Advocacy Guide
Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
Alexandria, Virginia USA

Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
Alexandria, Virginia USA
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ASCD is a community of educators, advocating sound policies and sharing best practices to achieve the success of each learner. Founded in 1943, ASCD is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, international education association with headquarters in Alexandria, Virginia.

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We are educators. We know what works. Together we can make a difference.
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How to Use This Guide

The resources in this guide and in the ASCD Action Center (www.ascd.org/actioncenter) will allow you to take action to support effective education policy. This guide offers advice for planning an advocacy campaign, communicating with policymakers, making your voice heard, and ensuring your advocacy is effective and efficient. Using ASCD materials and the tactics in this guide, you can make the most of your time as an advocate. Even if you have only two minutes to spare, these tried-and-true approaches will make sure you are respected and effective as a go-to source for education policy.

Take time to use, adapt, and share the resources in your ASCD Advocacy Guide. Your feedback is strongly encouraged; if you have ideas, suggestions, or questions about the ASCD Advocacy Guide or Educator Advocates, please contact the ASCD Public Policy department by sending a message to edadvocates@ascd.org or by calling 1-703-575-5608 or 1-800-933-2723, extension 5608.

Although some of the resources and tips in this guide are U.S.-based, the basics of effective advocacy are universal. We hope you will take what is helpful to you and tailor the tips and advice in this guide to your unique circumstances. If you have any questions, please contact us.

Why Advocate?

Whether it is through education funding, accountability, or teacher quality regulations, education policy affects our schools and students. For too long, these policies have been developed without full consideration of their effect in the classroom. ASCD is working to change that by helping educators engage in effective advocacy. We know that decision makers will continue to implement education policies whether or not we are at the table. It is up to us to help craft policies that support student learning.

Where Do I Start?

The time for advocacy on behalf of students is now, and the voice needed is yours. You may already be involved in efforts to change policies and programs close to home, but your voice must also be heard on a national level. ASCD can help
you be heard. The first step is signing up for ASCD Educator Advocates. When you become an Educator Advocate, you will join a broad group of educators who are committed to advocating for effective education policy that will have a tremendous effect on the lives of students. ASCD will provide the resources to make sure your advocacy time will be minimal but your influence will be significant.

With the help of educators like you, ASCD advocates for schools and students. Your voice and insight are invaluable to decision makers and legislators. They welcome your input, and it will make a difference. Without our involvement, others will shape the policy agenda according to their own narrow interests—and make decisions without the critical information we can provide. The consequences of such ill-informed efforts, even when well-intentioned, can be devastating to children and learning. The stakes are simply too high, and the potential too great, for educators not to engage in advocacy efforts.

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Getting Started

Like teaching, advocacy requires building respectful relationships as the foundation for change. And whether you advocate with a group or as an individual, your efforts will benefit from a little planning. How much planning? It all depends on your circumstances. When legislation you care about is up for consideration, taking action may be as simple as briefly researching the issue and picking up the phone to call your policymaker. When you have more time, or are part of a larger group, you should consider some other steps, such as communicating with your allies, setting your goals, and developing an action plan. Whatever level of planning you require, don’t forget what longtime House Speaker Thomas “Tip” O’Neill said: “All politics is local.”

Research the Issue

Information from constituents is the key to advocacy. Elected officials care about what their constituents have to say. To really make a difference as an advocate, you should be informed and engaged. You do not need to be a congressional expert, nor do you have to understand everything there is to know about all of education. All you need to do is provide insight about the local impact of education issues. If you are honest and accessible, you can help your elected officials understand which policies are effective and which ones have a negative effect on schools and students.

The ASCD Web site offers helpful information on many critical concerns, including a section on the ASCD Legislative Agenda (www.ascd.org/legislativeagenda) that identifies the Association’s top legislative priorities for the year. On the Web site, you will find key messages and brief policy papers to help you advocate for effective education policy in each of the areas. As you analyze each education issue, consider the following questions:

• What is the effect of the issue in my community?
• What does this mean to my local school, school district, and students?
• What is the cost of not doing anything on this issue?
• What possible actions can be taken? What are the consequences of these actions?
• Who else cares about this issue in my community?
Build a Network

As you talk to other members of ASCD, your local ASCD affiliate, and your community, you will find allies who support what you are doing and want to help. By working together with a group that shares the same goals, you can show your elected officials how important those goals are to their constituents. The more constituents a policymaker hears from who share the same view, the more influence those constituents will have.

It is also a good idea to consider working with people who approach education issues from diverse perspectives. Parents, religious leaders, senior citizens, health professionals, businesspeople, realtors, and law enforcement officials are just some of the people in your community who may be affected by education policy changes. Elected officials will be more responsive when they recognize that you represent a cross-section of their constituencies. Taken as a whole, a diverse group represents a community movement and cannot be dismissed as an isolated viewpoint.

Working with ASCD staff, Educator Advocates, your local ASCD affiliate, an ASCD network, or other coalition can add a lot to your advocacy efforts. Coalitions are particularly useful when they

- Bring together different constituencies with a common goal.
- Build support and legitimacy for the issue.
- Raise the profile of your issue or group.
- Show a number of people with shared goals.
- Bring people together to share the work.
- Rally resources for supporting the cause.

Communicate with Your Allies

Establishing a network of advocates doesn’t stop when members are identified. To support your group, you will need to develop effective means of communication. The first step is to gather contact information. With each new contact, keep a record of addresses, phone numbers, e-mail addresses, and any other information you think will be useful.

Each group has its own unique communication needs. Depending on the size and formality of your network, you will want to consider developing newsletters, fact sheets, a Web site, and other vehicles for sharing information among members. Many of these resources are available through the ASCD Web site. Educator Advocates
receive weekly e-mail news updates when the U.S. Congress is in session (visit www.ascd.org/actioncenter to join), and the ASCD Legislative Agenda (www.ascd.org/legislativeagenda) includes key messages and policy papers that you can share with others who support effective education policy.

Set Clear Goals and Reasonable Expectations

With a solid understanding of your education issue and a network of allies, you’re ready to set goals for your advocacy efforts. You should not expect to achieve a 200 percent funding increase or to eliminate a multibillion dollar program. Set reasonable expectations, like a new amendment to establish a pilot program or to offer additional flexibility in using federal resources. Advocacy demands perseverance; dividing your ultimate aim into small, manageable steps will help you stay focused on your immediate goals. The ASCD Public Policy team wants to help you with this aspect of your work. Remember, changing public policy, especially at the state and federal level, takes time.

At ASCD, we set goals annually through the ASCD Legislative Agenda. A dedicated group of ASCD members comes together each January to examine the intersection between the current policy climate and ASCD’s positions and advocacy goals. In the first part of this process, ASCD looks at the current policy climate through three lenses: current, anticipate, and initiate.

- **Current.** What is currently happening in education policy? Although some of this information can be gleaned from newspapers and television articles, it is also beneficial to ask decision makers, legislators, and their staff members for information about what they are working on. It also helps develop key relationships and tells decision makers that you are serious about wanting to help them. Consider asking policymakers or their staff members to speak briefly at your planning meeting.

- **Anticipate.** What issues do we anticipate coming within the next year? This question requires that you look beyond what is happening right now to see what is likely to come up in the near future. Look for issues that have had a lot of buzz, policies that are scheduled for reauthorization, and topics that have been featured in the media, in recent research reports, and at hearings, forums, and other community and national events.

- **Initiate.** Now that you have examined what is already being discussed, what’s missing? Is there anything your group feels passionately about that is not likely to
be addressed? If so, you may wish to include goals for initiating topics and policies that others have ignored. It may be more challenging to initiate a new issue, but it is an excellent way to set your group apart from the crowd.

Once you have identified topics that are current, anticipated, or worth taking initiative to introduce, it’s time to narrow your list. Prioritizing this list may be the most challenging aspect of setting your advocacy goals, but it is also one of the most important. Making tough decisions about which priorities are the most critical will help you focus your attention on what’s most important. Remember, you cannot accomplish anything if you try to commit to everything.

In prioritizing your goals, consider the following questions.

• Does this issue align with our mission, values, and beliefs?
• What do we want to accomplish? Why is this important?
• Could students, schools, and learning be hurt or helped by what is proposed?
• Do we have direct experience with this policy?
• Can we make a difference if we get involved?
• Will this topic motivate and mobilize our network?

Once you have identified items that meet these criteria, choose the most important based on your priorities. Although a successful legislative agenda has no set number of items, keep in mind that too many will keep you from focusing while too few may not be enough to call for significant action.

Develop a Plan and Take Action

At ASCD, we use the goals illustrated in our legislative agenda to prioritize the content of our action plan. Throughout the year, this plan guides the action alerts and sample letters to Congress and the media that we provide Educator Advocates to make their advocacy work effective. Whether you are working as an individual advocate or with a sizeable network, a carefully crafted list of priorities and an initial time line will provide an important road map.

Don’t forget to consider the time line of events that are out of your control as well. In the United States, for example, several timeframes with legislative significance are worth taking into account:
January: The President gives his State of the Union address each year in late January.

February: The Executive Budget is released highlighting the president’s priorities for the coming year.

March: Congress begins work on the annual budget process. The House and Senate work on budget resolutions to set general spending parameters for the year.

August: Congress takes its summer recess. Many times, this is a good opportunity to meet with members of Congress in their home district.

September/October: Congress targets this date for adjournment. The federal fiscal year begins in October.

Your action plan should first take into account your target audience: the elected officials, media professionals, and community leaders you intend to influence. For each audience, you may need to tailor your message and your communication techniques. The following sections of this guide present the range of communication strategies you need to consider as you develop your plan. Like teaching techniques, each advocacy method has its advantages and constraints. In general, a mix of techniques will better serve your efforts than reliance on a single strategy.
Working with Policymakers

From your local school board to Congress, the goals of your advocacy efforts are likely to require action by a decision-making body. Working with elected officials requires persistence, strong listening skills, and a compelling message.

- **Do your homework.** To be an effective voice for students and education, it helps to know where policymakers stand on specific bills, as well as education issues in general. If you are a member of ASCD Educator Advocates, we will periodically provide links to Web pages where you can find out how your member of Congress voted on a specific issue. You can also find this information on the ASCD Web site (www.ascd.org/actioncenter), by contacting ASCD Public Policy staff, or by looking at the Web sites of individual policymakers and their legislative bodies.

The following Web sites can help you research legislators and bills:

- The ASCD Action Center (www.ascd.org/actioncenter) includes links to contact lawmakers and research legislation.
- The U.S. Senate (www.senate.gov) and the U.S. House of Representatives (www.house.gov) include Web pages for individual members of Congress as well as committees.
- THOMAS (http://thomas.loc.gov) provides legislative information from the Library of Congress.
- FirstGov.gov (www.firstgov.gov) is the official U.S. government portal to government information, services, and online transactions.

- **Establish relationships.** Legislative staff members are a vital part of your elected official's team, so it's important to build a good relationship with them. Staffers advise their legislators on education issues and can be a key ally in influencing your elected official. They have power and can help you with their knowledge of the process, other legislators, and general strategy. Turn to them with questions about what legislation the policymaker is focusing on, what information they need you to provide, and what others who might oppose your cause are saying. In turn, you can help them write their bills and offer support for their work. More often, you will work with and through them, as they are the direct link and key voice for your elected official.
• **Think locally—before you act globally.** As an advocate for children and education, you have the greatest leverage with your own legislator rather than with legislators representing other districts in your state. Typically, if you want a bill sponsored or an amendment made, you should work with your own legislator. You do not have weight if you are not a constituent.

• **Begin the process early.** Advocacy should start well before the bill you are concerned about appears in the legislature. A good time to start is between legislative sessions when members often visit their district. You can and should touch base with legislative staff periodically.

• **Know your key messages.** When the opportunity to speak with a legislator, journalist, or decision maker arises, you will not always have a lot of time to make your case. It will be rare that you will be able to make more than three good points, so it pays to choose your most important points in advance. ASCD has developed key messages for each of the priority areas in the ASCD Legislative Agenda to help you in your efforts ([www.ascd.org/legislativeagenda](http://www.ascd.org/legislativeagenda)).

• **Get your issue on the record.** Ask your legislator to cosponsor or support your issue. When legislation is introduced, ask your legislator to submit a statement for the record explaining why the law is necessary. Work with your legislator and supply information on how you can help make the legislation most effective.

• **R-e-s-p-e-c-t.** Although you may vehemently disagree with a policymaker’s stated position on an issue, you can still communicate an understanding of other points of view. Respect and differing views are a fundamental ingredient of effective advocacy. To gain it, you must give it. Demonstrate it by taking the time to understand diverse opinions.

### Tools for Communicating with Policymakers

As an advocate, you can choose among several techniques for communicating with policymakers, including

- Meetings and hearings
- E-mail letters
- Telephone calls
- Personal visits
- Position papers
- Policy briefs
- Testimony

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We are educators. We know what works. Together we can make a difference.
Many of these techniques work well in combination. After a telephone call or visit to an elected official’s office, you should send a follow-up letter or e-mail of thanks.

E-mails and Faxes: The Write Stuff

E-mail letters to elected officials are a key tool for advocates. Given current security concerns, postal mail is significantly slower than in previous years. Many constituents find it faster and more convenient to contact their policymakers through e-mail and fax correspondence.

ASCD often provides sample e-mails and talking points that Educator Advocates can personalize and send to their members of Congress by using the ASCD Action Center. When writing to Congress, use your own words whenever possible, and explicitly state that you are their constituent in the subject line and first paragraph. The more positive and substantive your e-mail is, the more influential it is likely to be. But keep in mind that policymakers and their staff members do not have a lot of time. Be brief, clear, and specific. Keep your letter to one page if possible, and always state your purpose in the first sentence.

Follow these tips to improve your communication to elected officials:

• Stress that you are a constituent in the subject line or first line of the letter.
• If your letter refers to a specific bill or amendment, identify it in the subject line (e.g., “Constituent Who Supports H.R. 1” or “Support Education Funding in the Budget Resolution.”).
• Personalize the letter by including the name of your local school or school district and explain how the policy will affect your community.
• State your opinion and your specific request within the first few sentences.
• Avoid confusing education jargon.
• Demonstrate respect and courtesy, no matter what.
• Include your address; your elected official will want to know that you are his constituent.
• Enclose an article or two that are related to the issue, or enclose a copy of the ASCD Legislative Agenda or position statement on the issue.
• If you have any personal association with policymakers, remind them. Nothing is more effective in getting a policymaker’s attention.

Telephone Calls: Convincing Conversation

Telephone calls are a mainstay of education advocacy efforts. Follow these simple steps to effectively advocate by phone.

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Working with Policymakers

“Don’t underestimate the impact you can have. We are the educational experts. Our stories can bring life to the facts, set the record straight, and give policymakers the data they need for informed, principled action.”
—Mary Forte Hayes, Massachusetts ASCD Executive Director

- **Preparation.** Before you lift the receiver, jot down a few talking points. Be prepared to leave a voice mail message if necessary.

- **Conversation.** When you telephone a legislator’s office, ask to speak with the legislative aide responsible for covering education issues. If the aide is not available, leave a clear message, including your name and address, with the person who answers the phone. You might begin by saying, “I’m Jane Educator calling from Anytown, and I’d like to leave a message for Congressperson Smith.” State the issue you are calling about and what you want your representative to do. Be as brief as possible, recognizing that legislative offices are very busy.

- **Follow-up.** Be sure to thank elected officials and their staff members for their time. A follow-up letter is a good opportunity to restate your position and include additional materials, such as a position statement or relevant articles. It also helps to establish a relationship with the office.

**Meetings and Hearings: The Power of Presence**

One tried-and-true way to make certain your voice is heard as an education advocate is to attend meetings and hearings, from school board meetings to face-to-face meetings with your legislator. You may want to travel to Washington, D.C., to meet with your members of Congress, but you do not need to. Members are often interested in meeting with constituents when they visit their district in the time between sessions. When you are going to meet with a policymaker, consider bringing copies of your position statement and any relevant materials (including your business card) to share with contacts you may make.

A personal visit can be an effective method of getting the attention of legislators and legislative staff. Remember to follow these basic rules:

- Determine your purpose for the visit. Perhaps you just want to deliver materials and introduce yourself informally. In this case, you may not need to make an appointment, but you should still remember to dress and act professionally.
- For a more formal visit, call ahead and request an appointment with the legislative or staff aide responsible for education issues.
- Although the ostensible purpose of the meeting may be to focus on a particular education issue, remember that the long-term connections you are making are equally important.
- Carefully consider the materials you leave with the legislator or aide. Position...
Position Papers and Policy Briefs: Taking a Stand and Backing It Up

Position papers and policy briefs are concise statements of your stand on an education issue and the relevant research. When you need to communicate your stance to decision makers, the media, or other community members, position papers and policy briefs may be helpful tools. It is important to leave a position paper with a decision maker's staff as a record of your visit. And position papers reaffirm the substance and goals of your advocacy to people in your network. Three or four well-conceived and well-written papers might bring your group's name to mind when busy staffers are crafting future legislation. ASCD has created brief policy papers for each of the top priorities on its Legislative Agenda. These papers are available as printable PDF files on the ASCD Web site (www.ascd.org/legislativeagenda).

ASCD Public Policy staff can help you craft policy papers related to the Association's Legislative Agenda priorities.

Effective position papers

- State your position up front.
- Clearly communicate what you want done.
- Provide the background and context of the education issue.
- Are no longer than two pages.
- Identify your group and why the position is important to you.

Effective Testimony: A Window of Opportunity

For education advocates, testimony before a committee, board of education, public hearing, or legislative commission is a powerful opportunity. It may take months or years of relationship-building for some advocates to be invited to testify, yet the time allocated for testimony is sometimes no more than five minutes.

Using that brief window of time to best advantage is critical. In the ASCD publication Influencing the Education Agenda, Susan Nicklas and Judy Seltz suggest that advocates...
include the following points¹:

- An introduction of the speaker, including the speaker’s interest in the issue.
- A brief definition of the issue.
- A statement and explanation of your position on the issue.
- Rationale for your position and recognition of alternatives.
- Request for support of your position.
- An offer of assistance and a thank you.

Nicklas and Seltz also suggest that speakers remember to separate information from conclusions and provide evidence to support their claims. Remember to use plain language that can be understood by noneducators. And bring multiple copies of your spoken testimony that include your contact information and any supporting graphs, charts, and other carefully selected material. Share these copies with others who are present and with the media.

The questions you most dread may be the first ones you are asked. Prepare answers for the most likely questions and rehearse them in advance. Do not shy away from questions; use them to elaborate on your key messages. Always be honest and positive, even in the face of negative questions. “I don’t know, but I’ll get back to you” is a perfectly acceptable answer.

Relationship Building in Action: An Example from the Field

Wisconsin ASCD President Mike Zellmer believes in the power of relationships. When No Child Left Behind (NCLB) was first developed, several Wisconsin board members were involved at the state level. This team urged that experts in assessment be consulted and that the standards be simplified before developing assessments. The state department of public instruction followed through on both items. More recently, Senator Kohl’s education aide contacted Zellmer to ask for the results of a statewide survey on NCLB’s impact on finances and time. Members of Wisconsin ASCD had met with this aide twice in the last two years at her Washington, D.C., office, and the relationship continues.


“Because I was able to speak in detail about the bill in question and because I had credibility, I felt that my representative would better understand the details of a complex bill and would be more able to articulate the nuances to colleagues.”

—Mary Forte Hayes, Massachusetts ASCD Executive Director

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Working with the Media

Working with the media is an opportunity to spread your message beyond your usual network. You can communicate through the media in a number of ways, some of which you will be able to control, but many that will put your message at the mercy of others. When speaking with members of the media, keep these tips in mind:

- For help finding contact information for local and national media, visit the ASCD Action Center (www.ascd.org/actioncenter) and click the link to “Contact the Media.”
- If time permits, contact ASCD staff to work with you on your media strategy.
- Know the media—and make sure they know you. It helps to be familiar with the publication or show and things the person you are talking with has written or said in the past.
- Be honest, concise, and accessible. Return calls promptly and recognize that journalists are often busy and working on deadline.
- Give them enough lead time. If you’re not sure of their deadlines, ask.
- Consider ways to make their work easier—give them a story that writes itself.
- Use plain English, avoiding education jargon.
- Maintain control of the conversation. It is perfectly OK to ask “stupid” questions. Think before you speak.
- Assume that nothing is off the record. “No comment” is a comment; “I don’t know” is not a sin.
- Don’t let the reporter put words into your mouth. (It’s their job to get a story. Some of them may use lines such as “So, would you say that . . .”)
- Know in advance the points you want to make—stick to two or three points and bring every answer back to those points.
- It’s okay to say, “This is an important issue, and I want to be sure I convey our position precisely. Would you mind reading back what you just heard me say?”
- Thank the reporter if the story is even fairly good.
- Complain only if the story is factually wrong—and even then, be professional. Remember, it’s a reporter’s job to get both sides of the issue, and it’s seldom worth it to fight with someone who buys ink by the barrel.

Tools for Communicating With and Through the Media

A variety of tools are available to help you get your message out there, but the
message is always your top priority. These tools are simply a means to share your message with the appropriate media and spread the news to a wider audience.

In this section, we will consider the following communication vehicles:

- News releases
- Media advisories
- Information packets and fact sheets
- News conferences
- Individual briefings with reporters or editor
- Op-ed articles and letters to the editor
- Radio and television news appearances
- The Internet

**News Releases: Inviting Coverage**

A news release, or press release, is a basic component of communicating with the media. At its best, a news release provides a standard format for relatively quick and efficient dissemination of time-sensitive information about important situations or events. Nonetheless, it’s important to consider whether the information you are communicating is genuinely news worthy. If an editor has seen 10 unusable releases from the same group in the last six months, she may not bother to read the headline of number 11. There is no value in sending a news release when there is no real news.

To editors, all that matters is whether they are reasonably sure the news they cover will be exciting or important to their audience. Keeping this in mind will increase the odds that your message will actually make it to print. Ask yourself: “Does this pass the ‘who cares and why’ test?”

Tips for writing news releases:

- An editor should never have to search for your main point.
- Use the “inverted pyramid” structure for your release: put the most compelling information at the top with your paragraphs in descending order of importance. If it needs to be shortened, you should be able to cut it from the bottom.
- News releases should be clear, clean, concise, and correct. Write your release like a news story. Keep sentences and paragraphs short. With rare exceptions, keep it to two pages or less.
• Think of the news release as a teaser to lure the editor to want to know more; you do not need to tell everything.
• Focus on providing the who, what, where, when, why, and how. If you can also provide the reporter with leads for more resources (especially your own), so much the better.
• When initiating or responding to a press call, first find out the reporter’s deadline. Pitching a story a half hour before deadline will not be successful.
• Deadlines can vary widely. Daily papers may need only a matter of hours for late-breaking news. Local TV and radio stations may need two or three days. Monthly magazines often ask for several months’ lead time. If you don’t know, ask.
• Contact information should appear at the top of every release. Include at least an office phone number. Consider including a second contact person or a home or cell phone number.
• The release must be dated. Use the date when the media will receive your release, unless you want the information to remain unpublished until a later time. In that case, indicate that the information is “embargoed until December 10, 2006.”
• Don’t try to grab attention with an unusual paper color or font.
• The headline should be succinct and should convey the “hook” or the most salient point.
• Number your pages. Write “-more-” centered at the bottom of each page. At the end of the release, a few lines below the text, include “-end-” Below that, add a final paragraph of boilerplate information about your group or organization.

Many options are available for disseminating news releases today—mail, fax, e-mail—and at least as many theories as to which one is best. If you have the luxury of contacting each name on your mailing list and asking for preferences, do so. If not, research indicates many reporters prefer to receive news releases via e-mail. E-mail is also the least expensive and fastest alternative for getting your news out.

Media Alerts: The Five Ws

When time is of the essence, it might be more appropriate to send a media alert than a news release. Similar in style to a news release, the alert is limited quite literally to a bulleted list of the who, what, when, where, and why of your event. Whether you use e-mail, mail, or fax, this format is always appropriate when sending information to daybook editors. Daybooks are listings of the major news events scheduled for a particular day. You might call the editor the day that your media alert arrives at his
office, but don't bother the editor again until the day before your event, when it is perfectly legitimate to call again to learn if your information will be published.

Fact Sheets and Information Packets: Takeaways for Busy Reporters

Any time you meet a member of the media, whether at an event you’ve hosted or a quick one-on-one meeting, it will help if you have prepared information for them to take with them. Copies of fact sheets, annual reports, news releases, and policy briefs will give the reporter additional information to refer to when writing a news story or looking for sources later on.

- **Fact sheets.** One-page fact sheets are useful for focusing on the key points of a complex issue or as an introduction to an organization or program. (See page 26 for a sample one-page fact sheet about ASCD). The fact sheet, like the media advisory, gives just the facts. It may be written in a standard bullet format with a minimum of explanation preceding it, or it may take the form of short, journalistic paragraphs.

- **Information Packets.** More comprehensive public information packets and media kits are useful for disseminating a variety of information about your program, organization, event, or cause. You may wish to invest in heavy-stock folders with inner pockets and your group’s name or logo on the front. Components of the packet, which can also serve as stand-alone information tools, can include background information, fact sheets, an annual report or executive summary, newsletters, news releases, biographical information about key speakers or leaders in your group, and any visual elements available, such as a poster or photograph.

The key point about these tools is that they are meant to make it easy for reporters to cover your event or cause. You want the media to use your well-chosen words verbatim.

Op-Ed Articles and Letters to the Editor: Getting Your Opinion in Ink

Op-ed articles and letters to the editor are two ways to showcase your opinion in the press. Unlike providing an interview to a reporter for a story she is writing, op-eds and letters to the editor are stand-alone pieces that focus on your point of view. Of the two, an op-ed carries the prestige of placement opposite the editorial page and includes a byline. However, letters to the editor, if written well on a carefully chosen and focused topic, are often easier to get published than an op-ed piece.
• **Op-ed articles.** The purpose of an op-ed is to persuade the reader, generally in the form of either a direct commentary on a current situation or of a rebuttal of a previously published article or op-ed. An op-ed is most effective when it takes a strong, focused stand on a single issue. It’s a short piece (generally about 750 words for a daily paper, but keep track of the length and style in your target publication to be more precise). It should be both succinct and clear about what it wants to persuade the reader to do.

Op-eds, as a rule, are not written by “Jane Q. Public.” They tend to carry the voice of authority or expertise and are usually attributed to presidents, executive directors, CEOs, and the like. A good op-ed concisely and unemotionally examines and refutes the main opposing point of view. It also provides a clear connection between the writer’s view and the best interests of the reader. It tells your audience what’s in it for them.

At the end of the article, it is appropriate to add one or two sentences identifying the writer and the source of expertise. For example, a piece written by Gene Carter might note that “Dr. Gene R. Carter is the executive director of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. He is also the former superintendent of the Norfolk, Virginia, Public Schools.” To read recent op-ed columns written by Gene Carter, visit the ASCD Web site at www.ascd.org/news and click on “Press Room,” then “Statements and Editorials.”

You should submit op-eds to the editorial editor of the publication and include a self-addressed stamped envelope if you want to be sure you’re notified about rejection or if you have materials you want returned.

• **Letters to the Editor.** Although experts and important titles may still have an edge in getting a letter to the editor published, the letters to the editor section of a paper is more open to ordinary citizens on a local level. Generally, these letters are based on a reaction to a recent news story, feature article, editorial, op-ed, or letter that appeared in the same publication. They may be written to inform or to convey emphatic agreement with previously published information, but they are often used to present a different point of view or perspective or to correct misrepresentation or factual errors. Letters to the editor tend to be short (brevity is a virtue; one-paragraph submissions are definitely acceptable) and highly focused. If they refer in any way to a previously published piece, that article should be identified parenthetically—by title and publication date, if possible.

We are educators. We know what works. Together we can make a difference.

Visit www.ascd.org/actioncenter today to join ASCD Educator Advocates.
Television Appearances: A Visual Statement

From community cable access programs to interviews on regional or national news, television appearances offer an unparalleled opportunity for education advocates to communicate their messages to wide audiences with a sense of immediacy. On television, you essentially become the embodiment of your message. Your words and appearance will be associated with your cause. Make sure you hone your message to a simple phrase and practice answering any question that might arise with that phrase.

Television magnifies images, so consider the following tips:

- Dress in a subtle manner. Loud colors, patterns, or accessories will distract viewers from focusing on your key message. Wear solid-colored clothing and simple accessories. If you want to be viewed as a knowledgeable professional, make certain you convey that image visually.
- Before you go on the air, practice how you will deliver your key points. A mirror or critical friend may be quite helpful.
- It’s OK to pause briefly before you respond to a question.
- Saying “no comment” is a comment.
- Remember a top strategy that politicians use: it’s not what they ask, it’s what you want to answer. Redirect the question to include your key messages.
- If you don’t know the answer to a question, it’s acceptable to say, “I’m not certain. I’ll need to look into that.”
- Be aware of your nonverbal communication, particularly your gestures. Assume you are on camera at all times, from all angles. Make an effort to appear to be a good listener when other people are speaking.
- Smile!

Radio Programs: Making Yourself Heard

Whether you are being interviewed or are calling a talk-radio show program, your words—and your voice itself—assume great significance. On the radio, for example, a nervous laugh may sound to listeners as if you are taking a serious question lightly. Consider recording yourself in a practice conversation to learn your nervous habits and how to combat them, or consider taking a class in public speaking.

- **Call-In Shows.** Radio call-in programs, particularly syndicated ones, are an excellent tool for education activists. Your local newspaper will probably have listings for the major radio programs in your area. Tune in to talk radio on several occasions to become familiar with the style, format, and political views of the
host. Before you call in, jot down your key points. Remember to identify your role as an educator at the beginning of your message and to keep your points brief.

- **Radio Interviews.** As with television appearances and political testimony, carefully practice delivery of your message before you enter the radio studio. Once in the studio, watch your language; microphones are sometimes accidentally switched on. If you are a featured guest on a call-in program, listen carefully to callers and refer to them by name when responding to questions. Have your network or others who share your viewpoint also call in.

The Internet: Reaching Out to a Broader Audience

In communicating with the media and disseminating information, your contacts should include online publications, electronic mailing lists, and blogs. Many publications that have both a print and online version also have separate staff members responsible for each version. Research online organizations as you would any other media contact—know their content in advance and post your news releases only to appropriate publications, lists, and blogs.

Blogs, in particular, are becoming common vehicles for communicating online. You may wish to establish your own blog to communicate with your audience, or you may simply want to read and take part in discussions on already existing blogs. Whether they are hosted by an organization or individual, remember that blogs serve a variety of purposes. Some, like the ASCD blog (www.ascd.org/blog) allow users to comment and join in on the discussion. Others allow only the author of the blog to comment. Blogs also vary in the objectivity and balance of the information posted. Always consider the experience and objective of the author. For a sample of education blogs hosted by media outlets, visit the following:

If you have a Web site, include the Web address in your correspondence, when appropriate. It's also a good idea to include a “media kit” on your Web site. A media kit can connect members of the press with information about your group, including contact information, current and previous press releases, newsletters, biographical information about members and fact sheets. ASCD’s media kit is available online at www.ascd.org/news in the form of the “Press Room” section.
Setting Up Community Events and Forums

One way to promote dialogue among diverse groups is to hold a forum. By inviting panelists to discuss their viewpoints, and by encouraging the audience to respond and contribute to the conversation, a forum promotes a reflective and inclusive discourse on significant education issues.

Before planning a forum, you must first determine why you are scheduling the event. Are you trying to influence? Educate? Are you putting forth your own point of view, or pulling together a platform on which various points of view are discussed? You need first to define the purpose of the meeting in order to know who to invite, how to invite them, and where to hold the event.

Once you have figured out the why, you next need to determine the who, when, and where. Along with appropriate education groups, you will want to invite policymakers, journalists, and influential members of the community. Make, nurture, and update contacts. Cold calls and mailings are nothing compared to face-to-face communications. Talk to as many real people as you can. Follow your invitation with phone calls and e-mails. It is often difficult to get journalists and policymakers to commit to anything in advance; remain persistent but flexible. Don’t forget to fax information to appropriate media daybooks, both weeks ahead of the forum and then a few days before the forum.

Remember, the one thing you cannot control is what happens on the scheduled day of the event. A powerful story could break, a Congressperson could hold a press conference, a hurricane or blizzard could hit. Your media coverage is dependent on the news of the day. Accept those risks, keep your fingers crossed, and move on.

In addition, consider these planning details when setting up your forum:

- **Media Kits.** You should assemble media kits, preferably to send out before the forum, but certainly to hand out at the meeting. As mentioned earlier, media kits are folders of information and background sources that journalists and policymakers can use as a reference to better understand the issue and to influence others.

- **Directions.** When confirming with registrants, make sure to supply extensive directions to the venue, including information about parking and public transportation.

We are educators. We know what works. Together we can make a difference.
Setting Up Community Events and Forums

• **Seating Arrangements.** Again, the room set-up depends on your meeting goals. To educate, use theater style. To encourage dialogue, use a round table. For community forums, try to include your audience as much as possible.

• **Food and Beverages.** At a minimum, it is courteous to provide coffee, tea, and water. If you schedule your event during breakfast, lunch, or dinner time, attendees will expect to be fed. Providing a light meal is in your best interest—a hungry person is much less likely to concentrate on the topic at hand.

• **Sign-in Table.** Have a sign-in sheet available as people come in, and make sure it is staffed throughout the meeting. Members of the press will frequently sneak in late, and it is very important to keep track of attendees.

• **Follow-up.** The contacts you make at the forum are important. However, your contacts may extend beyond the venue walls. Many times, those who were unable to attend will want to be updated and informed about what they missed. You should create a product—either a videotape, some press clips, or even meeting notes (proceedings)—after the forum for those absent but interested parties.
Glossary of Legislative Terms

**act:** Legislation (a bill or joint resolution, see below) which has passed both chambers of Congress in identical form, been signed into law by the President, or passed over his veto, thus becoming law. Technically, this term also refers to a bill that has been passed by one house and engrossed (prepared as an official copy).

**amendment:** A proposal to alter the text of a pending bill or other measure by striking out some of it, by inserting new language, or both.

**appropriation:** The provision of funds, through an annual appropriations act or a permanent law, for federal agencies to make payments out of the Treasury for specified purposes. The formal federal spending process consists of two sequential steps: authorization and then appropriation.

**authorization:** A statutory provision that obligates funding for a program or agency. An authorization may be effective for one year, a fixed number of years, or an indefinite period. An authorization may be for a definite amount of money or for “such sums as may be necessary.” The formal federal spending process consists of two sequential steps: authorization and then appropriation.

**bill:** The principal vehicle employed by lawmakers for introducing their proposals (enacting or repealing laws, for example).

**budget resolution:** Legislation in the form of a concurrent resolution setting forth the congressional budget. The budget resolution establishes various budget totals, divides spending totals into functional categories (e.g., transportation), and may include reconciliation instructions to designated House or Senate committees.

**conferences:** Senators and Representatives appointed to serve on conference committees (see below). Conferences are usually appointed from the committee or committees that reported the legislation.

**conference committee:** A temporary, ad hoc panel composed of House and Senate conferees which is formed for the purpose of reconciling differences in legislation that has passed both chambers. Conference committees are usually convened to resolve bicameral differences on major and controversial legislation.

**congressional record:** The substantially verbatim account of daily proceedings on the Senate and House floor. It is printed for each day Congress is in session. At the back of each daily issue is the “Daily Digest,” which summarizes the day’s floor and committee activities.

**continuing resolution/continuing appropriations:** Legislation in the form of a joint resolution enacted by Congress, when the new fiscal year is about to begin or has
begun, to provide budget authority for Federal agencies and programs to continue in operation until the regular appropriations acts are enacted.

**discretionary spending**: Spending (budget authority and outlays) controlled in annual appropriations acts.

**engrossed bill**: The official copy of a bill or joint resolution passed by the House and Senate.

**filibuster**: Informal term for any attempt to block or delay Senate or House action on a bill or other matter by debating it at length, by offering numerous procedural motions, or by any other delaying or obstructive actions.

**fiscal year**: The fiscal year is the accounting period for the federal government which begins on October 1 and ends on September 30. The fiscal year is designated by the calendar year in which it ends; for example, fiscal year 2006 begins on October 1, 2005 and ends on September 30, 2006. Congress passes appropriations legislation to fund the government for every fiscal year.

**floor leaders**: The Majority Leader and Minority Leader are elected by their respective party conferences to serve as the chief spokesmen for their parties and to manage and schedule the legislative and executive business. By custom, the Presiding Officer gives the floor leaders priority in obtaining recognition to speak on the floor.

**markup**: The process by which congressional committees and subcommittees debate, amend, and rewrite proposed legislation.

**ranking member**: The member of the majority party on a committee who ranks first in seniority after the chair.

**ranking minority member**: The highest ranking (and usually longest serving) minority member of a committee or subcommittee.

**table, motion to**: A Senator or Representative may move to table any pending question. The motion is not debatable, and agreement to the motion is equivalent to defeating the question tabled. The motion is used to dispose quickly of questions the House or Senate do not wish to consider further.

**whips**: Assistants to the floor leaders who are also elected by their party conferences. The Majority and Minority Whips (and their assistants) are responsible for mobilizing votes within their parties on major issues. In the absence of a party floor leader, the whip often serves as acting floor leader.

ASCD—For the Success of Each Learner

We are educators united to improve learning and teaching. With more than 175,000 members, ASCD is one of the largest education organizations in the world. Our membership reflects all aspects of public and nonpublic education. Our members are professional educators from all levels and subject areas throughout the United States and worldwide.

We advocate sound education policies. Educators and all who care about education view ASCD as a trusted source. We help link research-based practice to informed policymaking. We help those with differing perspectives reach consensus about what’s good for kids—not what’s best for a particular job role, special interest, or political view. ASCD and its more than 60 affiliates serve as the gateway to sources and resources, offering “in the field” perspectives to educators and policymakers alike about what’s working in education.

We share best practices. ASCD provides education information services, offers cutting-edge professional development for effective learning and teaching, and supports activities to provide educational equity for all students. We advance professional accountability. We make evidence-based research accessible and understandable. We offer worldwide perspectives about the best in learning and teaching.

ASCD believes that education policymaking and practice should address the whole child—that student success is dependent not only on academic knowledge but also on physical and emotional health, engagement, and motivation.

ASCD makes a difference in the lives of learners. We are education’s largest leadership organization.

- About one in three principals and assistant principals in the United States are ASCD members.
- Nearly half of all U.S. district-level administrators belong to ASCD.
- Many of the nation’s top teachers are members.

We represent leaders in education.

- Many of our experts, authors, and consultants are recognized as the best in the field.
- Ninety-three percent of U.S. highly successful principals and university department chairs indicate they read our flagship publication, Educational Leadership.
- Nearly 80 percent of ASCD affiliates have representatives on policy-focused committees and panels that work at the state, provincial, or national level.

We focus on what works in schools and what is good for children and young adults.

- Our information and perspectives are research- and evidence-based.
- We are an award-winning publisher of books, periodicals, and multimedia products.
- States, districts, provinces, and cities have turned to us to help them launch school improvement efforts using our research-based resources.

We are educators. We know what works. Together we can make a difference.

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