

STAND UP *and* Be Counted



The PAACE Legislative Committee's 'how-to' manual, removing the mystery and intimidation from advocacy on behalf of adult continuing education.

This document was commissioned by PAACE to assist and encourage legislative-focused advocacy within the membership, and to provide tools so that PAACE members may become better able to flex our political muscle.

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LEGISLATIVE ACTION KIT for the *Pennsylvania Association for Adult Continuing Education*

• PAACE

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Sharing our Skills, Increasing Our Wins

1. How Do Politicians Make Decisions?

All day, every day, in Washington and Harrisburg, advocates walk the halls, meeting with decision makers and politicians. These lobbyists can be very smart. They can also be pushing for legislation that helps a popular issue (like education). However, no matter how good or well connected they may be, sometimes a single advocate can't be effective. **Why is this?**

Politicians run for office to serve the public—or at least the subset of the public that supported them in their election. Elected officials know that, to be elected, they need to look good to the key groups of people that they hope to get votes from. They also have to raise an increasingly large amount of money. In order to look good and raise money, candidates must make deals.

In some ways, politics can be about 'ideas' only tangentially. What moves a policy forward is usually numbers: number of voters and number of dollars. In cases of desperation or strength, a group may also strategically try to make an official look bad to voters she or he cares about.

Whenever a decision must be made, politicians and the officials they appoint weigh most of the following—before deciding how to vote or what issues to take the lead on:

- Their own ideas and desires
- Number of letters about an issue
- Number of phone calls
- News coverage
- The opinions and checkbooks of campaign donors
- The opinions of voters, by poll and perception
- The opinions of organizations representing substantial segments of the electorate
- The agenda of the person who appointed them or

- helped them get elected
- The opinions of the leaders of their party
- People or groups who can make a policy maker look bad

Note that the pre-existing ideas or opinions of the elected official are only one part of the equation—often not the largest part.

Adult education is important and necessary for the health of Pennsylvania and its economy. Nevertheless, there are many issues crossing the desks of politicians. Almost all of the bills and proposals are run through the filter above. Whether or not an idea is a good or just or correct or affordable often does not matter very much.

What matters is whether — and how many — voters are clamoring for it.

Constituencies that matter to the elected official are usually pushing their issues and positions. With exceptions, PAACE members are generally not sizable campaign contributors. By and large, adult education programs have few enemies in government. We simply do not register on the radar screen as a constituency to be concerned about.

PAACE member agencies serve 60,000 students over the course of a year, and involve many thousands of staff, volunteers, and board members.

Why don't elected representatives consider our large constituency?

Why would a representative vote for millions of dollars in new funding for (say) freeway construction, but not for money that would teach the residents of their district to read and write?

In such a case, the representative is often contacted by a dozen local construction contractors, one of whom makes moderate campaign contributions, plus two lobbyists for a trucking company as well as 25 Teamster members, and several local politicians who need jobs in their area. Other local elected officials from nearby towns believe that new freeways will increase development in their depressed area.

The representative understands that she will be rewarded with loyalty by constituencies for her votes that will award contracts and jobs in her district.

By the time that the legislature's budget arguments arrive at education, thousands of teachers and parents from across the Commonwealth have called and visited to demand a much-needed increase in spending for troubled urban and rural school districts. To retain a tight focus, groups coordinating the campaign to win closer-to-adequate spending for city public schools brush aside the concerns of adult education programs.

The representative already has broken the bank with freeway spending, and is weighing the best way to vote on spending education dollars help to her party in the next Governor's election.

When PAACE becomes more able to deploy our large numbers of students and volunteers, we will alter the terms of the political debate in this state and country. When few letters are written and few phone calls are made, our voice is not heard. *In political terms, silence means everything is okay.*

The extent to which our needs are taken seriously, or the proposals of our leaders within PAACE and our champions in Harrisburg and Washington are acted on depends on the quantity of grassroots political muscle.

2. ***What is Grassroots Advocacy?***

Decision makers are hearing from many interests — often with substantial money to donate or other sorts of economic clout. Good programs and initiatives *that remain silent* can find themselves on the losing end of decisions.

More 'noise' of almost any sort makes the concerns of a constituency a higher priority. More 'quiet' means falling gradually to the bottom of the pile.

Advocacy is simply advocating on behalf of oneself or the person or groups of people and issues that you care about. It is putting your voice forward to solve a problem. Grassroots advocacy is using the power we have to affect change and better the situation of adults needing basic education.

There is a powerful tool built into many PAACE member agencies. PAACE members care enough about adult education to work hard and long for little money. Vast numbers of people find literacy important enough to volunteer. Thousands and thousands of students take the time to come to tutoring or a class — and find their lives transformed.

The powerful tool is our numbers.

If we can coordinate our numbers, and use them in a concerted effort, we become a much stronger constituency with goals that must be considered when decisions are being made.

'Grassroots' is a word meaning the on-the-ground voices of real people: those in our programs, those who run our programs, and those who see the benefits for our nation and commonwealth that result from adult education.

Grassroots advocacy is when we use our strength in numbers to put across an important point to the politicians whom we elect. It does not matter if someone knows every policy detail or statistic. It doesn't even matter much if a few callers ask for a specific spending increase or reduction in paperwork without knowing precisely why.

What matters the most is making the calls and writing the letters — lots of them. Elected officials hire phone answerers for the express purpose of tallying the number of people motivated to make a call or send a letter or fax. The phone answerers and letter counters do not usually write down every specific in a letter. The most detailed letters sometimes do, however, get passed along to the member or their issue advisors.

We Are Constituents... and There Are Thousands of Us!

By Harrisburg standards, receiving one hundred telephone calls on an issue is unheard of. In most of the counties in the Commonwealth, agencies exist that could generate hundreds of calls and letters, simply by firmly and explicitly asking students and volunteers.

Currently, in the high priced PR firm world in Washington DC, a new and lucrative fad has swept firms engaging in lobbying for corporate clients. Firms that win the biggest contracts are those that have learned how to generate “the appearance of grassroots pressure” to accompany suitcase carrying lobbyists. “It has become essential for about five percent of our accounts,” states a lead staffer from Hill & Knowlton, one of the nation’s largest public relations firms. “That is, any campaign underway with a goal of substantial legislative change rather than an amendment here and there...”

PAACE members already know: we are asking for substantial change.

PAACE is seeking increases in state and federal spending for adult basic education. There is a staggering inability to meet the adult education needs of Pennsylvania. Only 2% of adults in need are receiving services, while reporting and staff development requirements leave many agencies struggling.

Major PR firms spend millions to attempt to create the numerical strength that PAACE already has. We have never fully deployed our considerable political power. Within the PAACE membership, there is substantial untapped potential energy.

PAACE members and agencies have hundreds of easily activated constituents almost everywhere in the state. The thousands of staff, students and volunteers—that are learning or teaching how to write letters—are *right now* armed to generate a whirlwind in the state capitol and within Pennsylvania’s delegation to Congress.

We need to learn to more effectively march out our troops. Now is the time to learn to use our power.

No one can do this for us. Even in times of economic growth and stability, failure to engage in advocacy means that our agencies and capacity to serve can be threatened by state and federal funders.

Advocacy can ensure the growth of our capacities to educate adults in Pennsylvania. At the same time, no one was born knowing how or what to do to increase effective advocacy.

3. ‘Grasstops’ Leadership

Grassroots power can only be used if there are leaders who are willing and able to mobilize it. Program directors, as well as volunteer coordinators, are the most logical people who have the authority and tools built into their jobs.

Advocacy can also be added to new and existing job descriptions explicitly.

Grassroots networks work best when there are people who volunteer to be the ‘grasstops.’ A grasstops leader is the contact for an area who takes responsibility to mobilize the troops when PAACE (or your agency or coalition) decides it is time to exercise political muscle. Grasstops leaders coordinate the advocacy capacity of PAACE for a state or region, town, or even just one program within an agency.

Grasstops leaders can be the ones to develop an ongoing relationship with legislators and their staff. When the troops are turned out, they usually are simply leaving messages for decision makers and/or sending letters expressing a broad point or making a request with little discussion. A leader can be the person who will regularly deal with the policy makers to discuss and explain, negotiate and follow up on PAACE-wide efforts.

These ongoing relationships do not necessarily mean getting invited to a party barbecue or fish-fry. It just means becoming a regular point of contact. This is an important component of any advocacy efforts, and PAACE has yet to find members who will ‘adopt a politician.’

Grasstops leaders use several tools, many of which (such as calling days and letter writing) are detailed

elsewhere in this manual. Some PAACE regional reps have used additional tools.

4. **Already In Our Toolbox:**

• *The Volunteer Tutor List*

Some PAACE members use their phone trees and volunteer lists when advocacy volume is needed. Many of our agencies have communications systems in place to be in regular contact with volunteers, and sometimes students. If a staffer's job includes communicating with tutors or adult learners, *help that staff person ask the students to do something.*

It can make the list calling take a little longer, since callers will need to briefly explain the issue, give a phone number and a message to deliver. The payoff can be substantial when phone call requests become routine.

Requests for letters work with agency mailings (if a sample letter or post card is included – *preferably stamped already*). Requests for phone calls work best when delivered by phone. **Its best to do both!**

Even with a list of strongly committed individuals, it is best to assume a high 'unavailable' rate, when some people are unreachable, temporarily overcommitted, or on vacation. The PAACE track record indicates that a leader should plan for a 50% non-return rate.

• *Groups of Bodies*

Staffs have meetings. Request the staff to engage in advocacy—*on the clock, at a staff meeting*. Staff meetings, are especially good places to look for frequent advocates.

Staffs have phones. Ask them to dial them.

Adult learners, tutors, or volunteers are audiences that care about adult continuing education. Ask them to do something!

5. **What a Leader Does:**

• **Builds a grassroots response network** — a list of groups and/or individuals who will regularly and reliably write letters and/or make phone calls.

Some PAACE leaders already have created a network of people who have committed to making at least one phone call and/or writing one letter, *as soon as the call is issued*. These individuals also commit to asking staff, tutors, or students to make calls or write letters when possible. Once a network is built, it is relatively little effort to generate 20-30 phone calls and letters.

• **Analysis:** The regional rep or grassroots leader analyzes the call for action, determines its priority, and sets a number goal of calls and/or letters.

• **Gets the word out:** When the time arises, call your network. Fax your network. E-mail your network and PAACE members e-mail list. Send mail to and call your network.

Tips and Tasks:

Hearing an advocacy request from you *firsthand* will produce far better results than a flyer posted on the bulletin board or telephone pole. Singular e-mail alerts, faxes, and mailings don't work: these tools individually simply do not turn out the troops. In advertising, professionals say that people need 'multiple exposures' before the importance of an activity requested 'sinks in'.

Broadly speaking, personal phone calls (that connect — not leaving a message) is the most effective single form of communication. However, data indicate that a personal call that follows an e-mail, a fax, and a piece of mail is by far the strongest way to get your message out. If a person has heard about something several times, by the time your phone call comes through, the recipient *suddenly assumes* that they are going to do whatever is needed.

• **Set a deadline for the calls or letters.**

• **Follow up:** One day after the deadline, call and confirm the results of the individual or program's efforts, with a plan for more follow up is needed.

• **Post results to the PAACE e-mail list:** The number of calls made and letters written, answers received, press coverage gained —all can serve as an inspiration to others, as well as an update for the coordinators of any campaign.

6. **Using Our Power: Grassroots Advocacy Tools**

Help learners, staff, and tutors by dedicating time to careful explanations of requests for calls and letters. It greatly increases response when staff and tutors are spoken to at length about the importance of the call to action and the importance of responding. Some-times the request for calls and letters must be repeated.

Basics:

- **In-Person Briefing**
- **Fact Sheet**
- **Sample Letter**
- **Sample Calling Script**

The PAACE Legislative Committee usually supplies a **briefing paper, a calling script, and a sample letter**. As we know, learning retention is greatly increased by reading out loud (or summarizing) written materials. In a class or office setting, summarize the briefing paper, localizing it where possible, and then role play the tasks desired.

A **mock, or practice, phone conversation** during a meeting can assist staff or volunteers. **Sample lesson plans and discussions** can help teachers and tutors be better able to generate more calls and letters.

Into Action!

A. Agency-wide Call-in Days

A planned day of phone calls can be one of the simplest and most powerful actions. Ask *everyone* in the building to make a phone call to the target—including tutors, students, and the delivery people. Agency call-in days can produce a lot of tick marks in our favor in DC or Harrisburg.

Calls should almost always go to the capitol offices whenever possible. This is where opinions are more formally kept track of. The capitol is where staff advisors familiar with the issues work. A network of organizations committed to participating in coordinated agency call-in days can be powerful.

Provide a sample script to phone callers and a phone number. Give a briefing and make assignments during the staff meeting. Write another call-

ing script for staff who must call the entire student or volunteer list.

The Congressional Switchboard (202.224.3121) can connect callers to the correct representative or senator in Washington by checking a person's home address. No one has to know who his or her representative is. The VOTE Smart Project (888 VOTE SMART) can run the address of a person to find federal, state, and local elected officials, voting records, and phone and fax numbers and addresses.

Declare a calling week! Ask everyone who comes in the door to make a call to the person who needs calling. It is okay to call more than once.

B. 'Citizenship Literacy' Classes

Many adult literacy classes are teaching a valuable skill: how to read and write business and personal letters. People seek adult education programs in part to more fully participate in the world they find themselves in. **Why not use this opportunity to teach about letters and writing to include education on the basics of political process?**

The best way to learn Politics 101 is through an applied effort to win something specific. The PAACE Legislative Committee keeps the membership informed about these issues and opportunities.

If you are a teacher or tutor, plan a "Citizenship Literacy" class or series. Teach the students about political process, constituency, and about why citizens write letters to politicians. Of course, you may also include sections on business letters.

Explain the issue of the day, and why it matters to the folks in the room. Explain how, since it matters to many folks in the room and other similar people, that it therefore must matter to the policy maker – if lots of calls and letters are coming in.

Have sample letter text suggestions. If a student prefers to write a letter to a politician about an issue other than the adult education issues you raise, you can help with that also!

It does not matter if a student is registered to vote. The number of letters matter. (However, many of

the strongest PAACE agencies register numerous students to vote over the year.)

C. Asking Students to Make Calls

The moral authority of an adult learner telling their story to a policy maker's phone answerer is powerful. PAACE member agencies have phones. Many agencies have groups of students in a room. Teachers (or other agency staff like administrative assistants) can ask students to make a call.

When the opportunity to make an advocacy call *in the agency* is offered, more students will make the phone call than will if they are merely handed a flyer with a phone number. Most students will be unfamiliar with making calls to politicians, and some adult learners will not be able to afford the long distance charges.

A staffperson should be available to assist with the calls when possible. Everyone can use a little coaching before beginning a new, strange activity like calling elected officials.

The ideal situation is a classroom with phones nearby. In classroom settings where there are no phones, administrators could try to provide them. During times of urgency, it is not unheard of for an executive director to give their cell-phone to a volunteer tutor with a room full of learners!

A calling coordinator could enter a classroom and make a presentation, explaining the issue to the students, stating why their voices as adult learners are important and needed. One should always explain that a caller rarely talks to a politician, and that politicians hire (usually) pleasant people to answer phones and keep track of public opinion. Explain that a caller can go into as much detail about their personal story and the importance of adult education as they wish, or they can say, "Please ask the representative to support X," and hang up.

Sometimes asking for a show of hands for phone call volunteers can produce disappointing (and self-defeating) results. More people will sign a piece of paper to volunteer than will raise their hands.

Depending on how many lines are available, bring out a few of the students at a time to make phone calls during the class. One could enter the classroom and quietly ask for the next callers who had put their names on the sign up sheet. If entering and reentering an active classroom to ask for the next callers is too disruptive, then write the list of names from the sign up sheet you passed around on the chalkboard or butcher paper. Ask the students to take turns coming and making their calls as the previous callers return.

7. What's Best? E-mail, Calls or Letters?

More is better. Calls and letters are more powerful than letters alone. Almost anything weighs more than an e-mail to a representative. Nevertheless, anything is better than nothing.

PAACE members from the legislative committee and the executive directors of some programs already make thoughtful and strategic calls to decision makers to discuss the issues of the membership. These calls from the 'grasstops' weigh much, much more after 200 students, staff, and volunteers have called in to voice their desires or opinions.

Advocacy tools from strongest to weakest:

- calls + letters + e-mails
- calls + e-mail, or letters + e-mail
- calls or letters
- e-mail alone (usually paid little attention)

Personalized letters (or e-mails) always matter much more than 'form letters' or identical post cards. When offering suggested language, leave lots of room for individualization. The PAACE Legislative Committee 'sample letters' are often written in such a way that they cannot be lifted word for word, even though this may cut into the number of letters slightly. However, numbers still matter: thousands of post cards are better than five personalized letters. A personal phone call and letter from a 'grasstops' leader who has built a relationship with a policy maker weighs a lot more if there were a thousand post cards dropped in the mail.

8. ***If You Are a Director or Coordinator***

- Encourage, assist, and assign such tasks as citizenship literacy lessons.
- Make advocacy efforts on behalf of students and the agency routine. Make advocacy expected of all staff and tutors.
- When communicating with volunteer networks, tutors, staff, or students, routinely include requests for phone calls and letters, and the tools needed to make the calls and write the letters.
- Include calls for action, sample letters, phone numbers, and calling scripts in every mailing.
- When activating phone trees of volunteers, make it a priority to request the action that our agencies need. Explain the issues and provide tools.
- To increase participation, make phones available for long distance calls.

9. ***Why Visit Legislators?***

Legislators hear from suitcase carrying lobbyists all the time. They rarely hear from ‘regular’ constituents—*voters who live in the districts*, stating the problems and offering solutions for the problems that affect the residents of the local area.

The representatives and staff will usually be polite and friendly, even if they are opponents on the issue you wish to discuss. **They usually actually want to hear from residents ‘from back in the district,’ and will often prioritize the comments from people most affected over the comments of people with the greatest technical analysis of the regulations.**

A legislative visit weighs considerably more than a phone call. A visit puts a human face on the issue, and more ably demonstrates the human consequences of a bad policy. An in-person visit is important, even if you don’t feel like you have a single new thing to say that wasn’t included in the hundreds of letters, phone calls, and news stories you have already placed. The visit is an important complement to the other efforts of you and the rest of the PAACE membership. Your visits magnify the calls and letters and editorials.

Your visits can answer the questions that the member of the legislature might not have thought to ask until preparing for a meeting on your issue.

Your visit engages the member in a discussion, and puts an issue on their table that they may have benignly ignored. A friendly visit or two forces a politician to take a position independently, rather than following the priorities of party leadership on an issue they have not considered.

PAACE has no real opponents or strong champions. We need to start the process of *cultivating* champions who are willing to take the lead on adult education issues, and are willing to push their party leadership to reprioritize. A visit can cultivate and strengthen your relationship with an elected official.

10. ***Legislative Visits***

Do your homework. Know which committee and/or leadership positions the legislator holds. Try to find out how a legislator has voted before on similar bills. You can search for information on Pennsylvania state legislators at www.legis.state.pa.us. Find information on the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives at congress.org. Project VOTE SMART (888 VOTE SMART) can give information on voting records.

A) **Getting a Meeting**

Setting up an appointment is as simple as making a call. It is rarely hard to get a meeting. Even if one doesn’t know who the education advisor is, and not all of the visitors live exactly in the district, *just call*. The scheduler will want to know the purpose of the meeting and sometimes a list of names. Unless you are meeting someone at the White House, it doesn’t matter if the people who show up are somewhat different from the people whose names you gave.

Give as much notice as you can. Let them know how long a meeting you want. It is best to send a written request by fax, with a phone call that happens immediately after the fax goes through.

B) **Meet With Whom?**

The advisory staff is almost as important as the politician. While your team will hopefully be able to discuss an item with the decision maker, often advocates meet only with one or more of the legislator’s staff. Many items cross the desks of legislators, and it is almost impossible to keep up with every issue adequately. Therefore, almost all politicians

have staff advisors who are in charge of research on a specific area (such as education), and making suggestions to the member on what positions to take. The staffers are *assigned* to be very knowledgeable about a group of issues.

These staff are important to meet with. A meeting with only the member and without her support staff can be a frustrating experience in describing your issue from the very ground level.

However, be aware that the staff, just like the policy maker they work for, prefer to make as few public commitments as possible, and are often very good at making visitors 'feel heard,' even when no change in position is coming.

- **Where to Arrange the Meeting**

With few exceptions, the most informed staff—the staff that hold advisory roles—will be stationed in DC or Harrisburg. Sometimes, on long recesses, an advisor will travel with the politician to the district. Often 'home office' staff are more attuned to getting potholes fixed or dealing with parking tickets than the sometimes complex issues of the day.

A meeting with the most relevant staff members will usually have to take place in a Capitol.

However, a meeting with the member herself can often take place in the home district, especially if press is to be involved (for example, you invite a member to an awards or graduation ceremony, give them an honor, and set up a meeting for before or after the cameras).

A meeting with the member will have to take place wherever you can get one. They will often wish to hold meetings that are more technical in the capitol where the issue staff are located.

In Pennsylvania, the Assembly takes the summer off. Times around major holidays are spent in the district as well. Consider requesting a meeting coupled with a press event proposal. Holiday themes!

C) Ask for Something Specific

Visibility is not enough. If the state needs to spend \$100 million more dollars to (begin to) have an

impact on the actual needs of the Commonwealth and your area, then *ask for it*.

- Ask for commitments for a certain vote.
- Ask for commitments to take leadership in steering an issue through a committee.
- Ask for the Senator or Representative to come speak in support of your position at a press event you organize.
- Ask the member if she will circulate a sign on letter to the Governor's budget office, copied to the House and Senate Appropriations Committee Majority and Minority Party Chairs.

Try to stick to one issue. Know the needs and priorities of your programs.

D) What to Bring:

Bring packets of information that support your case. The packets should include a one pager stating your requests or policy recommendations, another couple of pages with supporting background documentation for any claims you or your coalition is making that could be argued with, and couple of clippings of news stories supporting your group or your position. *Review the contents at your meeting.*

The last item reviewed should be something that increases the political weight of your positions. Include a piece of paper about the vast number of clients, staff, volunteers, and board members the agencies on your advocacy team come from. If you are advocating for a PAACE resolution, include on the same page information about the large and statewide scale of the PAACE network.

Have basic data on your program, including the number of learners served (including the number on public assistance when relevant), numbers of volunteer tutors trained, number of sites, funding levels, and percentage of private support.

Leave three copies of your packet. One is for the legislator, one is for the staff assistant, and the other is 'to pass along.'

E) Who to Bring:

Choose two or more from the list below:

- One to several adult learners (this can often be the most important group to bring.

Adult learners can be actively enrolled in current classes, and/or be graduates. If there are no adult learners to bring, then be prepared with success stories. Bringing adult learners is very important; personal stories can be the most effective way to communicate your message.

- A program director or agency coordinator
- A volunteer tutor, if your program uses volunteers
- A board member
- A person the official wants to hear from.

This could be a donor, a local party official, a pastor, a union leader, an editorial board writer, or any known opinion leader of the community.

- A person (who may already be one of those above) with extensive technical knowledge of the ins-and-outs of Harrisburg or DC.

It can be a boon to have a person on your team who is knowledgeable about the budget process, the committees and subcommittees of the legislature, familiar with the party leadership, and has an awareness of the interests and vulnerabilities of the member you are going to visit. However, this might be the least important person to invite, in addition to the hardest to find.

Briefcase carrying lobbyist skills just don't matter nearly as much as having people the decision maker will perceive as being directly effected, and/or politically connected.

The PAACE e-mail list is underused for connecting the experience and knowledge of the PAACE membership. By posting a request for comments or suggestions on the list, a new advocate could tap into the extensive collective experience and knowledge of the membership.

F) Establish Roles for Speakers

During a pre-meeting, determine everything you wish to say, and figure out who should say it.

G) Anticipate Questions, Prepare Answers

If you cannot answer a question, don't be afraid to say so. Just say, "I'll get that information to you," and then be sure to do so.

Be sure to let the legislator express her or his opinions—even if they differ from yours. Get a specific response to the specific request. If no commitments

will come during the visit, find out when a specific response will be available. Follow up. Sometimes, advocates call up several times a week to learn if the member has taken a position yet.

Keep the visit at the tone your group has decided in advance. If the legislator disagrees with you, your group should decide in advance what to do. Sometimes it can make sense to express disappointment, or even to explain the social (or political) implications of a bad decision. Sometimes it can make more sense to leave a friendly impression. Advocates may even plan to establish roles where some of the group can express growing disappointment or displeasure, while the others can look nervously at their team and the legislator, then shake hands and end the meeting — following up later as the contact.

H) At the Meeting:

- Establish very clearly who you, your group, and your agency represent during introductions.
- Review the packets.
- Ask your specific question. **Get a specific answer.**
- Answer questions. Answer more questions.
- Discuss what follow up is needed.
- Thank everyone—*strongly if agreement was reached.*
- Leave packets.
- Send a letter of thanks, any additional info requested, and a recap of any commitments made.

I) Other Kinds of Visits

Many programs invite legislators to special events, such as graduation or awards ceremonies. When asking if they will come, explain that they can address the crowd if desired.

Some programs have used these invitations to events to increase visibility of our issue to a legislator, and to get the legislator on record stating something positive for 'the cause.' If there is a dinner or a pre- or post meeting with the legislator after the ceremony, then advocates can hold a meeting similar to one that would occur in a legislators' office.

When a legislator agrees to come to an event, try to set up a table with the same folks mentioned above. Bring your packets, and be prepared to ask for something. Be very aware of the tone you wish for if there is press present.

J) Leaving Brochures

To contribute to increased visibility, some agencies have left stacks of brochures for their programs at a legislator's offices. When occurring in conjunction with phone calls and letters, these brochures can be a useful reminder of our existence – in addition to being a good brochure advertising a good program.

11. **The Truth About Limitations on Non-Profit Advocacy...**

Advocacy is okay! There are few restrictions on students, learners, board members, or staff educating elected representatives. Pennsylvania has stronger restrictions on efforts in Harrisburg than the federal government. In Pennsylvania, up to \$2500 of an agency's budget can be spent *per quarter* on lobbying for legislation. Even if an agency has an enemy in Harrisburg that is *monitoring* lobbying activity, there is nothing to be concerned if the group spends less than \$2500 *per quarter*.

Non-profit agencies are firmly restricted from campaigning for a specific candidate. *'Public education,'* —which can include voters guides or reports on issues—as well as meetings with decision makers to *discuss* the reports or issues—fall outside of the strict prohibitions on non-profit election campaigning. The voter registration efforts of PAACE member agencies are also acceptable, as long as voters are not encouraged to register for one party over another.

12. **Media**

Politicians and bureaucrats pay a lot of attention to the media. When advocates tell a story in the press, it gets the attention of policy makers in addition to the general public. Major political parties have clipping services that check every media source in the state for stories that might inform or adjust a politician's position

Goals

There are several goals to sponsoring a press event. One is to heighten the visibility of our programs and the social importance of adult education.

However, this is not the only important goal.

Another is to send a clear message to a targeted audience—the decision maker who has the power to give you what you want or need. A story men-

tioning politicians or appointed officials *by name* is more likely to get the attention of policy makers.

What Is 'News?'

Assignment editors or bureau chiefs decide which reporters get dispatched to what events. Producers and reporters get some latitude in story selection, or can at least help you 'sell' the editors. Below are suggestions for **press releases** and **press calls**. However, an event must seem like 'news' in order to get coverage. *Visibility alone is not newsworthy.*

Make an Event 'News:'

Does your press event include...

- Something new: *a new study, a report, or white paper, a leaked bad thing*
- People in power and/or famous people: *speakers who are important community leaders, CEOs, celebrities or politicians can increase the newsworthiness of an event—if they are widely known.*
- Conflict with people in power: *more newsworthy than thanks or deference.*
- A 'bad guy': the press knows how to tell a David and Goliath story.
- Controversy and scandal: always news.
- Anything that 'saves the public money' can contribute to newsworthiness.
- A 'schtick': something visual, or an image that dramatically tells your story.
One group brought a giant spine to a politician who had come under fire for not having the political backbone to do the right thing. Adult learners in Massachusetts rolled out a giant scroll down the state house steps. The list was names of individuals on waiting lists to enroll in adult literacy classes.

13. **Staging Press Event Considerations For all Press Events:**

• **Have a message**

A simple, easy to tell story that presents the understanding you'd like the public to have. Be able to state the message quickly and memorably. A catchy sentence or two is best. *"The failure to invest adequately in adult education means that politicians must instead invest tax dollars in adult incarceration."*

• **Have a Narrative**

Describe a problem, offer a proposed, and identify an obstruction.

Problem described: “The Legislature underfunds adult education. Only 2% of the needs of the Commonwealth’s citizens are met. When Harrisburg saves a few dollars by scrimping on adult literacy, this denial of basic social operating expenses may be resulting in higher costs to taxpayers in the form of homeless shelter beds and prison construction.”

Solution proposed : “The Commonwealth should support a modest increase in funding for adult and family literacy every year, until the needs of Pennsylvanians are met. A yearly investment of just 1% of the prison budget for the next five years could enable thousands of residents in our state to become better educated, more economically solvent, and better able to participate in the state economy. When the prisons become less crowded due to this investment, everyone wins.”

Obstruction identified: “Even though we have bipartisan support and enough votes to clear the house, the chair of the budget committee will not allow this proposal to be voted on. Even though our proposal takes no funds from jails or law enforcement, the Chair takes offense to pegging education to the growing prison budget, which he has overseen. The citizens of Pennsylvania are being held hostage by a representative claiming to represent the interests of law and order.”

• **Plan a Timeline for the Event**

Plan a fast moving event. Consider including roles for event attenders that will to keep the level of enthusiasm and participation high. Place key speakers at the beginning, before the media leave.

• **Have a Limited Number of Speakers**

Regardless of the event, there should not be too many speakers. Reporters need to go back to their office and write the story or edit film or tape, and do voiceovers. They may be covering several other events in the same day. Try not to have more than three speakers. Press will only stay at an event for so long before they will feel like they’ve captured what’s important and will move on to the next thing to cover. More than three or four speakers tends to loose press as well as participants.

14. **Event Suggestions**

• **Press briefings** are technical information sessions for reporters who are already interested in an issue or newsmaker. There is usually ample documentation, and in-depth discussion during questions and answers. Sometimes, a briefing will utilize a panel of speakers. Press briefings are sometimes used as a preface to a ‘splashier’ event later in the day, such as a rowdy demonstration—or a speech by the Governor announcing a new initiative.

• **Press conferences** are similar to, but more general than, a press briefing. Each has time set aside for questions and answers. Each involves creating a press packet that includes the press release, a favorable news clipping or two, and backing documentation for any claims made and solutions offered.

A press conference will generally be less focused on policy analysis than a press briefing. A wider array of general assignment reporters should be invited to a press briefing.

Both events are simple arrangements where a few speeches are made, and the solutions or demands of your group are presented in as common sense a way as possible. Then a question and answer period is held. One-on-one interviews with the speakers should be offered as well.

Either event should be held in a location that is convenient for the press, or newsworthy itself. A convenient location might be the Capitol Rotunda Steps, located near the Capitol Newsroom in Harrisburg, or in the National Press Club in DC near the White House (Press Club room rental charges can be steep). A newsworthy location might be outside the office or home of a target or supporter.

• **Town meetings** can be powerful events where citizens fill a room to hear and talk about a new proposal or a big problem they face. Town meetings sometimes have a panel of speakers, and usually will have time for questions from the audience *and* reporters. Some event organizers will suggest a few key questions to audience members in advance.

• **Accountability sessions** are similar to town meetings, except that one or several decision makers

are invited. If **one** decision maker is invited, it will often be an opponent of your group, especially a vulnerable or potentially wavering opponent. When several policy makers are invited, then some of them should be supporters. Sometimes, groups organizing an accountability session will put a citizen panel on one side of the front of the room, and the decision maker on the other.

- **A graduation ceremony** can demonstrate the moving emotions felt by adult learners who have benefited from a program. Graduates can speak about the social, as well as personal benefits of adult education programs. Speakers could talk about the need for a fair increase in spending, or a rule change allowing welfare recipients to remain in education programs until completed.

- **Honors and receptions** can honor student achievers *as well as legislators who have championed programs*. In addition to testimony about the importance of adult continuing education, speakers can address shortfalls in the state or federal budget.

For any sort of press event, arrange the room; For instance, one might hang signs or banners behind a podium and/or place the speaker where she will be surrounded by adult learners.

Invite legislators to honors and graduation ceremonies. These events can provide a good backdrop for newsworthy announcements such as new initiatives, or a call to the other party's members for closer to adequate funding. The 10,000th graduation from an adult education program could be an event where an official challenges Senate leaders to maintain benefits for families receiving welfare who are in literacy programs.

Filling the room is very important for ceremonies. A 'full house' is crucial for town meetings or accountability sessions. A half empty room can be seen as a display of political weakness and could contribute to the perception of an issue as 'marginal.' Sometimes, organizers deliberately book a room slightly too small. One group had a meeting with Senator Arlen Specter, and requested a room large enough to hold 300 people, knowing that between four and six hundred were going to show up.

- **A Rally or demonstration** is a display of support for or opposition to an issue, a position, or a decision maker. A rally should be exiting *and* have a clear message and policy recommendations.

The location of a rally is the same criteria as for a press conference, but the area must also be large enough to hold the crowd. *An area that makes your crowd look small should be avoided.* Legislators with a record of support can be asked to speak, as well as upstanding citizens like clergy, union leaders, or large employers. **Adult learners can be the most powerful speakers.**

Size Matters: More than any other public event, the size of a rally or demonstration is crucial. If 'turnout' for a demonstration is low, then public support for a position may be perceived as small. An issue can be hurt by a small demonstration.

15. Press Releases

The goal of a press release is to get reporters to cover your story in the way that you intend, whether or not they attend your event. A press release is written like a newspaper article, in an inverted pyramid. The most important facts go first, the least important facts are last. A good press release is propaganda camouflaged as very interesting news.

Getting Straight: Before writing the press release, gather facts about the issue. Collect documents and statistics, the correct spelling of people's names, etc. Consult other knowledgeable activists working on the issue. Take notes.

Message: decide with other staff or group members the approach to take in the press release and in interviews with the press. Some people may find it safe to play "bad cops," with a republican governor because their area is solidly democratic, and because allies in Harrisburg or elsewhere have committed to playing the 'good cops'—who can now reference the 'discontent out there.'

Style: The body of the press release should be calm and factual. Facts (backed by statistics, if appropriate) should seem compelling and interesting, but the press release should read like a news article. Good press releases are so news-like that they are some-

times printed in newspapers as articles. Propaganda must be subtle. Opinions and vivid language can be used in quotations. The press release must seem logical and credible to a reporter.

Good Writing Counts: Make sure that there are no grammar or spelling errors. Get the dates, times, and locations right.

At the Top: Type FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE and a contact name and phone number at the top of the press release. You can include more than one name, but the first name will be called far more frequently than the second.

Headlines: Use a large type size. A headline is the first—and *sometimes only*—thing an assignment editor will read before deciding whether a story is going to be covered or not. The headline should tell the “plot” of the press release. Be informative and catchy. Some media outlets get hundreds of releases each day. The reporter, assignment editor or producer will either read a press release or throw it away, often depending on the headline.

First Paragraph: Should explain who, what, where, when, and how. Mention any visuals, audio, and the chronological plan for the event: important speakers, awards for outstanding service, pickets, banner drops, etc. List the groups involved.

Make sure to list things that would appeal to *television* and *radio* reporters, as well as newspaper reporters. Electronic media needs visuals (giant awards, checks, large clever props) or audio (music, drumming, chanting, singing). Newspaper reporters tend to want more substance. All assignment desks want to see interactions with officials in power.

Second Paragraphs: Include crucial facts and background that reporters need to know to understand the purpose of the press release and/or event being announced. Try to put a quote in second paragraph that crystallizes the issue.

Quote accurate facts or statistics. If you make up facts, you will lose credibility.

Further Paragraphs: contain a concise, factual explanation of the issue, detailing and supporting the statements of the headline and first two paragraphs. The rest of the release is assist the reporter in telling the story you want told.

Say what you want.: A press release can also end with the policy recommendation your group is making. “Roland County Literacy Action Joins PAACE in requesting a fair increase of the Commonwealth’s spending for adult literacy.”

Try to keep the press release to one page.

At the bottom of the last page, **signal the end** of a press release with “-030-”. No one knows anymore why the end of a transmission should be signaled with an “030.” It just should.

Quotes are Crucial

- Quotes must be catchy, quotable, and informative. They must be able to stand alone. They are the part of a press release that is most likely to be ‘lifted’ and used in a newspaper article.

- Quotes can be ‘made up’ or actual, but get a person’s permission when attaching their name.

- Quotes can be used to include information that doesn’t fit in the rest of the press release. Quotes are usually used to convey the *opinions* a reader should have reached after seeing the *facts* contained in the rest of the release.

Backgrounders

A backgrounder is a fact sheet that provides further information and/or research resources about an issue. A backgrounder may be created to increase the likelihood of placing a substantive feature story.

Backgrounders can be used if a lot of background information or history is needed for a reporter to understand the issue. Backgrounders make it easier for reporters to write news stories. *Reporters are busy and have tight deadlines.* In a “backgrounder,” there are no quotes or opinions. Footnoted citations can lend credibility, and increase the likelihood of a reporter using the material.

- **When to Send Press Releases:**

A *press advisory* is a ‘save the date’ notice that goes out weeks in advance. The advisory includes a time, place, date, contact person, and ‘who-what-where-why’ bullet points.

Fax out press releases two to four working days in advance. Weekend staff are usually different from weekday staff. Send an updated release on the morning of your event.

Some press operations will send out a series of press releases weeks in advance, each with new spins and different information, starting with a press advisory.

16. **Get A Press List**

Advocates need a list of reporters, media outlets, phone and fax numbers, and mailing addresses for the geographic area where coverage is sought.

The Yellow Pages is a fine place to start. Call a newspaper or TV or radio station, and ask who would most typically cover stories about education, welfare issues, and Harrisburg or DC legislature—or another ‘beat’ that seems most relevant to the story you want to tell. Get the names and numbers of relevant reporters, editors, and assignment desks. Many newspapers have a desk in the capitol building in Harrisburg. *Don’t forget the wire services.*

17. **A Press Release Is Only the Beginning**

A press release will almost never bring out droves of reporters. In fact, a press release alone will most often be *completely* ignored. A press release is merely an excuse to call reporters, assignment desks, columnists and editors.

- **Call Reporters!**

This cannot be over-emphasized. When planning a press event, budget time to write a press release, fax it out a few days before, and then begin calling every reporter on your list. Try to give interviews to reporters and interest them in your story. Fill in any

blanks reporters might have, answer questions, and *above all*, get commitments to cover the story. Ask a reporter directly if she or he will come to an event.

If a desk or reporter didn’t get a release, re-fax *after* talking to them—the daily blizzard of releases means many are unnoticed until *after* a story is ‘pitched.’

When talking to an assignment editor, ask to talk to the reporter that will be sent. Try to give a substantial interview in advance.

Some press operations begin making calls to reporters weeks ahead of time to provide advance information, or ‘exclusive’ spins tailored to each different media outlet. Some people might try to get at least one advance story *before* their event. Others might try to make sure that some very pointed questions are planted in a reporter’s mind to ask the target—saving the agency the trouble.

- **Build Relationships with Reporters**

After a while it will be clear which reporters write the best story, and which reporters have the most affinity with the issue. In some larger papers or news bureaus, or large TV networks, a reporter or producer will have a ‘beat,’ covering an issue regularly. It can be useful to learn who this person is from the *start* of your press efforts. Building a relationship with this reporter will make it easier to occasionally place stories. In addition to writing a good story about an issue, a friendly reporter can answer questions about what *sort* of stories to pitch, and to whom (“How can we tell the ‘adult learners need more money’ story again?” or “Why won’t anyone cover our awards ceremonies and graduations?”).

18. **Talking to Press**

A. Educate yourself about the issue so that you know what you are talking about and can anticipate the questions you will need to answer.

B. Plan what you want to say in advance. Plan multiple sound bites for a single message. You can only tell one story per press event, and it must usually be a very simple story.

C. Rehearse what you want to say out loud, so that you can identify problems—especially if you are going to give a speech.

D. Speak from your direct experience, or the experience of people you know.

E. Speak plainly, from the heart. People watching you on TV or reading a quote in the paper probably don't know anything about your issue. Tell them about it.

6. Speak in "sound bites"—short three to seven second sentences that condense what you want to say. Long sentences won't make it onto television or radio, and they may not make it into the newspapers, either.

G. When asked to give an interview, you can ask the reporter to wait while you gather your thoughts. Then you can take a deep breath and review what you want to say. If you flub a recorded interview, tell them you are going to start over, and then answer the question (or give your message) again. They will edit it.

H. Slowly give your name and the name of your organization to the reporter.

I. Say what you want to say, not what the reporter is trying to get you to say. Try to answer questions so that you get to say what you decided ahead of time was important.

If a reporter asks you an off-topic question—and they frequently will— simply state your message of the day unequivocally. The reporter will probably not even notice. While a news broadcast can air a "No Comment," it is much harder to keep a completely ignored question in the final edit of a report.

J. Use your own words. Now is not the time to try out words you never used before. Speak slowly.

K. If you are talking to a TV reporter, speak to the reporter, not the camera.

L. Maintain your dignity. The reporter is not your friend; he or she is just a reporter. Reporters often distort news stories (often unknowingly) and do other things that will make you unhappy.

M. Be polite, even if the reporter is not.

N. Everything is on the record.

O. Offer the questions you'd like the reporter to ask the targeted decision maker. When suggesting lines of questions, or things you hope not be quoted, do it one on one, off camera or mike.

P. Share the limelight. The goal is to air a targeted message about our issue or problem. Adult learners speaking in tandem with experienced program administrators can make a more appealing story than either alone.

Q. How it all turns out is out of your hands. You don't get to edit the tape or choose which quotes to use. Doing your homework about the issue and planning what you want to say ahead of time minimizes the chance that you will say something you wish you hadn't.

19. Editorials and Letters to the Editor

• Set up a meeting with the editorial board
Policy makers definitely read editorials. Most newspapers have an editorial board that meets regularly (often daily) and agrees on editorial positions for the paper. It is not hard to set up a meeting with the editorial board of a newspaper to explain to them the editorial that needs to be written.

It might be more important to have access to technical information, and documented facts and figures for a meeting with an editorial board than it is for a meeting with a politician.

• Letters to the Editor

The 'Letters' section of the paper is one of the most heavily read, after the front page—and the sports section. Policy makers pay a lot of attention to the letters section of the paper from their area, as well as the letters sections of 'leading' papers like Harrisburg Patriot-News, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, Philadelphia Inquirer, and The Morning Call.

Federal officials concern themselves with the letters sections from their local areas, as well as big city papers, especially The New York Times and The Washington Post. USA Today and the Wall Street Journal figure highly, as well.

Letters to the editor should be short and to the point. If they come from a local address, they are more likely to be published than if they come from somewhere far away.

A letter to the editor should be three or fewer short paragraphs. Longer letters will not be printed or will be edited down unpredictably.

Just like a press release, letters to the editor should read just like a news story. Points that could be perceived as opinions should be substantiated with facts.

- **Guest Opinions or Op Eds**

Many editorial pages have guest opinions to complement regular columnists. A guest opinion can be more detailed than a letter to the editor. It also is perceived as having more authority. Contact your editorial page editor to investigate submitting an 'op ed' piece. An opinion piece can actually state more opinion than a press release, but the facts must appear indisputable, and the opinions are usually stated as fact. PAACE leaders have experience writing op ed articles.

20. **Get Started!**

Choose the advocacy strategy you would like to try first. If you have questions, contact the PAACE Legislative Committee Chair JoAnn Weinberger at 215.474.1235, ext. 227, or e-mail weinberger@centerforliteracy.org.

Use the PAACE members e-mail list to share your experiences. To subscribe to the list, go to paacesite.org/mailman/listinfo/members_paacesite.org.

Your action is important!