



American
Alliance of
Museums

Making the Case for Museums: 75 Advocacy Ideas in 75 Minutes

Alliance Annual Meeting – Baltimore
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ad·vo·ca·cy

/ˈædvəkəsi/ [ad-vuh-kuh-see]

noun, plural ad·vo·ca·cies. *the act of pleading for, supporting, or recommending*; active espousal:

He was known for his advocacy of states' rights.

Origin:

1375–1425; late Middle English advocacye < Medieval Latin advocātia. See [advocate](#), [-acy](#)



Advocacy is...

...FUN

...EASY

...IMPORTANT

...EVERYONE'S JOB





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75 Advocacy Ideas In 75 Minutes



1. As a museum employee, or volunteer, or supporter, you CAN advocate.
2. Advocacy and lobbying are not the same thing; there are important differences.
3. As a museum employee, or volunteer, or supporter, you CAN lobby.



4. Advocacy is really about providing information and building relationships. Identify a key relationship to build.
5. The best time to build a relationship is when you don't need anything. Start with a shout out or introduction.
6. Advocacy is non-partisan. Advocate both sides of the aisle, and start with a presumption of "innocence/support."



7. Elected officials, and their staffs, look forward to meeting with museum folks. Be a resource to these offices.
8. Location, Location, Location - all politics is local. Localize your story.
9. Be a squeaky wheel! Don't rely on others to make your case - you have to carry your own water.



10. See the future. Often today's school board member is tomorrow's Congressman or Congresswoman.
11. Invite your elected officials to your museum, programs, and events.
12. Follow up any bulk mail invitation with a hand written invitation, and hand-deliver invitations to local offices.



13. Ask to be included on the “about the district/state/city” page of their website.
14. Provide copies of brochures and printed materials to state legislators’ and federal elected officials’ offices.
15. Send a copy of catalogs from new exhibitions with a personal note.



16. Share testimonials with your elected officials. If teachers or students provide thank you notes or pictures after a school group visit, share them.

17. Offer to host or participate in the Congressional Art Competition. Work with your U.S. House Representative.



18. Serve as the location for a legislator's annual legislative briefing or town hall meeting.
19. Serve as the site for a US naturalization or citizenship ceremony, or as a polling place.
20. Never burn a bridge...you don't know when you might have to cross back over it.



21. Drink the Kool-aid – believe that advocacy matters and get involved.
22. Do simple things, and do them often – (Invite elected officials to your events, attend their events, send them a letter or share news about the museum.)
23. Don't do it alone – work in coalition and engage your board and staff.



24. Know who your legislators are, and learn about them.
25. Communicate with elected officials **BEFORE** you need anything.
26. Send a letter after elections congratulating elected officials. Introduce your institution and share how you serve their constituents.



27. Take a picture showing how your museum is serving constituents and send the picture with a handwritten note to your elected officials.
28. Ask people who have had a great experience at your museum to write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper.
29. Clip letters to the editor or positive news stories and share with elected officials.



30. Communicate regularly with legislative staff.
31. Say thank you....as often as possible.
32. Invite legislators to visit your museum – not only for big events and openings, but to see a program in action, such as a school in their district visiting your museum. Give them a photo op in your museum with their constituents.



33. Create your economic impact statement for your institution, with great photos, using the template on the Alliance web site. Distribute this widely to elected officials and the media.
34. Collaborate with other cultural organizations in your community to develop a community economic impact statement. See the Alliance web site for examples.
35. Visit legislators in their home districts – state legislators during their legislative breaks and members of Congress when they are on recess.



36. Follow, listen, and respond to Alliance advocacy alerts, and state and regional association calls to action.

37. Advocate not only with elected officials, but with the executive branch of state government, too. Reach out to the Governor and other state offices.

38. Consider how visitors can help you advocate. Can they attend events with you? Send a letter to legislators or the local paper?



39. When you get government grants (IMLS, arts council, humanities council, tourism, etc.), let elected officials know, and share the tangible results of the projects.
40. Never give inaccurate information. If you don't know the answer to a question, say you will follow up.
41. Put your best foot forward when you advocate. Be mindful of what you say in elevators, and hallways, and on Facebook....



42. Complete your Educational Impact Statement and invite legislators and staff to come to the museum to see your education programs in action.
43. Host a meeting with colleagues from nearby museums about collaborating to advocate for common issues of concern (school district funding, tax deductibility of charitable giving, etc.).
44. Respond to surveys by your national, state, regional associations when they are collecting data to be used for advocacy.



45. Organize a local “Advocacy Day” for museum staff to visit district offices during the Alliance’s national Museums Advocacy Day.
46. Invite district staff and their families to events at your museum; offer to provide a special tour.
47. Sign on as a museum to support bills introduced by your Senator or Congressperson when appropriate (such as those related to informal education, historic preservation, etc.).



48. Offer your site as an event space for appropriate meetings, activities, hearings, etc.
49. Get out in your community and consider legislators at all levels and their staff one of the audiences you're seeking to cultivate.
50. Approach advocacy as you would your development efforts/donors – do your research, introduce yourself, and cultivate a relationship before making an ask.



51. Do what you say you're going to do.
52. Hold an event specifically geared to legislators and their staffs.
53. Whenever you're able, introduce legislators and staff to your museum coworkers.



54. Leverage your board in your advocacy efforts. (See the Museum magazine article.)
55. Make sure your elected officials at all levels receive your publications.
56. Ask your legislator to recognize a special event at your museum with a proclamation on the floor of the House, Senate or state legislature.



57. Let your Congressional delegation know when you are applying for a federal grant.
58. Contact your legislators with field-wide advocacy requests you get from the Alliance and others.
59. Always be respectful - remember that legislators and staff are just people, too.



60. Make advocacy a habit. A year-round advocacy plan can help. Identify one or two activities to do each month.
61. Learn about the issues – an informed advocate is an effective advocate.
62. Look for connections with current events; it can be good conversation starter with elected officials and staff.



63. Identify connections between your museum's work, and the issues your legislator is already focused on (healthcare, youth outreach, other community issues).
64. Learn the basics of the legislative process and the calendar.
65. Make the right ask of the right person.



66. Lesson from Burn Notice – If you want someone to trust you, confide in them first, and share a key piece of information to build their trust.

67. Lesson two from Burn Notice – If you need help solving a problem, solve one for your ally first.



68. Social Media is an advocacy asset, even if you don't use it personally. Like and follow elected officials and public offices, and make positive comments whenever possible/appropriate.

69. Watch for news and events from your state or regional museum associations or local nonprofit council. Invite colleagues to join you for events and webinars on advocacy and issues.



70. Reward good behavior. When elected officials act favorably on your issues, share the news, thank them, let your members know, and let them know.

71. Lesson from The West Wing – sometimes the best strategy is no action. Be thoughtful about your efforts.



73. Reach out to your local CVB or Tourism Board to coordinate messages, and build relationships and raise visibility.

74. Develop your elevator speech. You can run into elected officials at unexpected times. Be ready with your key information to share.



75. Share celebration points/achievements!

Museum anniversary? Completed a MAP or StEPs or other similar program? Receive Alliance Accreditation? An important grant or donation?

These are great, positive accomplishments to share with elected officials. You can also find templates on the Alliance website. 😊

www.aam-us.org/advocacy



Final Takeaway:

I never thought *that* could happen...

What if legislation were introduced to:

- Eliminate your tax exempt status
- Make your donor records subject to FOIA
- Sell your collections

Would you be prepared to make your case to
elected officials who know you?

Can you afford *not to advocate?*



And Remember:

You are **ALREADY** an advocate
for your museum!

In all the ways you interact with visitors, care for the collections and educate guests, you are already telling the story of your museum.

Tapping into that passion is your most powerful advocacy asset, and it comes naturally.



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