lobbying activities – whether or not they employ a designated “lobbyist”.

In some states, like Rhode Island and North Carolina, requirements are tied to the state's *definition* of a lobbyist. Other states tie requirements to *expenditures*. In New York, an individual must register as a lobbyist if their compensation and expenses exceed \$5,000 in a given calendar year.

To be very clear, related to this specific question around who is and is not a lobbyist, the analysis necessary for a 501(c)(3) to remain compliant by staying within lobbying limits is **not the same** analysis that applies to ensuring that staff or consultants are following those rules in your state.

However, understanding these nuances remains **very important** for charitable nonprofit organizations engaging in lobbying activities. For example, even if your Local Association is tracking, reporting, and staying well within your lobbying limits, if someone on your payroll is required to register as a lobbyist and doesn't, that can result in fines, reputational costs for your Association, and higher scrutiny of your operations from the state government.



Looking for information about legislative advocacy and lobbying during election years? Check out the guidance and partner resources on this topic [here](#).

The Anatomy of a Legislative Advocacy Campaign

Legislative advocacy campaigns include multiple components that drive success. Broadly speaking, the chart provides a high-level overview of key parts of legislative campaigns. **Keep in mind that to launch a new campaign in your state or join and add value to an existing one, your YWCA Local Association does not need to expedite or lead in all of these areas.** Successful legislative campaigns are collaborative efforts executed over time.

CLEARLY DEFINED GOALS & MILESTONES

Overall Goal and Shorter-Term Goals and Milestones

Legislative campaigns are very rarely completed during a single legislative cycle, and each key step can take a significant level of work. Clearly defining key shorter-term goals is important to tracking and demonstrating success and help to keep the overall goal in perspective.

Example of an overall goal: Pass a paid family and medical bill in Pennsylvania.

Examples of common shorter-term goals (not exhaustive):

- Identification of a legislative champion who will shepherd bill drafting and introducing legislation.
- Introduction of proposed bill in one of the state's legislative chambers.
- Passage of the legislation with key components of the bill intact by a key committee of jurisdiction (the committees most important to moving the bill through the legislative process).
- Achieving a milestone of gaining XX number of legislative co-sponsors on the record in support of the legislation.
- Affirmation from the governor's office that if the bill is passed, the governor will sign it into law.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Review information on the legislative issue/goal that may already be ongoing and the current strategy and state-of-play.

This is important to ensure that work is additive and not duplicative and to gain important perspectives and intel that has shaped the current strategy.

***Quick tip:** It is a good idea to keep in mind that we never want to take up a cause and find we are inadvertently doing more harm than good because we don't understand the current context.*

EXTERNAL PARTNERSHIPS (INCLUDING COALITIONS)

External partnerships and dedicated coalition tables are **critical to:**

- Informing strategy and expediting the plan and various tactics;
- Sharing the workload and providing different skillsets, capacities, and access; and
- Ensuring that key perspectives and communities are informing and shaping the work, and more.

EXTERNAL OUTREACH & ENGAGEMENT

Legislative advocacy campaigns are **ultimately about successful persuasion**. Success cannot be achieved without engaging multiple groups and employing multiple tactics to gain support, and to understand and neutralize potential opposition, which is important for a strong campaign.

Key groups to consider include (not exhaustive):

- State legislators and their offices;
- Community members writ-large who could become allies;
- Individuals who would be impacted (positively or negatively) if the bill passed;
- Industries that could be affected (positively or negatively) if the bill passed;
- Media outlets and associated professionals;
- Funders;
- Grassroots leaders that have high credibility and trust among any of the groups that need to be engaged; and more.

Key tactics include (not exhaustive):

- Different kinds of advocacy communications that educate, persuade, or call individuals and groups to action.
- “Inside game”, or behind-the-scenes work to educate, gain information, or influence key stakeholders and decision-makers;
- Public issue education work with the general public (with or without an ask for action or support) that creates a strong foundation of shared understanding by explaining the problem, how it could be solved, and to dispel myths and misinformation.

FUNDING & ONGOING FUNDRAISING EFFORTS

Successful legislative campaigns can be costly, requiring valuable staff time and potential hiring, materials costs, travel costs for staff or for community members to enable them to take action (for example, hiring a bus to the state capitol), and many other components.

There is a great deal of work that can be done with stringent funding, but considering the potential costs, institutional funders, major donors, and grassroots donors at the start of and throughout a campaign is critical to supporting the work.

***TIP:** Making this piece a part of the planning at the outset will help you build the content and track the success you’ll need to attract and maintain funding.*

Working with State Legislatures

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Working with State Legislatures

Working with State Legislatures and Other State-Governing Bodies

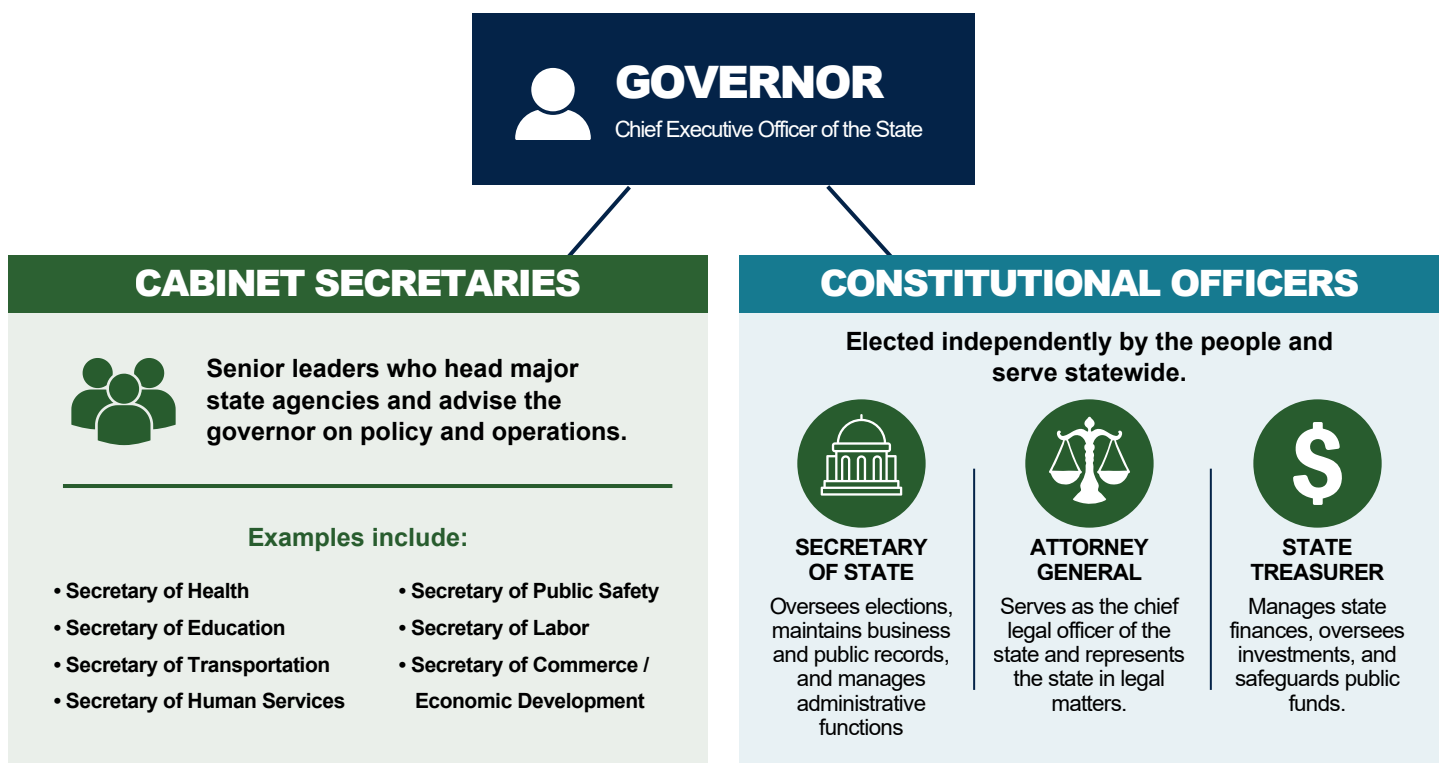
While every state government has its own unique structure, rules, traditions, and political culture, most state legislative systems share a common foundation. Legislatures introduce, debate, amend, and vote on bills; governors exercise executive authority and often have veto power; committees review legislation before it reaches the full chamber; and state agencies implement laws once they are enacted. Understanding these common elements provides advocates with a framework that can be applied across states, even as specific procedures and requirements vary.

Executive Branch

The executive branch in a state government is responsible for carrying out and administering state laws, programs, and services. After the legislature passes laws, including the bills that set the state's budget, the executive branch puts those decisions into action through state agencies and departments.

For advocates, the executive branch is often where policy becomes reality. Executive branch leaders make decisions about how programs are designed, funded, regulated, and delivered to communities.

Executive Branch of State Government



Note: Titles and structures vary by state.

Governor

The governor is the chief executive officer and primary representative of a state's executive branch. Most governors are elected to four-year terms and may serve additional terms depending on state law. As chief executive, the governor proposes a state budget, signs or vetoes legislation from the state legislature, implements and enforces laws, appoints leaders of state agencies that oversee policies and programs, and works with the state legislature and congressional delegation on key policy issues and legislation.

Common Key Roles in a Governor's Office



These roles work together to support the governor in setting priorities, leading state government, and delivering results for the people.

Engaging with Your Governor's Office

It's important for Local Associations involved in state advocacy campaigns to build relationships with governors and their staff. Governors set policy priorities and propose state budgets – both of which can include Local Association goals. They also work with legislators to advance these priorities and have the authority to sign or veto legislation.

Examples: Ways Your Local Association Can Engage with Your Governor's Office

- **Build your relationship** with the governor directly and with the governor's key staff through informational, introductory meetings, and by initiating a cadence of regular contact (see additional guidance and examples in the next section);
- **Advocate for state legislative solutions** that would address a problem or need in your community;

Section 3: Working with State Legislatures

- **Advocate for the inclusion of or specific levels of funding** for programs YWCAs provide in a governor's priorities for legislators via appropriations legislation or in a state budget.
- **Ask the governor to weigh in during key legislative moments;**
 - **Advocate for the governor to sign** a legislative proposal you support into law;
 - **Advocate that a governor's office reject** a legislative proposal that would be harmful to your Local Association, your programs and services, or members of your community;
 - **Advocate ahead of the governor's annual State of the State** address for budget items or issue priorities your Local Association has prioritized;
 - **Advocate that the governor weigh in** – publicly or behind the scenes – during debates on proposals you support; and
 - during the federal appropriations process around programs that provide funding through state pass through grants and other issues that can impact a state's budget.
 - **To thank** the governor and their staff for supporting priorities important to your YWCA.

Tips: Staying Updated and Understanding Your Governor's Priorities

Being aware of what's going on is important generally and can help you prepare for an upcoming meeting with the governor or their staff. **The easiest way** to stay updated about a governor's agenda and activity by visiting your governor's official website and **signing up to receive their email updates or newsletter**.

You can also:

- **Set up internet notifications**, like Google alerts, with your governor's name and the priority you want to track. Alerts like this can capture press coverage of a governor or their office's activities, like press conferences and speeches.

EX: "Governor Unity" + "domestic violence"

- **Review your governor's biography**, via their website or other sources, to help you better understand more about who they are and their longstanding priorities.

NOTE: The [National Governors Association](#) (NGA) is a trade association for governors that can provide additional information about a governor's background, family, interests, and priorities.

Examples: Ways to Engage with Your Governor and Their Staff

- Outreach to the governor to share considerations, concerns, or specific advocacy requests.



TIP: A letter from a Local Association CEO, a group of CEOs in your state, or signed by coalition partners you are aligned with to advocate for or against a legislative proposal or an issue you'd like the governor's office to take action around is a very effective advocacy communications tactic.

Section 3: Working with State Legislatures

- Requesting in-person or virtual meetings with the governor's office to advocate for specific requests – like the inclusion of a YWCA budget line-item or a specific funding level for a child care/early learning, violence prevention, or housing-related program that your Local Association provides or wants to support in allyship with other Associations in your state – or asking for the governor's commitment to signing into law or vetoing a specific bill once it is passed by the state legislature.
- Sharing invitations for a governor and/or their key staff to attend a site visit at your Local Association or to join for a key Association moment – like a ribbon cutting for a new facility or a Woman of Achievement event.



TIP: A governor or their staff attending a public event – like a ribbon-cutting or breaking ground ceremony – can also be a great opportunity to generate press (see the Advocacy Communications section below for more on this tactic) and capture images that you can share with funders and your board.

The How-To: Reaching Out to Governor's Offices

It's important for Local Associations involved in state advocacy campaigns to build relationships with governors and their staff. Governors set policy priorities and propose state budgets – both of which can include Local Association goals. They also work with legislators to advance these priorities and have the authority to sign or veto legislation.

1. Visit the governor's website to find contact information for the office and its staff.

If you need to reach a specific staff member, **call** the governor's office and ask for:

- Their name
- Title
- Contact information
- Policy or scheduling responsibilities

2. Requesting a Meeting or Event Participation

- Check the governor's website for a "Contact Us" page or request portal.
- This portal is how staff track and respond to requests.
- Use available online forms to:
 - Request a meeting.
 - Invite the governor to an event.
 - Share information about an issue or policy priority.
- Submit any required formal letter in addition to the online request.
- Follow up within two business days by phone or email to confirm receipt of your request.



TIPS: If there is no online request form available: Follow any scheduling guidance you may have received in step 1 or reach out via phone, email, or formal letter and request a meeting or invite the governor for a site visit or to speak at an event.

Meeting Considerations: If the governor is unavailable, request a meeting with:

- The Chief of Staff
- A policy advisor or legislative affairs staff member responsible for your issue area or budget priority.

Lieutenant Governor

Lieutenant (Lt.) governors are the highest-ranking chief executive officer after the governor. The position, like that of the United States vice president, is unique and lacks a defined set of job responsibilities beyond being next in line to succeed the chief executive in the event of death, resignation, or removal.

As a result, a lieutenant governor's responsibilities vary by state and are usually assigned by either the governor's office or the state legislature.

Examples: Common Responsibilities of Lt. Governors:

- Leading a department or agency.
- Appointment by the governor to serve on commissions, committees, and boards.
- Authorization from the governor's office to make appointments to commissions, committees, agencies, or boards.

Lt. governors may also advocate to the governor or others to support or oppose legislation or to include issues related to the Lt. governor's own priorities and interests.

Finally, roughly half lieutenant governors preside over their state senate. Thus, by serving in their state legislatures, especially in the Senate, they are members of both the executive and legislative branches.

Engaging with Your Lieutenant Governor

Local Associations may choose to engage with the lieutenant governor's office based on their responsibilities, alignment with your legislative priorities, or as an alternative representative at events the governor cannot attend.



TIP: The National Lieutenant Governors Association (NLGA) is a trade association for lieutenant governors. Resources provided by the NLGA can be helpful to review before meeting with a lieutenant governor's office or simply familiarize yourself with their role or background.

Examples:

- **Advocacy letters:** Send a letter to the lieutenant governor asking them to support your priority within the governor's office.
- **Public event invitations:** Include the lieutenant governor on invitations to the governor to attend public events (like ribbon cuttings), noting that the Lt. governor is invited to attend in addition to or in lieu of the governor's attendance. Executive branch support – particularly from the governor or Lt. governor's office is helpful for both relationship-building and to further validate and amplify the work of your Local Association. Lieutenant governors may also run for higher office later, such as governor or United States senator. Developing relationships with them now can pay off later.

Lieutenant governors may also run for higher office later, such as governor or United States senator.



Lt. Governors in Action

Spotlight: Lt. Governor Peggy Flanagan

Lt. Governor Peggy Flanagan (Minn.), is a member of the White Earth Band of Ojibwe, and currently the country's highest-ranking Native woman elected to executive office. Her priorities are children, working families, communities of color and Indigenous communities, and Minnesotans who have historically been underserved and underrepresented.

Lt. Governor Flanagan co-chairs the Young Women's Initiative to center the voices of young women in state government, works to advance housing stability and serves as chair of the Minnesota Interagency Council on Homelessness, Lt. Governor Flanagan has also been integral to successful legislative efforts, including the establishment of the nation's first Missing and Murdered Indigenous Relatives Office, and securing investments in affordable housing and child care.

Examples of and Ways to Engage with Your Lieutenant Governor

- Phone call, email, or letter to share information and raise awareness of your interest in serving on or being appointed to a board, commission, or task force on issues important to your YWCA, such as a state commission on domestic violence or a state task force on housing affordability.
- In-person meeting to urge the lieutenant governor, in their official capacity as a member of the legislative branch, to support legislation improving access to direct-mail voting in the state.
- Invite them to visit your YWCA for a tour or to speak at an event on an issue that is important to them and the community you serve.

State Attorney General

The state attorney general is the highest law enforcement official in the state and serves in the state's executive branch. Like the lieutenant governor, a state attorney general's authority and duties can vary from state to state.

In general, the attorney general serves as the primary legal advisor to the governor and state legislature. They issue legal opinions and guidance on state laws and their implementation to state agencies, businesses, and nonprofit service providers.

COMMON DUTIES OF STATE ATTORNEYS GENERAL

- **Providing** legal advice to state agencies and officials
- **Representing** the state in court
- **Defending** state laws when challenged
- **Enforcing** consumer protection laws
- **Investigating and prosecuting** certain types of fraud
- **Participating** in multistate litigation
- **Issuing** legal opinions interpreting state law



Attorneys General in Action

Spotlight: The Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) and State Attorneys General

Depending on the state, the Attorney General's office may:

- Administer VOCA victim assistance grants.
- Set funding priorities and grant guidelines.
- Convene victim service stakeholders.
- Advocate for state funding of crime victim services.
- Operate victim assistance divisions.
- Collect data on victim needs and service gaps.

Engaging with Your Attorney General

Similar to other government officials, you may want to engage with your attorney general to build a relationship with their office, share information about YWCA work in the state; raise awareness of key issues, policies, or programs, or constituencies of interest to you or the YWCA; and discuss state and federal legislation and budget proposals.



TIP: The National Association of Attorneys General (NAAG) is a trade association for state attorneys general that provides key information, like background, duties, and contact information that can help your Local Association understand more about both the role in your state and background context for a specific state attorney general.

Examples: When to Engage Your State Attorney General

State attorneys general have come together to file lawsuits against the federal government – particularly federal agencies – around issues related to federal funding freezes, delays, and elimination and ICE immigration enforcement.

- Outreach to a state attorney general may be appropriate when your Local Association wants to support those efforts by sharing specific examples that could appear in litigation led by an attorney general or attorneys general or to learn more about additional litigation that your YWCA may decide to join.
- If a state adopts a new voter registration or voting process that appears to conflict with state election law or disproportionately prevents eligible voters from registering, your Local Association or coalition can engage the Attorney General's office to seek clarification, request the enforcement of state law, or raise concerns about voter access and compliance.

Secretaries of State

The secretary of state serves in the state's executive branch and, depending on the state, is an elected or appointed position. Like lieutenant governor and attorney general positions, their responsibilities and duties depend on the state they are in; however, most perform administrative functions such as record-keeping for the state and administering and overseeing state elections.

Secretaries of state are often **the chief elections official in a state** and in that role, may oversee:

- Various or all aspects of elections in the state, including data security, voter registration, voting methods and vote processing, post election vote audits or recounts, and election results certification. They also promote civic engagement and provide election information and details.
- Some secretaries of state lead “Address Confidentiality Programs (ACP)”, also commonly referred to as the “Safe at Home” programs that make special provisions for survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, and/or stalking to vote without sharing their home address.
- Secretaries of state often weigh in at the federal level around issues impacting elections, such as the use of mail-in ballots and the sharing of voter registration rolls, as well as efforts to expand or restrict access to voting. They also provide voters in their state with information on voting laws and requirements for elections and discredit false information.
 - 501(c)(3) nonprofit filing processes in their state

Secretaries of state oversee elections in 47 states and the District of Columbia.

In comparison, in Alaska, Hawaii, and Utah, the lieutenant governor oversees elections.



Examples of and Ways to Engage with Your Secretary of State

- **Requesting a meeting or sending a letter** to advocate that your state:
 - Strengthen or implement a program like Safe at Home to protect survivors.
 - Establish partnership around civic engagement and participation.
 - Provide clearer guidance on 501(c)(3) nonprofit filings and compliance.
- **Sharing an invitation to speak** at an event or gala recognizing champions of democracy and securing free and fair elections.
- **Joining disability advocates in your state** or sending your own letter to advocate for more accessible voting locations and provisions or to push back on potentially harmful legislation – like those that would restrict mail-in-voting, which is critical for the disabled community.



State Secretaries of State in Action

Spotlight: Washington Secretary of State: Address Confidentiality Program

Washington's Secretary of State operates one of the nation's longest-running Address Confidentiality Programs. The program provides survivors of violence with a substitute address that can be used in government records, including election-related records, helping survivors vote while maintaining their safety and privacy.

The **National Association of Secretaries of State** (NASS) is a trade association for Secretaries of State / Lieutenant Governors who oversee elections in their states that can provide additional information about your specific secretary of state.

State Agencies

A state agency is an important part of the executive branch and is organized by issue areas, such as the Department of Children and Families or the Department of Human Services. They implement legislation, oversee policies and procedures, work with the governor on the state budget proposal, and allocate funding for departments, programs, and services under their authority. Agencies also implement congressional requirements for federally funded programs and services, such as child care supported by the federal Child Care Development Block Grant. Additionally, they work with members of the state legislature, local governments (such as mayors), the state's congressional delegation, individuals, organizations, and businesses interested in the areas, policies, and programs under their authority.

- **State Departments of Health and Human Services** may oversee:
 - **Head Start, Early Head Start, and other pre-K child care and early learning** programs.
 - Programs related to **survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault**, including violence prevention programs.
 - Public funding for **shelters and emergency housing**.
- **State Departments of Social Services** may oversee:
 - Various state assistance programs, including food and energy cost assistance for low-income communities.
 - Programs and supports for survivors of violence, including children.
- **State Departments of Education** may oversee:
 - Job training and apprenticeship programs.
 - Aspects of child care and early learning programs from the perspective of workforce engagement and development.

To find a list of state agencies, visit your state government's webpage. To learn more about a state agency and its departments, programs, and policies, visit the agency's website.

Engaging with State Agencies

It's important to engage with state agencies because they implement legislation, develop and administer regulations, oversee programs and grants, and manage state and federal funding that supports services

and programs within their authority.

State agencies also oversee rules and regulations, which allow agencies to assert their authority over programs and legislation. Rulemaking has also become a way for agencies to pursue ideological approaches to programs, services, and the implementation of laws. Local Associations (and individuals) can engage in the rulemaking process, which is considered “administrative advocacy,” when you wish to advocate for or against a proposed rule. State agencies also engage in a process referred to as “rulemaking.”

The rulemaking process: Depending on the state, the process typically includes:

- Drafting proposed rules
- Issuing Notices of Proposed Rules (NPRMs) with designated timeframes for the public – including organizations like Local Associations – and individuals to submit public comments in support of or against a proposed rule.
- Reviewing public comments submitted in response to NPRMs.
- Holding public hearings (in some cases).
- Revising proposed rules based on feedback.
- Issuing and implementing final rules.

Engaging in Administrative Advocacy Through the Rulemaking Process

- Familiarize yourself with your state’s rulemaking process, including how to locate rules proposed by state agencies important to you and your YWCA, as well as how the public can submit comments and testify at public hearings.
- Set up online alerts or sign up for agency newsletters and updates to receive notifications of rules that are being proposed by agencies that oversee programs and services that your Local Association cares about.
- Once you identify a rule for any agency that you would like to submit comments on, follow the process outlined by your state. You can submit a comment as an individual or as a Local Association.
- Depending on the process identified by the agency, Local Associations may also decide to testify at agency hearings. Testimony should share the specific impacts and, whenever possible, specific stories and experiences from program participants and community members. You can encourage stakeholders such as program staff and participants to participate as well.

Tips for Effective Public Comments

In administrative advocacy campaigns, **the volume of individual comments** – which agencies must review – **can be very important** to influencing the outcome of a proposed rule.

But, unlike legislative advocacy campaigns where it is common and effective to share form letters to demonstrate a breadth of support, **many agencies group identical messages as just one comment.**

- When using templates provided by a coalition partner or other source, make sure to adapt the suggested messaging to your Association’s voice and include language specific to your programs and services, communities served, and the ways the proposed rule could impact your Local Association.
- Customizing your comment in these ways can **help you make the highest impact** by making it clear why your organization – specifically – is opposed or in support and **can help to ensure that your comment is counted as an individual submission to the agency.**



Rulemaking in Action

Spotlight: California Civil Rights Council AI Employment Regulations (2024 - 2025)

Proposed rule: The California Civil Rights Council proposed regulations governing employers' use of automated decision systems in hiring and employment decisions.

Advocacy and public comments: Employers, civil rights organizations, technology companies, and labor advocates submitted extensive comments raising concerns about definitions, liability standards, and compliance requirements included in the proposed rule.

Outcome: In response to the outpouring of comments, the Council extended the original public comment period from 15 to 30 days and issued updated and modified text that **ultimately led to substantially revised provisions** that the rulemaking record specifically tied to the comment process.

State Legislatures

State legislatures are the government bodies – like Congress at the federal level – that create, amend, and repeal laws, including appropriations legislation related to a state's budget.

The structure and processes for state legislatures vary by state, but in most cases, legislators serve in either the **upper chamber** (the State Senate) or the **lower chamber** (the State House or Assembly).

- **State senators** don't represent the entire state like United States senators do, but they often represent larger districts and more constituents than **state representatives or assembly members** who typically represent small and much more localized districts.



TIP: Engaging with the legislators that make up lower and upper chamber leadership, like a senate president or speaker of the house/assembly, can be a valuable way for Local Associations to leverage their time and influence.

These leaders, much like in Congress, can oversee the legislative agenda for the session – dictating which legislative proposals are addressed and which are not, use their position to “whip”, or build support, for their party's priority bills, and many other functions related to state legislation.

- **State legislatures operate on either annual or biennial (every other year) legislative cycles** for their legislative sessions, which is when lawmakers meet to consider legislation, including state budgets.
 - **Annual cycle legislatures** meet each year to consider legislation and state budget proposals which can translate to advocates as short turnaround times to advocate for or against proposed legislation and higher competition when working to convince a lawmaker or lawmakers to take up a specific priority.

- **Biennial cycles** generally provide more time for planning and advocacy between sessions, but that can also mean long delays, a build-up or priorities for legislators to turn their attention to, and contextual changes and unavoidable impacts on communities related to a problem proposed legislation could solve.
- **The length of a state's legislative session and the calendars for the senate and house or general assembly vary by state.** Knowing the duration of sessions in your state is important to both planning activities like state lobby days, and how much time you may have to engage in a process like the state budget, which can have important impacts on Local Associations' programs, services, and other priority issues.

Example

- Some states, like Utah – which only meet for 45 days – have very short legislative sessions, which makes advance planning, relationship-building, and early engagement key to effective advocacy efforts.
- It is common for advocates to engage with state legislators between sessions. For a Local Association, this could look like requesting meetings (in states where legislators serve year-round, regardless of the session length), sending invitations for site visits and events at your Association, and attending public events where the state legislators you need to reach are likely to be in attendance.

Learning About Your State Legislature

- Local Associations can find information – like legislative calendars, leadership, proposed legislation that the legislature is taking up, and much more via your state's legislature website.
- [The National Conference of State Legislatures \(NCSL\)](#) is also a reliable source, providing comprehensive information, like **each state's legislative calendar**, information about party leadership, research, **50-state ballot and bill (by issue area, like [early childhood](#)) tracking** resources.

**Note: Because NCSL is a membership organization serving state legislators and their staff, some resources are not available to the public.*

Tips: Planning for Advocacy Action

Understanding the workflow and reviewing the legislative calendar in your state can be helpful to planning events like state lobby days.

- **Example:** Although this varies and should be confirmed for your specific legislature, for many states, the legislative workweek during sessions follows a general flow; Mondays and Fridays are often days for work in the state capitol, where legislators may be engaged in floor votes, committee hearings, and meetings with fellow lawmakers, advocates, constituents, and state agencies.
- Throughout the legislative session, Local Associations can consider **engagement focused on key decision points**, including bill and budget introductions, committee hearings and votes, floor votes, and the governor's signature or veto.

Engaging with State Legislators

Engaging with the state legislators that represent Local Association services areas and serve on committees responsible for moving legislative proposals related to your Association or your state's Local Association coalition's priorities is one of the most essential and effective ways to engage in state legislative advocacy.

Tips for Successful Engagement

- **Getting to Know Your State Legislator**

Learning more about your state legislators by reviewing their official websites – including biographies, press releases, and recent press coverage, speech transcripts, and/or their office's social media posts can also offer valuable insight, especially prior to a meeting with the legislator's office. Identifying shared interests in addition to better understanding their issue priorities is an important way to build productive, authentic relationships.

- **Contacting Your State Legislator**

- **Contact information is available on the legislator's website.** If you are seeking the name and contact information for a specific staff member who handles the legislator's schedule or is responsible for a policy issue or legislation, you should call the office and ask for the name and contact information of that staff member.
- **When requesting meetings,** if the legislator is unavailable, a meeting may be scheduled with an individual, often called a policy advisor or legislative staffer, who handles the policy issue or budget item to be discussed. Meeting with staff is very common and oftentimes, the staff person you meet with is more up to speed than the legislator because they have expertise in the area you're discussing.

Examples: Key Opportunities to Influence State Legislation, Including Budget Decisions

To influence legislation and state budget decisions, engage with policy makers at key points throughout the legislative and budget processes. Opportunities include:

- At the beginning of a legislative session to congratulate elected officials on their election or reelection and establish relationships.
- When seeking a sponsor to introduce legislation or champion a budget priority.
- When legislation your Local Association supports is introduced to publicly endorse the legislation or advocate for the state legislators that represent your Local Association's service area to support the bill by signing on as a co-sponsor.
- During committee hearings and votes on legislation, including budget proposals, to advocate for or against bills, amendments, funding levels, or program changes.
- When legislation moves to "the floor" – which means the proposed bill has moved through the committee process and all members of the legislative chamber will debate and cast votes – to urge lawmakers to support or oppose the bill or amendments that may be added during the floor process.

Section 3: Working with State Legislatures

- During conference committee negotiations, when differences between House and Senate versions of legislation or budget bills are reconciled and final decisions are made.



TIP: Seeking bipartisan support for legislation, including budget proposals, that your Local Association has prioritized, can greatly improve the chances that a legislative proposal will move through the full process to become a law and can help to ensure that the law is not overturned or revisited and made less effective in the future.

Identifying State Legislators

- Legislators are most responsive to their constituents – the people who live in the districts they represent – and organizations, like your Local Association, that serve people in their districts.
- Visit your state legislature’s website to find the tools – usually, a submission form where you can insert the specific addresses of your facilities – that will identify the legislators who represent your Local Association’s facilities (and staff or board members if you are encouraging individual engagement).
- Mapping all of the relevant districts related to your Local Association can help you exert as much influence as possible and can help you expand your network of legislative contacts and relationships, identify potential allies, and identify connections to key committees and chamber leadership.

Examples of Ways to Engage with Your Legislators

- Phone calls, emails, and letters shared via email to express your support or opposition to legislation that will be coming before a committee the legislator is assigned to or a full chamber vote.
- Requesting in-person or virtual meetings to urge the legislator to support or oppose legislation.
- Sharing an invitation for the legislator to visit your Local Association for a facility tour or a public event, like a groundbreaking ceremony.

State Legislative Committees: Essential to How a Bill Becomes a Law

Legislative committees are responsible for moving – or not moving – a legislative proposal through the process toward becoming a law. Typically, that process looks like:

1. A bill is introduced by a legislator or group of legislators in the upper or lower chamber – or both.
2. The bill is referred to one or more legislative committees that review, consider amendments, and hold hearings that will determine what is ultimately included in a proposal and whether or not it will continue to advance.
3. Once a bill has cleared all of the relevant committees, also referred to as “committees of jurisdiction”, the leadership for the upper and lower chamber of the legislature or a “Rules Committee”, which – depending on the state – typically controls the calendar for the full floor of their respective chamber, decides if a bill will be called to a “floor vote” and if so, when that vote will occur and any processes the chamber will follow for its debate and consideration process.



TIP: Committee hearings are often scheduled with minimal notice and may be posted online shortly before they occur.

To stay informed, check to see if you can sign up for committee alerts or newsletters or contact the committee chair's office and speak with the committee clerk or the staff member responsible for committee matters.

Every time a committee approves proposed legislation that has maintained the components that matter most to your Local Association is a major milestone – many bills stall and ultimately fail to pass in the full state legislature because a committee failed to achieve a successful vote.

Examples: Common State Legislative Committees Relevant to YWCA Priorities

Committee names and responsibilities vary from state to state. It is important to review the information provided on your state legislative website or on the websites for the upper and lower chambers of your legislature, which will list specific committees, members of committees, and additional information.

- **Rules Committee:** Rules often oversees and manages the legislative processes and – in some states – makes decisions about when and if a bill will advance to a full chamber debate and vote.



TIP: Delaying or not scheduling a vote can be a key part of the legislative strategy for bills your Local Association opposes.

- **Appropriations, Finance, and/or Budget Committees:** These committees typically review state spending related to funding for survivor services, housing, child care and early learning programs, and other state budget related items.
- **Health and Human Services (HHS) Committee and Education Committees:** This committee may be engaged in legislation related to domestic violence and sexual assault legislation and programs, public assistance programs – like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as food stamps), and legislation related to child care and early learning and related programs.
- **Judiciary Committee:** Judiciary committees usually oversee criminal and civil laws, including victims rights, discrimination protections, and other matters that may be related to courts.
- **Labor, Workforce, and/or Economic Opportunity Committees:** These committees are typically engaged in issues related to pay equity, paid family and medical leave and paid sick days, workforce participation and other employment/employee-related legislation.

A Note on Committee Structure

All legislators serving on committees important to your Local Association's legislative advocacy priorities hold considerable influence over whether legislation advances through the full process.

However, if any of the lawmakers that represent your Local Association and its facilities are committee chairs or vice-chairs, you have the opportunity to engage with the most influential leaders.

- **Committee chairs and vice chairs** are often (but not always) appointed by the majority and minority parties – respectively - represented in the state legislative chamber.
- In some states, the upper or lower chamber **may have a specific process that engages a wider range of legislators**, like a vote, to make decisions about committee assignments and leadership.

Committees are often managed by **non-elected/non-legislative staff** that include roles like:

- **Committee Directors or Committee Staff Directors**, who manage the committee's operations, serve as advisors to the chair, and are often the primary point of contact for advocates and other stakeholders.
- **Committee Clerks or Committee Secretaries**, who manage committee agendas, hearing notices, submissions of testimony from the public, and other administrative supports.

The Next Steps: Full Floor Debates and Votes

- If chamber leadership or a Rules Committee have decided to move a bill to the full chamber floor for debate and call a vote, a bill may go through multiple rounds of passage between chambers **until both chambers can agree on revisions and are able to pass identical version of the proposed legislation**.
 - When the upper and lower chambers of a state legislature need to resolve differences in a bill, they may engage in processes like conference committees, which are special committees formed where leaders from each chamber can meet and negotiate.
 - When both chambers have passed identical bills, the proposed legislation moves to the governor for signature or veto.
 - If the bill is enacted – or signed into law by the governor – a date will be determined for the new law to go into effect.

Specific Legislators: Caucus Members

Legislative caucuses are groups of lawmakers who work together around shared interests, such as political party, policy issue, program, or constituency. Caucuses are typically led by a chair or co-chair and may be partisan or bipartisan.

For **advocates, issue-based caucuses can be valuable allies**. Their members often have a strong interest in specific policy areas, serve on key committees, and can help support, amend, or advance legislation and budget priorities. Because many caucuses are bipartisan, engaging caucus members can help build support across party lines.

Caucus membership lists are also useful for identifying potential champions, bill sponsors or co-sponsors, event speakers, and other legislative supporters.

Tips for Successful Caucus Outreach

- **How to Find a Caucus List**

Locating a list of state caucuses can be challenging. The easiest way to find information about your state legislative caucuses is to search online or contact your state legislators and ask them to help you find a list of caucuses in their chambers.

- **How to Meet with a Caucus Member When You Aren't a Constituent**

If you are not a constituent of the caucus member you want to meet, call their office and ask to speak to the legislative staff handling the caucus work or the issue you want to discuss. Explain who you are and that you want to meet about an issue, legislation, or budget proposal that may interest them based on the caucus focus.

Specific Legislators: Champions and Allies

One of the most enjoyable and meaningful parts of legislative advocacy is the opportunity to work with champions. There are two types of champions:

- Legislative champions are legislators **who serve on key state legislative or budget committees**; are invested in relevant issues, policies, and programs under the committee's authority; and have the authority to support, amend, or oppose legislation or a budget proposal in committee.
- Issue champions **may not serve on the primary committee but** have an interest in or passion for an issue, policy, program, or constituency being impacted, and **can vote for or against the bill if it comes to the chamber floor**.

It is important for you to engage with champions because they are legislators who can introduce YWCA supported legislation and who will often work tirelessly behind the scenes to gain the support of other legislators and committees. Champions lend their time, staff, and passion to advocate for the issues, policies, programs, and constituencies they support.



Legislative Champions in Action

Spotlight: Former Wisconsin State Senator Rep. Gwen Moore

Former Wisconsin State Senator Gwen Moore, who now serves in the U.S. House of Representatives (D–Wisc.), was a dedicated champion for ending violence against women, strengthening anti-poverty initiatives, and promoting racial justice in the state of Wisconsin. As chair of the Wisconsin Legislative Black and Hispanic Caucus and a member of the Joint Finance Committee, she played a key role in the shaping of the state's budget and securing funding for programs important to Local Associations in the state. Drawing on her personal experience with poverty, domestic violence, sexual assault, and gun violence, Rep. Moore used her committee positions to ensure the interests of poor and low-income individuals, women, survivors of violence, and Black and Hispanic Wisconsinites were represented and protected in the budget process.

In 2024, State Senator Moore was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives, becoming the first Black woman elected to serve in Congress.

Identifying Legislative Champions

If you are seeking legislative champions, start by identifying legislators who have:

- **Demonstrated commitment** to some or all of YWCA's mission and values;
- **Publicly demonstrated support for YWCA priorities**, like domestic violence or sexual assault services, child care and early learning programs, and/or housing; and
- **A track record of advocating on behalf of communities important to YWCA**, including survivors, parents in need of high quality, affordable child care and early learning options, communities of color, women, and veterans.

Legislative champions may also share priorities important to the YWCA mission, like opposing racial profiling and supporting women's economic security by working to advance paid leave.

Sometimes, champions simply share a passion for a specific issue with a Local Association, as was the case with the introduction of the federal Safe Salons Act, which piqued the interest of U.S. Senator Marsha Blackburn (R-Tenn.) after YWCA Nashville and Middle Tennessee shared information about the state law they had worked to introduce and champion in their state.

Key Opportunities for Identifying and Engaging Legislative Champions

- When your Local Association is interested in working with a state legislator or legislators to draft and introduce new legislation;
- When working to advocate for additional legislative support – like co-sponsorship for a priority bill – and you need the help of a champion willing to lead the behind-the-scenes work, like circulating a “dear colleague letter” urging their peers to join them as co-sponsors; and
- During key legislative moments, like committee hearings and votes led by a committee your champion serves on or before a full chamber vote.

Connecting and Engaging with Allies

In addition to champions, you can identify legislative allies. Allies are legislators who have alignment with issues that your Local Association prioritizes and/or who have co-sponsored legislation that your Local Association supports.

Tracking and engaging with allies is important because:

- If your Association is represented by an ally, you can support the legislator's work to advance a bill by providing them with stories about the lived experiences of their constituents and the impacts a proposed bill may have on their lives.
- Most legislative advocacy campaigns take more than one legislative session – in many cases, several – to see a bill signed into law. Helping lead-cosponsors bring legislators that served in a previous session back on board by advocating for their co-sponsorship when a bill is reintroduced is a valuable way to contribute to a multi-year effort.

Tips, Tricks, and Templates for a Successful Lobbying Meeting with Elected Officials

Preparation

- **Determine the specific goal of the meeting** and your ask of the elected official (to support or oppose a piece of legislation, introduce an amendment to a bill etc.).
- **Prepare for meetings that may last between 15 minutes and one hour. Most meetings are about 30 minutes, but some may be shortened to 15 minutes** due to unforeseen circumstances. Be ready to present your top three points if time is limited.
- **Research the elected official you are meeting with.** One of the biggest ways to show respect to the offices you are meeting with – and to get the meeting started off well – is to know something about the elected official.
 - Review their official webpage.
 - Read the legislator's biography, look for key constituencies they care about – like youth, seniors, veterans, and crime victims, issues they care about, and review press releases to get a sense of their recent activity.
 - Check to see which committees the legislator serves on and note committees that are important to your Local Association's priorities and the specific bill you are meeting with the legislator about.
- **Identify who you will be meeting with.** Many times, you will meet with legislative staff rather than the legislator. Reviewing any background information about the staff member you will be talking to can be a valuable way to have an impact that can help to carry your message to the legislator effectively.
- **Create notes for yourself** with the most important points you want to discuss in your limited time during the meeting – these could be sharing the stories of the constituents they serve, data about the impact of a program you provide to the community that would be impacted by the proposed legislation, and other supporting information.



You don't need to present data heavy or policy expert-level information. The most important value add you can provide is sharing the ways a proposed bill would help or harm the community members the legislator serves and their real-life perspectives and experiences.

If the elected official is a known supporter of YWCA or has a personal or professional connection, express gratitude for their ongoing support. Use meetings as opportunities to strengthen relationships and increase awareness of YWCA initiatives, regardless of prior support.

Section 3: Working with State Legislatures

- **Prepare any documents** – like a backgrounder on your Local Association that includes information like the areas you serve, programs, services, and supports that you provide to communities, and your key priorities and/or information about the bill you are there to discuss.
- To prepare for your meetings as a YWCA coalition or if you are joining a meeting with external coalition partners, **work with your group to create a “run-of-show”** with speaker assignments to ensure you are able to effectively convey the key points your group wants to make.

This may look like:

- Selecting 2-3 spokespeople to lead and speak during the meeting.
- Determine which speaker will share which points, make the ask to oppose or support legislation, and who will open and close the meeting.
- Roles can include
 - A meeting facilitator who will open the meeting, begin introductions, and close with final points.
 - A note taker who will later share information gathered and what happened in the meeting with the group.
 - Which attendee will take charge of following up after the meeting on behalf of the group.
- **Monitor your schedule:** Offices of elected officials often reschedule meetings due to changes in the legislative calendar, such as a vote that was scheduled after your meeting was confirmed. About one week before your meeting and on the day before, contact the legislator’s office to confirm the date, time, and whether the meeting is in-person or virtual.

On the Day of Your Meeting:

- Check your email and voicemail for any last-minute updates from legislative staff regarding meeting changes. If you are running late or cannot attend, promptly notify the elected official’s office.
- **Remember:** State legislators are community members just like you. They are elected to serve their constituents, which includes the leaders and staff of your Local Association and the people you serve.

After the Meeting:

- It is important – to your **relationship with the legislator’s office**, to **reinforce key points made in the meeting**, to **provide supplemental information** you may want to share, and to answer any outstanding questions from the legislator or their staff – to follow up with a thank you message to the people you or your group met with after the meeting.



TIP: The sooner you can send a thank you message, the better. It is best to follow-up **within 1-3 days**, when your conversation is still fresh in the minds of the legislator or staff you met with.

You can use **the template provided below** to begin drafting your follow-up message before you meet so that all you need to do is add any specific points you want to reference from the meeting itself before you send your message.

Template Legislator Meeting Thank You Message

[Click here for Word template.](#) [Click here for Canva template.](#)

[Placeholder: Your Association's logo]

Title and legislator's name

[Title of chamber, i.e. Georgia General Assembly or North Carolina State Senate]

[Office you met with – street address]

[City, State, Zip]

Cc: [Staff you met with]

Dear [elected official or staff you met with],

Thank you for taking the time to meet with YWCA [association OR list of associations attending the meets] on [date] to discuss [xxx]. These [issues, programs, policies, or legislation] are [critical/harmful] to our YWCA Local Association(s)' ability to [xxxx]. We [strongly support/oppose] them.

I/We [thank you for your support and your continued commitment to OR urge you to protect, defend, and increase xxx].

As I/we noted in the meeting, [include the key points that were made or stories that were shared. [If there was a question you would like to address further. To follow up on your question about x + more information.

Enclosed are [name any additional documents you are including with your follow-up].

Finally, we would welcome the opportunity to host you at [YWCA Association] in [city] to continue our conversation and [tour our facility or attend a public event, like a ground breaking and ribbon cutting]. This will give you a firsthand look at how we serve your constituents. Please let us know your availability to schedule a visit.

In the meantime, please don't hesitate to reach out if we can be of assistance.

Thank you,

[Name]

[CEO and/or President, or other title of the person who attended the meeting]

YWCA [Association name]

Tips for Establishing and Maintaining Relationships with Elected and Appointed Officials

To be an effective legislative advocate, it is essential to build and maintain relationships with lawmakers and their key staff that go beyond one specific ask or moment in time, like a state lobby day or a meeting.

Like all of us, legislators and their offices are more likely to give you their time, build trust with you, provide you with “insider” information, and consider or support your priority issues or legislative advocacy goals when there’s an effort to move beyond a purely transactional request.

Local Association leaders and staff are juggling many priorities beyond advocacy, so they can’t devote the same time and resources to building these foundations as a dedicated lobbyist or advocacy-only organization.



It can be easy and very common to feel intimidated when interacting with people who hold power.

But don’t forget:

Elected leaders are people, just like us, with interests, passions, families, and lives beyond their jobs.

The following tips can help establish the relationships you need without spending all of your time at your state’s capitol.



TIP #1: Establish a cadence of communication that begins with a simple introduction rather than a specific ask.

Introductory Meetings

*Does your governor’s office or the state legislator who represents the district where your main facilities are located **know who you are, who you serve, and what you do that benefits your community?** Are there **newly elected leaders** that will be entering state government in new roles or for the first time? The most effective advocacy relationships begin long before a specific legislative ask is made.*

In 2026, voters will decide the outcomes of **state legislative races in 46 states and governor’s races in 46 states, kicking off new state legislative sessions across the nation in 2027.**

That creates the perfect opportunity to schedule virtual or in-person introductory meetings with key leaders, like your governor or the legislators who represent the area(s) where your Association and facilities are located, to begin establishing your relationships.

Introductory meetings are not focused on a specific legislative ask or commitment. Instead, they offer a chance to establish your Local Association or coalition as a trusted community resource, educate policymakers about your work and impact, and begin building relationships to support future advocacy. These meetings are particularly valuable following an election when a new legislator takes office.

Sample Goals for an Introductory Meeting

- Introducing your Association or coalition of Associations, the YWCA mission, and the services and programs you/your sister Associations provide.
- Sharing key information about the populations and communities you serve.
- Highlighting your local and statewide impact.
- Learning about the legislator's priorities and interests.
- Identifying areas of mutual concern or opportunity.
- Establishing your Association or coalition of Associations as a resource on relevant issues and experiences and as a dependable "ear to the ground" that can help a legislative office better understand the needs of your community.
- Inviting the legislator to visit a program, facility, or attend an event.

Sample Questions for an Introductory Meeting

Introductory meetings are an opportunity for your Local Association to engage and learn more about the elected leader you are meeting with, allowing you to develop an authentic relationship. They can also provide key insights into what a leader values and cares about, which can be very important to informing how you approach them with future policy requests.

- Which issues are most important to you for this **legislative session**?
- Which issues and policy areas are **most important to you**?
- What **inspired you to run for office** for the first time/last year (if newly elected for the first time to public office)?
- How can our YWCA **be most helpful** to you?
- Are there issues affecting our community or experiences community members have shared with us that **you would like to learn** more about?

Establishing a Cadence

Once you have begun to lay the foundations of your relationship, it's important to establish a regular or semi-regular cadence. What and how you communicate does not need to be complex – the goal is to continue dialogue and keep you and your work on your elected leaders' radars.

Consider the ways that you may be able to integrate work your Association is already doing into a touchpoint plan. ***This could look like:***

- Sending a brief email when your organization launches a new program, receives a significant grant, publishes a report, or reaches an important milestone.
- Inviting legislators to site visits, ribbon cuttings at new facilities, community events, or other activities that showcase your impact.

- Sharing a success story, community need, or emerging trend that helps policymakers better understand the issues facing the people you serve.
- Sending a brief email to congratulate a state legislator on a new committee assignment, leadership position, or policy accomplishment related to your mission (signing up for an elected leader's newsletter is an easy way to receive that kind of information automatically).

Example: A Four Point Annual Touchpoint Plan

Of course, the more communication the better, but even a few interactions each year – outside of lobbying visits and requests of support – can be enough to begin to establish a relationship and keep your Local Association on the radar in a meaningful way.

- 1 January - March:** Schedule and participate in one introductory meeting.
- 2 April - June:** Share one site visit invitation. Even if you are not able to schedule the visit, the outreach and information about the facility or facilities you are highlighting and the communities you serve communicates important information about your work and impact.
- 3 July - September:** Share at least one update related to your work and its benefits to your community – this could be as simple as adding an elected leader's staff to a quarterly newsletter, adapting an impact update prepared for a funder for a simple email touchpoint, or sharing a newspaper article featuring your Local Association.
- 4 September - December:** Schedule one end-of-year check-in to revisit some of your introductory meeting questions to your elected leader, share news of progress, or preview your priorities for the next calendar year. Even four meaningful interactions each year can be enough to establish and maintain a productive relationship.



TIP #2: Consider your “brand” to more concisely communicate what your Local Association or Collective of Local Associations want legislators to associate with you.

Building a consistent reputation around your Association's priorities and values helps keep your work and the communities you serve on elected leaders' radar.

- **Consider the identity you want to establish at the State Capitol.** Beyond YWCA's national mission and brand, are there specific issues, values, or areas of expertise you want lawmakers to associate with your organization? A clear and consistent identity that adds depth to the YWCA national brand can help strengthen your credibility, visibility, and influence with elected officials and their staff.
 - **If you are working collectively,** identify the common threads that unite your Local Associations – whether that is reflective of services you provide in your communities or a specific shared legislative goal. A clear and consistent identity will help strengthen your credibility, visibility, and influence with elected officials and their staff.
- Like any successful branding effort, the goal is not to communicate every detail of your organization. Instead, focus on how you want to be perceived and the **key messages you want policymakers to remember when they think of your specific YWCA or YWCAs in your state.**

Building External Support and Influence to Advance Campaigns

- a.** Advocacy Coalitions: Benefits of Engagement, Guidance, and Examples
- b.** Advocacy Communications Tactics: Goals, Types, and Examples

Building External Relationships & Support to Advance Campaigns

Landscape Analysis

External Relationships, Partnerships, and Outreach are Critical to the Success of Any Legislative Advocacy Effort

One of the first steps in launching or deciding whether to join an advocacy campaign is gathering as much information as you can about the existing landscape.

Landscape mapping is an important process that involves identifying the organizations, coalitions, advocates, and stakeholders that are actively engaged in an issue and/or working to advance a specific piece of legislation. Taking the time to understand the current state of play, including information about who is involved, what strategies are being pursued, and where gaps exist can help your Association determine the best ways to leverage its capacity and strengths in ways that add to and strengthen existing work and avoid wasting time and accidentally duplicating efforts.

This process is particularly important when considering coalition participation or partnerships with allied organizations and leaders. Acknowledging existing efforts can also help your Association position itself as collaborative partner, which is important to build trust and relationships with allies.

Three Steps to Help Local Associations Gauge the Landscape

1. If you have a relationship with an **allied elected leader**, ask if and who they may have heard from about your issue.
2. **Ask other community-focused organizations** you may have relationships with if they have been engaged in advocacy efforts or have a sense of others who may be working on the issue.
3. **Look online for public records of advocacy activity**
 - Legislative hearing testimony
 - Coalition sign-on letters
 - Public comments on regulations
 - Press releases
 - Advocacy campaign websites
 - Op-eds and media statements

Coalitions

Coalitions, also often referred to as coalition “tables”, are defined groups comprised of organizations, advocates, and stakeholders that work together around a shared issue, goal, or set of goals. Coalition partnerships can expand capacity by allowing each group to leverage complementary strengths, share resources and information, coordinate strategies, and demonstrate broad support and public will for a policy proposal.

*Put simply, strong coalition partnerships mean that **your Local Association does not have to fill every role needed or be in all places at once to do this work well.***

For YWCA Local Associations and other service and program-providers that are not exclusively focused on policy and advocacy work, these relationships are essential to maximizing your unique strengths as community service-oriented organizations working to both meet immediate community needs and achieve our mission to eliminate racism and empower women.

Key Benefits of Participating in an Advocacy Coalition

- **Shared workload.** Coalition members can divide responsibilities based on expertise, capacity, and resources, reducing the burden on any one organization.
- **The ability to leverage specialized expertise.** Coalition partners often bring different strengths, such as policy analysis, lobbying, communications, grassroots organizing, subject matter expertise, research, or data analysis.
- **Access ready-made resources that can be used as-is or adapted.** Many coalitions develop talking points, fact sheets, action alerts, legislative updates, advocacy toolkits, and other materials that members can use or adapt, saving time and effort.
- **Increasing advocacy capacity.** Participation allows Local Associations to engage in advocacy efforts that might otherwise exceed their available staff time, budget, or expertise.
- **Preventing duplicating efforts.** Coalitions help organizations coordinate strategies, share information, and build on existing work rather than creating parallel efforts. For Local Associations, which are community service-first rather than advocacy-first, this is a particularly valuable way to maximize capacity.
- **Expanding your reach.** Coalition partners often have relationships, audiences, and networks that can help amplify messages and engage a broader range of stakeholders.
- **Strengthening the credibility of an advocacy campaign.** Policymakers are often more receptive to issues supported by a broad coalition of organizations than by a single organization acting alone.
- **Demonstrating broad support.** Coalitions help show that an issue affects multiple communities, sectors, and groups of people, making it more difficult for decision-makers to dismiss.
- **Creating opportunities for learning and relationship-building.** Coalitions can help organizations develop new advocacy skills, stay informed about key policy developments, and build relationships with potential partners, allies, and funders that may be engaged in the campaign.

How Coalitions are Structured

Coalition Structures: Learn more about the ways coalitions can be structured, additional best practices, and view sample resources, like coalition agreements that can support how a table operates in [this guide](#) prepared by YWCA USA's coalition partners at [Alliance for Justice](#).

Checklist for Powerful and Purposeful Coalitions: This [resource](#) from [Midwest Academy](#) can help you assess an existing coalition to consider ways you may want to contribute its makeup and processes or to help you build your own coalition – including across YWCA Local Associations in your state.

The structure of coalitions can be organized in several different ways that vary based on the level or need for specific formalities, fiscal responsibility, or how quickly a particular issue needs to be addressed. Some coalition tables require dues to participate, but many do not. Most importantly, a coalition should be comprised of organizations and stakeholders that represent a diversity of communities, perspectives, and interests.

Considerations: Who Should Be At The Table?

The most effective coalitions make an **intentional effort** to include participants, like proximal leaders, organizations representing or serving specific communities, and advocates who can speak from the perspective of the individuals that are directly impacted by the problem or gap that a policy solution would fill.

This **ensures that the coalition table is making well-informed decisions and prevents strategies or outcomes that may intentionally cause harm** to the very communities a legislative campaign seeks to support. YWCA leaders can help to recruit coalition members to existing coalition tables they participate in or build their own tables keeping these groups in mind.

It can also be helpful to consider partners that would likely be aligned with the goals or values of the coalition that could bring valuable skillsets and access to your effort.

Considerations may include:

- Ensuring that the voices and perspectives of the people who would be **most impacted** by this legislation or the advancement of an issue campaign that includes a legislative component.
- **Skill sets and expertise** needed to advance the work: Start by asking the question, “who can be engaged to both add capacity and strengthen the quality of the work of the campaign?”
- **Diverse communities** should be represented so that cultural considerations – like previous harms or boundaries – and other perspectives that can shape messaging, tactics, and other considerations and ensure your coalition table is intentionally incorporating a standard of diversity and inclusion throughout the entirety of the campaign.
- In some cases, engaging organizations that can bring youth voices that have a direct stake in the issue to the table can help to shape the strategies and solutions.



TIP: This can include race and ethnicity, but it also can include faith, disability, and other groups that may be typically marginalized and underrepresented.

TIP: Practically, a coalition table isn't likely to be able to include every group that may be able to inform the crafting of a legislative proposal. However, ensuring **this lens is an intentional and actively revisited part of your coalition work** from the beginning is a key way to continue to build the most effective group. **Keep in mind that as a coalition grows, perspectives missing from the table will continue to become clearer.**



Examples: Advocacy Coalition in Action

It takes many voices to successfully achieve a legislative advocacy victory. These two examples exemplify what this can look like.



State: The [Colorado FAMILI Coalition](#) is a broad state-based coalition that encompasses **multiple constituencies**, including organizations representing the women's community, child care and child advocacy leaders, healthcare organizations, labor, and more, that successfully advocated to pass a statewide family and medical leave law in Colorado that went into effect in 2024. Now, the coalition focuses on providing information that supports individuals and employers in navigating the law.



National: [The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights](#) (LCCHR) which is the nation's oldest, largest, and most diverse coalition dedicated to advancing and protecting civil rights. It is organized around issue-based task forces, like the Voting Rights Task force that YWCA USA actively contributes to and participates in. LCCHR is widely credited for the confirmation of the first Black woman to serve as a United States Supreme Court Justice, Ketanji Brown Jackson, because of the **coalition's ability to organize and mobilize multiple constituencies**.

Ways YWCA Local Association Leaders & Staff Can Engage with Coalitions

*As leaders and staff of YWCA Local Associations, **you have valuable and unique perspectives and expertise** around the communities you serve, their needs, and what it means to be a community service-focused organization with a values-based mission to eliminate racism and empower women.*

A Local Association leader or staff member does not need to have deep policy expertise, a high level of capacity, or a history of doing this kind of work to make important contributions to a coalition and/or legislative advocacy effort. In fact, the types of things Associations can contribute are often critical elements that inform, guide, and mobilize action in support of a coalition's legislative advocacy goal(s).

Examples of valuable ways Local Associations can contribute to coalition efforts include:

- **Strong leadership skills** and the **ability to think nimbly** and **remain solution-oriented** thanks to the diversity of work and community needs that your Associations work to meet every day;
- **Data** related to programs and services that demonstrate community need, relevance, and impact that can be critical to making the case for a proposed legislative solution;
- An **understanding of what communities need that can:**

Section 4: Building External Support and Influence to Advance Campaigns

- Ensure a policy proposal or campaign “**does no harm**” unintentionally and **genuinely meets community needs**.
 - **Explain and exemplify the real-life experiences and perspectives** from your own voices as Local Association leaders and staff and those of the community members you serve through tactics like storytelling, testimony submitted to legislative hearings or at legislative lobbying, educational, or introductory meetings.
 - These experiences can help to **shape a legislative proposal**, a **coalition’s strategy**, and **remind elected leaders of the humanity** behind a legislative campaign and the human cost of inaction (or action if the work is related to preventing a harmful proposal); and
 - **Help lawmakers personally and/or emotionally connect** to the issue or problem to address, making them much more likely to engage meaningfully and act.
 - **Information and insights** around certain processes, like the federal or state grant process, processes related to nonprofit services, programs, and other community-related supports that may be important to understanding and addressing the problem a proposed law could solve;
 - **Brick and mortar spaces** for events, press conferences, trainings, or meetings.
 - **Access and reach to educate, persuade, and mobilize community members, leaders, and stakeholders** that other groups may not have.
 - **And much more.**
-

Advocacy Communications Tactics

Advocacy communications tactics are important to all legislative advocacy campaigns, but they can be particularly helpful for Local Associations, which may not have a lot of dedicated capacity for advocacy work or be near a state capitol, to maximize reach and influence.

These tactics can be used to reach all the key groups that an advocacy campaign focuses on – elected officials, the general public and community members, stakeholders and leaders, and potential partners and allies, coalitions, and more.

Common Goals for an Advocacy Communication

In the context of a legislative advocacy campaign, the goals for a communication typically fall within three categories – education, persuasion, and action/mobilization. Regardless of the intent of your advocacy communications work, **key audiences** you may need to reach include:

- State legislators and their staff;
- Governors and their staff;
- The general public;
- Specific communities and stakeholders that are directly impacted by the issue or who may be affected by the implementation once a legislative proposal is passed and signed into law.
- Specific communities that may be influential later in the campaign; and
- Funders.

Goal: Education

The goal of education in the context of legislative advocacy is to provide accurate, objective information about an issue or specific legislative proposal that helps audiences understand an issue, its cause(s), and the impact of the issues.

Educational efforts can raise awareness, identify unmet needs, highlight challenges and opportunities, and demonstrate how proposed policies may affect individuals, communities, businesses, industries, and nonprofit organizations.

Goal: Persuasion

Communicating messages that will persuade an audience is a substantial part of the work in any legislative advocacy campaign and can move decision-makers and key influences from awareness of an issue or legislative proposal to active support for a specific policy outcome.



REMEMBER:

When engaging an elected or appointed official, focus on how an issue affects the community *they specifically serve*.

For example, if you are asking a state legislator to support a proposed legislative solution, explain **how that legislation would benefit the people in their district** and the **cost of inaction**.

It can be helpful to think about effective persuasion communications in this common framework:



1. **Head:** Providing evidence, such as data, information, and testimonials



2. **Heart:** Sharing experiences and values that others can relate to or may be moved by emotionally.



3. **Trust:** Engaging “trusted messengers” to communicate information.

These three elements together create a powerful and persuasive message.

• **What are “trusted messengers” and why do they matter?** An audience is most likely to consider arguments about the need for a legislative solution if the person delivering the message already holds some level of trust. Consider who can best share your message with key stakeholders and decision makers to maximize effectiveness. Examples of common trusted messengers can include faith leaders, business owners, and other key community stakeholders.

Example of a trusted messenger appealing to legislators by incorporating both data and a real-life example:

On Friday, Jane Equality, the CEO of YWCA Utopia, who has been an integral part of our community for the last 20 years, delivered powerful testimony to a key committee at the state legislature in support of a policy that would cap rent increases and protect tenants.

Section 4: Building External Support and Influence to Advance Campaigns

“Nearly half of renters in America spend over [30% of their income](#) on rent, making it challenging to afford the rest of the basics. For Jamilla, a highly skilled child care and early education worker employed by YWCA Utopia, even competitive pay and overtime opportunities have meant working two full-time jobs for the past five years just to afford rent and basic necessities for her family.

Because our state does not have a law that caps how much a landlord can raise rent when a lease is renewed, Jamilla faced a \$250 per month increase last year and was forced to leave the community where she had lived and raised her family for 15 years. She now has to commute more than 90 minutes to get to work, costing her four times as much in gas as before and taking away critical time – like helping her children with homework or getting home in time to put them to bed.

Our community members deserve protection from unreasonable rent increases.”



TIP: The practice of relational organizing is focused on how we, as individuals, can harness our own relationships and networks – *where we are **already** the trusted messenger* – to move change and dispel myths. To learn more about relational organizing and how this strategy can maximize your reach, [this resource](#) can help get you started.

- **Always consider your audience:** Tailor messages to the policymaker’s values, priorities, district demographics, and committee responsibilities.
- **Lead with shared values:** Start from common ground before discussing policy specifics.
- **Use clear, simple language:** Avoid jargon and explain complex issues in plain terms.
- **Practice “message discipline”:** Stay focused on the key messages that need to be communicated and adapt and repeat them consistently across different kinds of outreach.



TIP: Repeat or reinforce your key messages across your advocacy communication efforts. Any Op-eds, social media posts, fact sheets or talking points your coalition may use should all leave the audience with the same takeaway.

- **Anticipate opposition and potential concerns:** Do your best to understand the points that an individual, lawmaker, or other influential group or leader may have in opposition to your efforts. Taking the time to find ways to proactively address those points and offering solutions can be an effective way to ensure the conversation continues and demonstrates that you have taken the time to understand your audience.
- **Keep your messages relevant to the audience:** Whether you are working to persuade members of your local community or a state lawmaker, connect the problem and potential legislative solution to your local community or the groups that your audience may care about most.

- **Frame benefits, not just problems:** Explain what the policy will achieve rather than only describing the issue it addresses.
- **Always keep your credibility in mind:** Providing accurate, well-sourced information in your advocacy communications is essential for building and maintaining trust. When you clearly cite data or acknowledge the sources behind your ideas and evidence, you strengthen your credibility and make it easier for your audience to engage with your message and consider what you're asking them to support or act on.



TIP: Presenting data and information using concise language and professional formats or designs (thinking about social media graphics or imagery that may be developed to support your work) is another way to communicate credibility and professionalism.

Goal: Action / Mobilization

The goal of communication focused on action or mobilization is simple: ***These are the messages we use to move individuals who are thinking about and considering an issue or proposed policy to do something about it.***

Key Audiences for Advocacy Communications

Regardless of the intent of your advocacy communications work, **key audiences** you may need to reach include:

- **Elected and appointed state officials:**
 - State legislators and their staff.
 - Governors and their staff.
 - State agency leaders and staff
- The **general public**;
- **Directly impacted people and groups:** Individuals and communities of people that are directly **impacted** by the need or problem and would be **directly benefited or harmed** by the legislative proposal.
 - **Examples:** *Members of a community that will no longer be represented by fair electoral maps in their state or parents who live in a community facing the closure of its only affordable child care center.*
- **Indirectly impacted people and groups:** Individuals and groups who may not be specifically helped or harmed by the passage of a legislative solution but would be impacted by its implementation.
 - **Examples:** Small business owners or service nonprofits – Local Associations – adjusting to a new statewide paid sick days law or taxi drivers who may be impacted by a new road toll.
- **Constituency groups:** are comprised of individuals united by factors like gender, socio-economic status, race and ethnicity, age, parenthood (like Black women, mothers, and Gen Z), or other shared qualities (like veterans, nonprofit service providers, or teachers).
- **Influencers:** Specific leaders, stakeholders, or social commentators who are respected by and are already speaking to the people you need to reach.
 - **Examples:** Social media influencers, faith leaders, and close advisors to an elected or appointed official.
- **Funders and grassroots donors**

Examples: Applying Advocacy Communications Strategies to Legislative Campaigns

Often, due to tight legislative timelines, limited capacity, and other constraints, advocacy communications end up trying to achieve multiple goals at once. For example, a single message might combine education with persuasion or include both a request for action and supporting information. This can absolutely be effective.

However, when possible, it can be helpful to take a phased approach – building a strong foundation of understanding and support before making a specific ask.

Example #1: A Social Media Campaign Geared Toward Your Followers and the General Public

Phase 1: Education and Awareness

Timeline: Week 1

Primary Goal: Help audiences understand the issue and why it matters.

Communications Focus:

- Define the problem.
- Explain who is affected and how.
- Share facts, data, and research.
- Raise the visibility of the issue.

Phase 2: Persuasion and Support Building

Timeline: Weeks 2 - 3

Primary Goal: Build support for a specific policy solution.

Communications Focus:

- Explain the proposed legislation or policy change.
- Highlight benefits and expected outcomes.
- Share stories, expert perspectives, and supporting evidence.
- Demonstrate why action is needed.
- Address common questions or misconceptions.

Phase 3: Mobilization and Action

Timeline: Weeks 4 - 5

Primary Goal: Encourage audiences to take specific advocacy actions.

Communications Focus:

- Requesting an action or actions, like:
 - Contacting a legislator or legislators;
 - Attending hearings, rallies, or advocacy day;
- Submitting testimony to a committee before a hearing or a public comment in response to a proposed rule issued by a state agency;

Phase 4: Reinforcement and Follow-Up

Timeline: Ongoing or directly following a key moment.

Primary Goal: Maintain engagement and communicate progress.

Communications Focus:

- Provide legislative updates.
- Thanking supporters, lawmakers, and partners.
- Preparing audiences for future advocacy opportunities.
- Celebrating milestones and successes.
- Encouraging continued engagement.

Example #2: An Advocacy Communications Strategy Related to Your Work With an Elected Official

Phase 1: Education – Introduction and Awareness

Timeline: Ongoing; ideally before a legislative need arises.

Primary Goal: Ensuring an elected leader and their staff are familiar with your Local Association and what you do to benefit their community.

Potential Tactics:

- Please refer to the examples provided in Section III, Working with State Legislatures, such as adding a legislative staffer to your newsletter, and other ways you can communicate who you are, what you do, and how your Local Association serves your community beyond direct meetings.
-

Phase 2: Education – Specific to the Issue, Need, or Problem

Timeline: Prior to or during legislative consideration of an issue.

Primary Goal: Increase the elected official and their staff's understanding of a specific problem and potential solutions.

Potential Communications Tactics:

- **Drafting and sharing documents** that clearly outline the issue or problem directly with a legislator's office (*Tip: this could be a document you email or leave behind physically following an introductory meeting*).
 - **Communicating lived experiences, or “stories”, from individuals with direct experience with the issue or problem a proposed bill would help to solve:** Creating a visually-focused document or series of social media graphics that shares photos and quotes from community members and/or colleagues or staff who are comfortable engaging publicly (this could include perspectives and experiences related to providing a particular service or program or their own personal experiences).
 - Participating in or organizing a **legislative briefing for a group of lawmakers**.
 - **Participating in press conferences or press calls** that will be reported in the media market where your lawmaker lives or works.
 - **Drafting an op-ed or public blog (that is shared with the lawmaker's office) explaining the issue or problem.**
-

Phase 3: Advocating for Action

Timeline: Before and directly after a legislative milestone, like a vote or a hearing.

Primary Goal: Gain the lawmaker's support, demonstrated by action (like co-sponsoring the proposed legislation or writing a “dear-colleague” letter to urge other members of the legislature to support the proposal).

Potential Tactics:

- Organizing or participating in an advocacy day and sharing action photos via social media demonstrating public support for the request.
-

- Sharing an action alert on your website and via email to members of your community asking individuals to write a letter to the elected official urging their support.
 - Signing on to coalition letters that urge legislative action.
 - Submitting written testimony at a legislative committee hearing.
 - Engaging in earned media tactics, like drafting an op-ed or participating in a press conference that specifically names the elected official and the request for support for the proposed legislation.
-

Phase 4: Continuing the Relationship

Timeline: After legislative action.

Primary Goal: Maintain and continue to strengthen your Local Association's relationship with an elected leader.

Potential Tactics:

- **Creating thank-you graphics** celebrating the victory and recognizing the **lawmaker(s), community members, and/or coalition partners** who participated.
- **Creating a digital** "community card" to deliver to a legislative office signed by community members in the district the lawmaker serves to share their appreciation.
- **Writing and submitting a letter-to-the-editor** in response to a news article reporting on a victory or positive milestone thanking the legislator(s), community members, or coalition partners who have engaged in the campaign.

Examples: Different Tactics and Audiences

Engaging the General Public

When engaging the general public, do your best to keep examples as broad as possible to attract the attention of different kinds of audience members. Consider the larger benefits a policy could have on community members beyond those who may be immediately impacted.

- **Example:** When talking about a program like Head Start, point to both the benefits to children and parents **AND** how access to child care bolsters local economies because when parents can remain in the workforce, they are more able to spend as consumers, which is good for **everyone**.

Engaging Targeted Audiences

It is important to identify a few of the more specific audiences that can be most important to legislative advocacy work. These groups often have cross-over – for example, a small business owner may also be a Black woman, advocate, and a parent.

Keep in mind: We all identify ourselves as members of multiple groups and no group is a monolith. However, using messages that appeal to a group's shared traits or values can be an effective way to attract new attention and engagement.

Appealing to Targeted Audiences: Scenario Based Example

Scenario: The only child care and early learning center in a rural community faces closure because the state may cut funds from its budget.

- **Constituency group (mothers across the entire state):** *Despite meaningful progress toward gender equality in the United States, women continue to carry most family caregiving responsibilities. In Dignity County and across the lakes region, programs like Head Start are often the only option families have for child care and early learning. If those programs close, many mothers would be forced to leave the workforce, losing income their families rely on to make ends meet.*
- **Directly impacted constituency group (moms):** *Moms in our county understand what it would mean if the YWCA child care center closes. Many of us would be forced to leave our jobs and find other ways to put food on the table. We need to come together to support one another and raise our voice – making sure State Senator Persimmon and other leaders understand exactly how cuts to this funding would affect our families.*
- **Indirectly impacted group (small business owner):** *When parents are forced to leave the workforce because they no longer have access to the YWCA child care center, local businesses feel the impact. Staff may be unable to cover shifts – or may have to leave their jobs altogether, making it harder for businesses in Dignity County to operate. Increased hiring and training costs, combined with staff shortages, put additional strain on employers. At the same time, families who lose income will have less to spend in our community. Even if you don't have children at home, these funding cuts affect all of us.*

Advocacy Communications Tactics & Tips To Educate, Persuade or Call for Action

• Social Media



TIP: By tagging individuals or groups, you can use social media to demonstrate a coalition partnership, thank or call a specific lawmaker to action, or reference the author or news publication of a piece you are sharing. In particular, if the individual or group you tagged re-posts or replies, this can help you widen the audience that sees your post.

• Blogs and Newsletters



TIPS to help you get your blog post in front of more people, consider:

- **Sharing your blog beyond your Local Association's website:** You can consider posting on social media or adding it to newsletters or other communications you already have planned.
- **Engaging others to repost your content:** Consider engaging staff and colleagues, organizational partners and allies, and others repost your content to help you engage with audiences you don't typically interact with.
- **Teaming up with a coalition partner organization, an elected official, or a community leader:** Consider contributing to an external partner's blog or co-writing a piece that would be shared by both parties.

• Informational Content

- **Fact sheets:** Short pieces aimed at providing key information to engage potential external partners, to educate communities, or to provide to an elected or appointed official.
- **Briefs:** Longer, in-depth, and typically highly technical documents that are usually best for people like policy makers, agency officials, or coalition partners that have deep expertise or are highly engaged in an issue.
- **Talking points:** Messaging based content that conveys information about your issue or a proposed bill that can be geared toward a specific or public audience that you can use to encourage message discipline internally and can encourage a partner or ally – like a coalition group, elected leader, or other partner stakeholder to adopt.
- **“Elite” Media Tactics:** Content that will be published, like a **newspaper op-ed** or **letter-to-the-editor**, a written piece that would appear in an **online news or special interest magazine** (*Newsweek* and *Ms.* are good examples of this, though the latter appeals to a more specific but wide audience).



TIP: You can also engage newspaper and magazine **editorial boards** to publish their own piece on your issue or proposed legislative solution. Working with an editorial board can add third-party validation to the issue or solution, making it more appealing for some audiences, and can help you develop relationships with these key members and deciders in the press

Resource: This [guide](#), prepared by the Union of Concerned Scientists, provides additional information and tips around how to engage editorial boards.

- **“Earned” Media Tactics:** Publicity or media coverage that an organization receives from an independent third party, like a news outlet, podcast, or online publication, rather than content the organization pays for or publishes itself.



TIP: If your Local Association does not have relationships with members of the press, working in partnership with a coalition member or allied elected leader can help you gain media attention.

Examples of earned media

- Press conferences and press calls.
- Public events that may be newsworthy (*and provide the opportunity to include information about your issue*) like a ribbon cutting at a new facility or a YWCA Woman of Achievement/Distinction awards ceremony.
- Issuing press statements, releases, and advisories.

Examples:

- A local CEO or President sharing a reaction to something that has publicly occurred.
- Sharing a new report with data relevant to an issue you want to highlight.

Section 4: Building External Support and Influence to Advance Campaigns

- Inviting the press and the public to the opening of a new facility or programmatic event.
- Advisories of “media availability” that highlight that a Local CEO or staff member with a specific area of expertise or experience is available to speak to reporters and offer valuable information or perspectives.
- The “elite” media tactics noted above, like op-eds and letters-to-the-editor are also earned media tactics.

• Direct Supporter Engagement Tactics

- **Action alerts:** Content developed for the public to ask an individual to take action, most typically by asking the audience members to send a letter or make a phone call to an elected leader urging them to support or oppose a legislative proposal.
- **Petitions:** Content that individuals can sign on to that indicates support, opposition, or to call for an elected leader or stakeholder to take action.
- **Sign-on letters:** Content organizations develop for other organizations that breaks down an issue, explains why it matters, and makes the case for or against a specific legislative action.
- **Issue-specific newsletters and updates:** Content that shares how the campaign is going, new information, or calls to action that are specific to the issue or legislative proposal you are focused on.



TIP: When geared to supporters in your community, these kinds of communications can be important, not just because they share valuable information, but because they can help you keep supporters engaged over long periods of time – and legislative campaigns are not brief.

These kinds of communications can **help supporters feel like they are part of something bigger and that progress is being made** – even when that progress is incremental. *If you are working with coalition partners, sharing or contributing to their communications can be a much easier lift.*



eliminating racism
empowering women

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YWCA IN ACTION

**Blueprint for Successful
State Legislative Advocacy Campaigns**