

Guide to Advocacy

It is important to note that advocacy can have quick results, but more often it is a **long-term strategy for change**. Once you've found your voice, you need to raise it and become an advocate on behalf of those issues that you are really passionate about. With this guide, you can start to effectively plan exactly how your team implements events in order to reach your NGC advocacy goal.

Tools of Advocacy

Start a letter writing campaign.

Inspire lots of individuals to write letters to people of influence regarding a particular issue.

Circulate a petition about an issue you care about – online or in hardcopy.

Email or write letters to your elected officials letting them know how you feel about your issue then request meetings with those public officials to discuss your issue.

Tell your local media about your advocacy campaign and your issue.

Hold a rally.

Write an opinion piece for a newspaper.

A word on “approaching power” effectively...

When you are an advocate, it is sometimes tempting to “vilify” (think of others as villains) powerful people who are not doing what you want them to do. It is however more effective to start with the premise that they are reasonable people who are willing to listen to “your side” of an issue. If you approach a leader with a reasonable request (such as a meeting or a response to a polite inquiry), you may very well get a sensible response. If you get what you asked for—great! If you get an unfavorable reply or no response at all, push a little harder. If you ever feel “stuck,” remember these two things:

Be respectful.

Be persistent.

Talking Points

In any advocacy activity it is important to have a set of agreed upon talking points. If everyone uses the talking points you can create a coherent and unified message. Your talking points will change and grow as your project develops, so don't forget to regularly update them.

Sample Talking Points

List and describe the issue:

For example—We are dedicated to supporting the efforts of both Ugandan and international organizations and agencies in alleviating the impact war has inflicted on the children of Uganda.

List the activities you have planned:

For example— We plan to have bake sales every Friday at lunch to raise money and awareness for our Global Project House of Hope in Uganda. We also plan to mobilize students in our school to write letters to Congresswoman Pelosi about pending legislation that would provide further aid to Uganda.

List your goals:

For example—*Our first goal is to raise \$500 for House of Hope’s school expansion and purchase of school materials for its students. Our second goal is to send 200 letters to urge Congress woman Pelosi to support diplomatic pressure as a means to support the rebuilding and growth of Uganda.*

List some of your accomplishments:

For example—*We have already raised \$200 for our efforts. We also have mailed 40 letters written by students to Congressman Pelosi and have set-up an on campus teach-in that will incorporate more letter writing.*

Petition

Aside from communicating with a leader, a petition is also a good way to get people talking about an issue and another way to educate. Petitions are also volunteer- and support-building tools and, when successful, they can express an impressive number of supporters that you can share with politicians and media. Petitions are most effective when they have lots of signatures, so be sure to get as many signatures as possible. Petitions with a lot of signatures show that many people in the community care about the issue. You can address a petition to a specific person, a company, an organization, or the government.

Petition Tips:

- Petitions should be short and to the point with a clear title so people will read them.
- *Each page* with signatures must have the petition text at the top, with signatures below. It is not enough to just attach a sheet of signatures.
- When you gather signatures, make sure you have multiple copies of the petition and pens available for people to use to sign. Always have a flyer or information sheet that people can take with them that explains the issue and how they can get further involved. Include your team webpage and contact information.
- It is helpful to put the petition on a clipboard to make it easier to sign.
- Make sure everyone who is gathering signatures knows the major issues and can explain why they are doing this. Also remember that it is better to answer “I don’t know” to a question you can’t answer than to make up an answer that could be wrong.
- Online petitions allow you to reach people who are not in your immediate geographic location. A good free online petition site is www.onlinepetition.com. It’s best to have as many hand printed signatures as possible, even if you also gather petitions online.

Sample Petition—General

Title of the Petition

To: (The person or organization the petition is directed towards)

From: (Who you are, for example students of _____, residents of _____)

We, the undersigned, (state the reason why you are writing a petition, include any relevant information)

Therefore, we request that (what you want the person or organization to do)

Printed Name Signature Address

Letter to a Government Official

Did you know that every letter that is sent to a legislator’s office gets recorded? If you send 50 or 100 letters it can send a very powerful message. You can write letters to your government officials to tell them what you think about an issue, how you want them to vote on certain legislation, or how you want them to address a general issue. Keep in mind that handwritten letters are the most effective, and while you should create a template letter for people to work from, encourage people to write their own messages.

Sample Letter to a Legislator—General

Your name
 Your address

Date
 Title
 Address

Dear (greeting) ,

*Urge the official to support the issue that you are writing about.
 Give them some facts and why you think they should support this issue.*

I urge you to _____. I look forward to hearing from you. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
 Your name
 Your address

Call your Elected Officials

Another effective way to let your government officials know how you feel is to give them a call. Like with letters, every call is documented. It is important to know what you are going to say before calling. If you are asking other people to call it is a good idea to make up “talking points” (a list of a few things they should mention in their call). You can also make up a script.

Phone Script—General

Hello my name is and I am a resident of (**your city**). I am calling to encourage (**name of your representative**) to _____. This is extremely important because _____. Thank you!

Meeting with a Government Official

Even better than writing and calling is meeting with your government official. It is nearly impossible to ignore a group of young people who are passionate about an issue!

How to approach a government official

Call to set up an appointment. You can call your representative’s office and ask when s/he is available to meet with **constituents**. Make sure you have an appointment before going in, as the representative may be unavailable or out of town. It is possible that you will end up meeting with a representative aide (or staffer), which is great, too!

Bring a few committed members of the group. Two to four people is best. You want enough people to offer moral support, but not too many to seem intimidating.

Be professional but not uncomfortable. Dress nicely, but not in something that makes you feel uncomfortable. You want to be yourself and be taken seriously.

Know ahead of time what you are going to say. Plan out exactly what each person in the group will say and rehearse it at least once. This is a good way to sound well informed on the subject.

Be prepared with materials to hand out. While you are speaking you can give him/her the materials to look over and refer to at a later date. This is especially important if you are meeting with a staffer so s/he can pass documents along to the legislator. Elected officials are very busy and they often rely on their aides to advise them on policy decisions, so leaving materials with the aide or representative to look over later is essential.

Demonstrate what you have done. Show the government officials what you have accomplished. Giving them “proof” of what you have done gives you credibility.

Let them know what you have planned for the future. By letting them know the other things you have planned it shows your dedication to the issue.

Ask questions. It is best to have something concrete to request of the legislator, such as “We would like to ask you to sponsor a bill that addresses this issue”. Or you can ask more generally, “What do you intend to do to support this issue?”

Be persistent. At the end of the meeting the representative or staffer may tell you that s/he will consider what you said and get back to you. Be sure to ask when you should check back in and follow through! Don’t let the representative off the hook – keep contacting him/her until you get what you want. If you don’t get an answer to your questions, keep coming back to meet with him/her. You can come back two, three, four times...

Don’t be disappointed if you meet with a staffer. Sometimes it isn’t possible to meet with the government official. Often it is just as effective to meet with one of their staff members – they often make the decisions, write the bills and find co-sponsors.

Follow Up. Don’t forget to say thank you – to the politician, the staffer that helped you set up the meeting, the politician’s assistant, the security guard and anyone else who may have helped you. Thank you’s are a matter of general politeness but also a non-intrusive way to stay on their radar and make them remember you when it comes time to hold the politician accountable to the promises they made you.

Some titles that may be helpful to know:

For the President:

Title: President (full name)

Greeting: Mr. or Madam President

For a former President:

Title: The Honorable (full name)

Greeting: Mr., Mrs. or Ms. (last name)

For a U.S. Senator:

Title: The Honorable (full name)

Greeting: Senator (last name)

For a U.S. Representative:

Title: The Honorable (full name)

Greeting: Representative (last name)

For a Governor:

Title: The Honorable (last name), Governor of (name of state)

Greeting: Governor (last name)

For a Mayor:

Title: The Honorable (full name);

Greeting: Mayor (last name)

Use the Media

Using the media can bring extra attention and support to your issue. The best option is to focus on your local media and educate your local community about the issues you are addressing. Human-interest stories are a favorite of local media, so play up the “young people taking action in their community” angle.

In order to most effectively use the media it is important to elect one (or at most two) people to be the media contact. This person should be on hand to speak to the media if they call, give interviews, and answer any questions if they arrive at your event. The media contact should be someone who is not afraid to be interviewed (possibly live and on TV), who knows the issues well, who is outgoing and charismatic. Just because one person is the media contact doesn't mean that the whole group can't help.

Create a Media Contact List

This list should include:

- Local newspapers, weekly papers and newsletters
- Radio and TV stations
- Online media and blogs
- High school newspapers and publications

To find contact information, go online to the newspapers' websites where you will most likely find telephone/fax numbers, e-mail addresses, street addresses, and a list of staff with their contact information. If you are looking for a list of local publications to contact, try using a search engine with city names and publications.

When compiling your own media list, for each media source you should list the publication/station name, name of the contact person (if you have one), his/her email, phone and fax numbers. A good way to find a contact person is to call the media source. That way you start to build a relationship with someone there. By calling you can find out whom you should direct your media releases to. You can also use the media's website to help you find a contact: good people to note are editors, feature editors, community/education reporters, and reporters designated to your specific geographic area.

Media Advisories/Press Releases

You can use media advisories or press releases to let the media know about your event and will help you to generate media coverage. Media advisories should be sent to a few news outlets 3-5 days before your event. Send the advisory to the Assignment Desk Editors; they are the ones who decide if a reporter will cover the story. You should also follow up by calling the assignment editors

and reporters to make sure that they received your information. When you call, be ready to answer any questions they might have in a brief and concise manor to be considerate of the reporters' time.

Phone Script—General

Hello, my name is I go to **(your high school)**. I am part of a New Global Citizens team that is dedicated to creating global change on specific, pressing issues facing the world.

We are working on **(your issue/project)**.

I am calling to see who I should address press releases to for our fundraising and education events.

Phone Script—Specific

Hello, my name is Pete Santos. I go to **Loften High School**. I am part of a NEW GLOBAL CITIZENS team that is dedicated to creating global change on specific, pressing issues facing the world.

Our group is focusing on **funding water pumps to provide clean water for villages in Africa**. I am calling to see who I should address press releases to for our fundraising and education events.

Follow-up with the Media Release

Follow-up calls are as important as getting the media release forms out to the press. This is a chance for you to reiterate why you think they should cover the event while making sure they actually read your press alert. You can fax them the press release again to make sure they have it. Before calling make sure you know what you are going to say. Make **talking points** before the call.

Media Advisory—General

For Immediate Release:

Date submitted to the media

Media contact name:

Your name

Your contact number

Your city/school,

Title of the event

Your town, state – Tell what the event is, and give some background as to why the event is taking place and the goals for the event.

WHO: Name of group's spokesperson, title, your city or school or group

WHAT: Title of your group's event, your city/school

WHEN: Date and time

WHERE: Location

-30-

(Put -30- or ### centered at the end of the press release. This lets the reader know that this is the end.)

Media Advisory Example—Specific

For Immediate Release:

January 15, 2009

Denise Massen

Contact: Jennifer Jenkinsberg

(555) 933-7866

Alameda, "Art for Orphans"

San Antonio, Texas –This fundraising event is completely organized by youth and features the work of student and community artists that have donated pieces for auction. All of the proceeds of the event go towards funding schools for children with disabilities in Ecuador. We have already raised almost \$1,000 for this project and our goal is to raise \$1,500 at the art auction.

WHO: Jennifer Jenkinsberg, Outreach Coordinator, Thomas Clark High School New Global Citizens team

WHAT: Art for Orphans, San Antonio/Thomas Clark High School

WHEN: Friday February 11, 8pm

WHERE: San Antonio Art Center 993 High St. San Antonio, TX 55567

###

Opinion-Editorial or Op-Ed

An op-ed is a column that expresses the point of view of the author. It does not necessarily express the view of the newspaper in which it appears. This means that you can write an op-ed that disagrees with the newspaper. An op-ed is usually about 600-800 words, but you should contact the newspaper to find out the specifics. You should try to write about something that has been covered recently in the newspaper or relate your piece to something recently printed. Think up a title that really captures what you want to say. Often, if you don't include a title, the newspaper will think up something that may not capture your ideas.

A great way to engage the reader is to tell a story. Stories have a way of catching people's attention as well as being more memorable than a list of statistics. You will want to keep your piece simple, clear, and focused, while grabbing the reader's attention. If the newspaper does not print your op-ed, you can shorten it and send it as a letter to the editor.

Letter to the Editor

You can write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper about a general topic to educate your community, or on how you feel about an issue relating to your project. Use current events or anecdotes to engage the reader. You can use a letter to the editor to respond to an editorial opinion piece or article that may have missed something you think is important. Writing a letter to the editor gives you a chance to reply to something that has already been written. Don't be disappointed if your Op-Ed or letter to the editor doesn't get published. Even local papers receive many more letters everyday than they can possibly print. You can continue to send submissions.

Letters to the editor should be submitted based on the newspaper's guidelines. You should be able to find those guidelines on the newspaper's website or by calling. Submissions are usually between 200-250 words. Generally, a letter to the editor will look something like this:

Useful Websites

Unites States Senate—<http://www.senate.gov/>

Unites States House of Representatives—<http://www.senate.gov/>

Websites of U.S. Embassies, Consulates, and Diplomatic Missions—<http://www.usembassy.gov/>

GovTrack.US: a civic project to track Congress—<http://www.govtrack.us/>

ReliefWeb—<http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/dbc.nsf/doc100?OpenForm>

Letter to the Editor—General

Date

Editor's name

Publication

Address

City, state, zip

Dear Editor:

(Body of the letter should give some background and make some kind of stance or give information.)

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Your Name

Name of your group or High School

Address

City, State, Zip

Contact Number

Letter to the Editor—Specific

January 15, 2009

Tracy Noffit

Sol News

888 Maple St.

San Jose, CA 94233

Dear Editor:

I am writing to respectfully refute an article published on Tuesday, December 12 entitled, "Youth are Lazy and Stupid." I am insulted by the assumptions the author makes about my generation, and the work that my peers and I have done shows that young people are far from "the most apathetic and undedicated generation that America has ever seen."

For the past four months, Vista High School's New Global Citizens Team has been working relentlessly to make global change by raising money and awareness for indigenous communities in Acre, Brazil. We have held garage sales, raffles, teach-ins, and car washes and have raised almost \$2,000 to provide sustainable alternatives to rainforest depletion. We have been able to inspire hundreds of students at Vista High School, and the project is spreading to Irvington and other local schools because students are so excited about this opportunity to make global change. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Sara Laong

Vista High School New Global Citizens Team

4000 Park Street

San Jose, CA 55563

(555) 959-8396