

Advocacy Throughout the Year!

January: Plan

Use the start of a new year to plan your work through the end of the year. Mark important dates on your calendar so you can be prepared to take action.

Action item

February: Follow the Dollars

At most levels of government, February marks the start (or continuation) of the budget process. As many advocates are looking for resources, this is a good time to be sure you know what's going on. At the Federal level, check out the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities at www.cbpp.org. At the state level, learn about budget processes through the National Conference of State Legislatures (www.ncsl.org) or on your state legislative website.

Action item

March: Hone Your Message with the Message Formula

To be agreed with, you'll need a message that resonates with your audience. Build that kind of message using the message formula below:

- Hello, my name is [] and I'm from [] (establishes relevancy)
- I am here to talk to you about [policy / relationship ask]
- Knowing of your interest in [what policy issues is the person you're talking to interested in?] we think you'll be interested as well
- This is important to the people I represent because [personal story]
- That's why we really hope you'll [ask]
- I'd like to follow-up by [follow-up ideas]
- Can I get contact information for all the appropriate people in your office?

Action item

April: Media Messaging

Social media? Radio? Podcasts? TV? Internet? Newspapers? Each venue can help you get the word out, but each wants different things. Radio and podcasts want sound bites, television wants pictures, newspapers want stories, and the internet all of the above. Find your “hook” both in terms of hot topics and reporters’ needs and you’ll be on your way to free publicity in no time.

Action item

May: Get to Know the Staff

In Washington, D.C. they all seem 14-years old. In California they’re called “20/20’s” (they’re 20-years old and make \$20K per year). In many cases, getting to know staff people can move your issue forward even faster than getting to know the policymaker.

Action item

June: Make a Relationship Building Ask

You don’t always have to ask a legislator to cosponsor (or stop) a controversial bill. Sometimes you can simply ask him or her to make a statement, talk to your group or participate in a site visit. What kind of action might you ask them to take that would get them actively engaged, without being too complicated?

Action item

July: Social Media Outreach

Social media can be an incredibly useful tool for effective advocacy. “Like” your legislators on Facebook (you don’t have to actually “like” them). Find mutual connections on Linked-In. Follow them on X (formerly Twitter). All these steps will give you new insights in to their interests and actions.

Action item

August: Site Visits

Showing a legislator or staff person something “on the ground” helps them understand how what you’re asking for connects to the real live people they represent. August is a prime time for visits, so get going!

Action item

September: Election Strategies

Getting like-minded citizens out to vote helps get people who understand your views into office, which in turn makes it far more likely that policymakers will agree with your views. Consider running a voter registration drive or become engage in GOTV efforts – you'll be making a difference on your policy issues and for democracy as a whole!

Action item

October: Town Halls

Legislators often set up meetings in their districts to hear the views of their constituents. This is particularly true during an election year. Find out when these meetings will take place and make plans to attend whether in person or online. Who knows? If you stop by a little before or after you may be able to talk to the policymaker directly.

Action item

November: Vote! Early and Often

OK, vote just the once – but be sure to vote! If you don't vote, you don't get to whine about the outcome.

Action item

December: Build Coalitions

Coalitions can make or break your cause and December is a great time to build them because there is usually less legislative activity than at other times. When considering coalitions, ask yourself: who might serve as good coalition partners, either because they support our cause OR because they have good relationships with our target audience? Who should approach them?

Action item

If you follow these steps, you'll be building relationships with your legislators in no time – and advancing your cause!