



Advocacy 101

Austin-Travis County
Food Policy Board
December 12, 2016

What is Advocacy?

- Latin *advocatio* = “summon or call to one’s aid”
- The act or process of supporting a cause or proposal
- Aims to influence public policy and budget decisions within political systems and institutions



Why Advocate?

- You believe in food justice, the mission of the board
- You have expertise—elected officials don't always have the knowledge
- We are one of 81 city boards and commissions—you have a duty to speak on behalf of our issues
- There are budget limitations, and many initiatives take funding
- City staff cannot advocate, only be a resource and when requested

Developing a Strategy



- What are you asking for?
- Is it realistic?
- Who does this affect?
- Does it provide value?
- What are the barriers?
- What does it cost? Are there alternatives to local funding?
- Do you have best practices from other communities? What were their lessons learned?
- Do you have research to back up your ask?



Developing a Strategy

- Who is competing with this? Who might oppose it?
- Who are your allies? What coalitions can you build?
- Where are you willing to compromise?
- Will you testify, have your elected official's "back?"
- Will you be there to support implementation?

How to Advocate

- In-person meetings are ALWAYS best
- Prepare for your meeting—have all strategy questions answered
 - Do your research
 - Know what you are asking for
 - Know what authority the elected official has (don't ask for a federal change from a state official, etc)
 - Be prepared for the questions
 - Prepare a leave-behind
 - Be willing to meet with an aide if elected official isn't available
 - Be persistent, yet polite in requesting a meeting
 - Be flexible



How to Advocate

- Your meeting day:
 - Arrive on time
 - Know who is speaking to the ask (if there is a group of you)
 - Be thorough, but concise
 - Be passionate, but not angry or emotional
 - Numbers are good; “human” perspective better
 - Never lie or “guess”—OK to say “I don’t know, but I’ll get back to you”
 - Listen

How to Advocate

- Your meeting day:
 - Ask for their support
 - Follow up on any questions
 - Leave-behind (ONE PAGE)
 - ALWAYS send a thank you, and re-cap
 - Don't be afraid to ask again

How NOT to Advocate

- DON'T:
 - Threaten
 - Be a pest
 - Criticize publicly
 - Blindside them
with your
opposition
 - Be inflexible

Austin City Council

- 10-1 system of single-member districts
- Prohibited from talking to more than four other offices re: a policy issue—this rule extends to staff
- Use data via district
- Know who their HHS policy staff members are
- Austin is a home rule city, with “inherent power:” can perform an act without having received it from the state constitution or legislature
- Austin is a council-manager plan structure: council sets policy; manager implements it administratively



Travis County Commissioners Court



- Four commissioners, representing precincts, and a county judge
- Counties are extensions of state government, and constitutionally limited in their authority
- Main duties: roads, jails, judiciary, public records, property taxes, elections, health and human services, law enforcement
- County judge is an administrator and presiding officer of the court, but does not have authority over other county offices (except approving budgets)

Building Coalitions

- Look for shared priorities—especially those outside your issue area
- Provides a stronger voice
- May connect lawmaker to familiar interest
- Must be willing to compromise

Example: hunger  health

The Value of Media

- All elected officials are on social media—Twitter, Facebook, and they listen
- Op eds, blogs, interviews with radio/TV are also effective



You Got What You Wanted. Now What?

- Passing the legislation or the ordinance is only the beginning
- Understand what's next, and be involved
- Follow up with the administrative process
- Be available to participate in community meetings, hearings, etc.

Questions?

