



# American Foundation for the Blind

## A CAPITOL IDEA!

### Introduction

Congratulations! You have taken the first step to becoming an effective advocate. The purpose of this guide is to give you a head start by providing some basic information and strategic guidance. Most of the other things you will need to know you will learn by doing or from a more experienced friend or colleague. In times of increasingly scarce resources, it is more important than ever to be able to advocate successfully on behalf of your needs and interests and the programs that you value.

You will be surprised at what you can accomplish. You will find that a person with a disability, or an advocate who lives or works with a person with a disability, has an expertise that is invaluable to legislators, their staff, and public officials at all levels. You have an important story to tell to these policy makers and your most important job is to tell your story persuasively and repeatedly. You are the expert and you have much to teach, but you must be patient. And, you must also remember that public officials usually want to be helpful and they will be most helpful if you are polite and respectful. Their proficiency lies in the area of politics and legislation, not disability programs. They can help you turn your agenda into law. Effective advocacy requires a partnership between advocates and policy makers.

Although you do not need to become a political expert to be successful in influencing policymakers, it is important to understand the language and rules of the political process. This manual will take you step by step through defining your issue, identifying the players, planning your strategy, forming alliances, meeting and communicating with legislators or regulators, and following up on your contacts. The World Wide Web will be one your most valuable tools and you will find many web sites mentioned throughout this manual. AFB's Governmental Relations Group offers a legislative briefing, *Words from Washington* (WFW), via e-mail, published periodically while Congress is in session. To sign up for WFW, go to [WFW Subscription Information](#).

We are interested in hearing about your advocacy successes and failures. Let us know if there are additional topics you wished we had covered in this guide. Send your comments to [afbgov@afb.net](mailto:afbgov@afb.net). Good luck and may you always get what you want from your government!

# Part I: The Basics

## Why Get Involved with Politics?

It is very difficult to avoid "politics." Whether it's the design of bus routes, the number of school teachers in the local school or the television stations available on your cable TV system, politics played a key part in the decision. Many people may say they don't like politics, but for those of us who want to improve our lives or the situation of those we work with, politics will likely play a part. So, let's see if we can make it a little easier, and maybe a bit more enjoyable than you thought.

## What About Lobbying?

Is it legal? Absolutely, thanks to the First Amendment to the Constitution which states in part that "the Congress shall make no law abridging the right of the people to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."

Certain limitations on lobbying apply to nonprofit organizations. It is permissible for a nonprofit organization to carry on lobbying activities, so long as they are nonpartisan in nature.

You and/or your organization may be required to register as a lobbyist. An organization's lobbying expenditures must be reported to the IRS on your Form 990 nonprofit tax return. If your lobbying expenditures as a nonprofit organization are substantial, you may also wish to make a Sec. 501(h) election with the IRS. They will provide you with more specific guidelines and limits on the amount of money you may expend on lobbying activities. Check with your accountant or tax attorney for help on reporting lobbying expenditures. If you make a campaign contribution, be certain that it is made by you personally, and not from your organization's funds. If you receive state or federal funds, you clearly cannot lobby using those funds. However, it is perfectly legal to use state or federal funds to respond to a request for testimony or information about your program or agency. It is also perfectly legal for you as a state or federal employee to be asked to provide testimony. In either case, ask the office you are dealing with to request your assistance in writing. If you are a state government employee, you should also check with your supervisor regarding any state restrictions on lobbying activities. ([See Appendix I](#))

## The Basics on our Federal Government

### The Executive Branch

The Executive Branch of the federal government consists of the Executive Office of the President, 15 cabinet level offices and six offices with Cabinet rank. You will find the President's Cabinet and the heads of the Cabinet rank offices at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/government/>.

The Executive Office of the President includes the Office of Management and Budget (commonly known by its initials OMB), the Council of Economic Advisers, the Council on Environmental Quality, the Domestic Policy Council, the National Economic Council, the National Security Council, and the Office of Science & Technology Policy. These agencies act as advisors to the President. (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/government/eop.html>)

### The White House

You will find the text of presidential policy documents and speeches, press briefings and more at <http://www.whitehouse.gov>.

### Cabinet Departments and Independent Agencies

Cabinet level departments of the Executive Branch administer and enforce the laws. They issue regulations

implementing legislation passed by Congress and signed into law by the President. Comments on proposed regulations are solicited from the public via a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) which is published in the *Federal Register* (you will learn more about the Federal Register in Part 2). Once an agency has reviewed public input, it publishes the final rules, which have the force of law, in the *Federal Register*. These notices, press releases, legislation, regulations, policy statements, and other important documents are often available on the departmental web sites as well. You will find links to all executive offices and cabinet departments, and related sites, independent agencies, and boards and commissions, and an A-Z Index of all federal agencies at <http://www.firstgov.gov/Agencies/Federal/Executive.shtml>.

## **The Legislative Branch**

### **Brief History and Structure of the United States Congress**

Under the three branch system of federal government established in the United States Constitution, Congress is assigned the task of enacting legislation, that is, making laws. There are two chambers of Congress, the House of Representatives and the Senate, with more or less similar authority to develop legislation. The 435 members of the House of Representatives are apportioned among the 50 states according to the state's population (six states—Alaska, Delaware, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Vermont, and Wyoming—have only one representative). In the Senate each state has equal representation with two Senators. The Senate has one very important exclusive authority that often leads to historic advocacy battles: it has the power of "advise and consent" to Presidential treaties and nominations for certain key government offices.

Almost all of the legislative work in Congress is done by committees or subcommittees. There are 17 standing committees in the Senate and 19 in the House. There are more than 150 subcommittees as well as numerous select and joint committees. Information about these committees can be found on the [Senate](#) and the [House](#) web pages.

The House and the Senate have a rich history as well as various formal procedures and informal traditions. While you do not need to be an authority on Congressional history to be a good advocate, you will likely find that learning about some of the people and events that have shaped the institution makes advocacy even more fun and enjoyable.

Learn about the Senate at [http://www.senate.gov/learning/learn\\_history.html](http://www.senate.gov/learning/learn_history.html).

Learn about the House at <http://clerk.house.gov/histHigh/index.php>.

### **Finding My Members of Congress**

Who is my U.S. Representative? Who are my U.S. Senators? What committees do they serve on? The Web is a great place to start to get answers to these questions.

The House offers a service called WriteRep (<http://www.house.gov/writerep/>) which will help you to identify your representative. You may need your Zip+4 code (your nine digit zip code). WriteRep supplies a link to the Post Office Zip+4 lookup page (<http://www.usps.com/zip4/>).

The Senate offers a list of [Senators by State](#).

If you do not have access to the Web, the local public library reference section should be able to answer these questions for you.

## **The Judicial Branch**

We will not be discussing the U.S. court system in this advocacy manual. If you would like further

information on the judicial branch of the U.S. government visit these three sites.

Supreme Court of the United States <http://www.supremecourtus.gov/>.

Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts <http://www.uscourts.gov/>.

The White House <http://www.whitehouse.gov/government/judg.html>.

## **How State and Local Governments Are Different**

Each state is headed by a governor and other state-level elected officials such as a lieutenant governor, secretary of state, treasurer or comptroller, and attorney general. You will find a list of the governors of all the states and territories at <http://www.nga.org/governors/1,1169,,00.html>. You will find links to each of the states at the Council of State Governments site at <http://www.csq.org/CSG/States/state+pages/default.htm>.

There are some important differences between the U.S. Congress and your state legislature—differences which can affect your approach and success at influencing either body. All states, except Nebraska, which has a nonpartisan, unicameral (one chamber) legislature, have bicameral legislatures designed along the lines of the U.S. Congress. They have an upper chamber (usually a state Senate) and a lower chamber (usually a state House or Assembly). States like California and New York have large full-time legislative bodies with numerous committees and large staff, not unlike the U.S. Congress. However, most state legislatures are considerably smaller, both in numbers of elected members and staff. Some states have part-time legislatures which meet annually or biannually sometimes for thirty days or less. You will find links to each of the states legislatures and individual state legislators at the National Conference of State Legislatures site at <http://www.ncsl.org/public/leglinks.cfm>

State legislators may be more directly accessible to constituents. Your state Assemblyperson may be your next door neighbor or local hardware store proprietor. You may meet in the supermarket or at your place of worship. For these reasons, there is a greater likelihood that you will be able to relate to your state legislator on a more personal level than your House or Senate member in Washington. Remember, though, that if they do not have staff, they will be very busy.

Make a little time count for a lot. Generally, legislation moves more quickly on the state level. Procedures are less formal than on the federal level, but knowing the legislative process, or knowing someone who does, is critical when working in either venue. With shorter legislative sessions, a bill may move quickly from concept to final passage which means that you may not have a lot of time to mobilize constituent support or opposition. Although you may see quicker results from your advocacy efforts, in most instances you will have precious little time to work. Accordingly, what you have done before the legislative session begins—good old fashioned preparation—becomes even more critical.

Local governments range from part-time unpaid local officials to the officials of Washington, D.C. where the mayor and the city council (with some federal government oversight) have the powers, respectively, of a governor and a state legislature. Some towns hold town meetings where individuals come together, in the true sense of democracy, to discuss the issues and make decisions. In some larger towns and cities, legislative committees hold hearings in which the public can participate. Search for local governments using an Internet search engine. Type in the name of the locale—even the tiny town of Packwaukee, Wisconsin has a web site!

## **State Level Advocacy**

With less federal government control over the delivery of social services, states will play an increasing role in determining eligibility and frequency, location and types of services. Government downsizing, departmental reorganizations, changes in funding priorities, or simple funding cuts can affect the delivery of vision-related services in your state, sometimes almost overnight! As states take greater fiscal and programmatic responsibility, your voice as an advocate will be even more critical. This shift in focus to state legislatures and state government agencies will increase the need for grassroots activity at this more local

level where constituents are closer to legislators. Legislatures have the responsibility to not only pass new laws, but to oversee the effectiveness of existing programs. This is yet another reason why you need to be an effective state advocate.

## **Influencing Policy at the State and Local Levels**

Increasingly, state and local laws and regulations are extremely influential in determining how funds are distributed and how services are delivered, so it is important not to neglect elected officials at those levels. Although the tips for meeting with members of Congress apply equally to your state and local representatives, the structure of government differs considerably from state to state, county to county, city to city, or town to town—the number of legislative houses, part-time versus full-time legislators, the timing of legislative sessions and budgets, the committees, the role of state agencies in formulating legislation and policy, methods of tracking legislation, and even the importance of behind-the-scene negotiations versus floor debates in passing legislation. Short state legislative sessions make advance preparation and the ability to move quickly and change strategies necessary. Local governments are even more variable. Therefore, it is important to obtain information on how the legislative process in your area works before you plan your strategy. Depending on the issue, you might also need to contact the local school board or a city agency. The League of Women Voters publishes several pamphlets that help citizens analyze the structure and function of local government. Some state and local chapters of the League of Women Voters publish lists of representatives, detailed guides to state and local governments, materials on how to track legislation, and lobbying tips. You'll find the League of Women Voters at <http://www.lwv.org/>.

## **Information on State and Local Governments**

Your state may publish a state government manual, information about members, legislative calendars, or hearing schedules. In this day of electronic information dissemination, states have web pages that contain information about government structure, services, and personnel. An Internet search on the term "state legislative information" should retrieve links to legislative information from many of the states. An Internet search on the word "municipalities" plus the name of the state should bring up links to a league/association/conference or listing of municipalities in that state. You will find information on topics such as staff, advocacy, policy/legislation, local governments, publications, and job opportunities. Your community's newspapers are a good source of news on local issues.

C-Span, the cable-TV channel that covers Congress and the federal government also offers a State Politics web page with links to state legislature home pages and to live webcasts of state legislative sessions at [http://www.c-span.org/states/legislatures.asp?Cat=Current\\_Event&Code=St\\_Pol](http://www.c-span.org/states/legislatures.asp?Cat=Current_Event&Code=St_Pol)

Some state legislators even have their own web pages!

For information on state and local governments, check the following web sites.

Library of Congress <http://lcweb.loc.gov/global/state/stategov.html>

National Association of Counties <http://www.naco.org/>

National League of Cities [http://www.nlc.org/nlc\\_org/site/](http://www.nlc.org/nlc_org/site/)

An Internet search on the word "municipalities" plus the name of the state should bring up links to a league/association/conference or listing of municipalities in that state. You will find information on topics such as staff, advocacy, policy/legislation, local governments, publications, and job opportunities. Your community's newspapers are a good source of news on local issues.

## **Part II: Gathering Information: The Web of Possibilities**

The World Wide Web and other Internet sources offer a myriad of information and time-saving resources. The job of an advocate is information gathering.

Part II is a guide to resources and Web sites that will help you become your own legislative assistant---tracking legislative and regulatory activities, or finding information about issues, policy, agencies, staff, or personalities, etc.

Years ago, you could spend days in a library gathering information and once you found that information, you had to make notes or copy pages and then type them into your document or you had to make phone calls or write letters to obtain copies of documents.

Today, you can find the same information on the Internet in just hours and a search on as little as a single word can bring up a myriad of sites containing the information you are seeking. The best part is that you can download or copy and paste the information for incorporation into your document or print it for your file.

## **Legislative Information Using the Web**

The best place to start your research on legislation or almost anything related to Congress is Thomas <http://thomas.loc.gov/>. Thomas is a searchable legislative database of floor activities; the status, text, and background of major legislation, and; information on committees and subcommittees. It also links to other Web sites, including the Government Printing Office database and a Library of Congress database of information on state and local governments.

The GPO database at [http://www.access.gpo.gov/su\\_docs/databases.html](http://www.access.gpo.gov/su_docs/databases.html) contains a wealth of information, including the federal budget, the Congressional Record, the Federal Register, legislation, the United States Code (USC), the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Supreme Court decisions, agency and presidential documents, and much more.

The House <http://www.house.gov> and Senate <http://www.senate.gov> each have their own web sites. These sites contain information about the schedule in each chamber, recent actions, details and status of bills, links to Congressional offices and links to other sites (e.g., the Government Printing Office).

Most Representatives and Senators have web pages. Representatives can be found at <http://www.house.gov/house/MemberWWW.html>. Look for an alphabetical list of Senators at <http://www.senate.gov/senators/index.cfm>. Some of them include information about legislation they have sponsored, their voting record, include links to other sites and databases, or provide information about their state or district. This information may give you an idea of the types of issues that interest a particular legislator.

## **Information by Telephone**

Congress's Office of Legislative Information (LEGIS), a source of information on the status of legislation, can be contacted by telephone (202-225-1772). This service can locate bills, reports, documents, and laws by number, key word, or sponsor.

The office of your own Representative or Senators is always an excellent place to begin. Their offices in Washington D.C. are most easily reached by calling the Capitol's switchboard for the House or Senate" give numbers and continue with local listings and district office. A legislator's office can also help with information. Check the government listings in your local telephone book for the legislator's district office, check their web site or contact the House switchboard (202-225-3121) or the Senate switchboard (202-224-

3121) to be connected to their Washington office.

## Legislative Program

Democratic 202-225-1600  
Republican 202-225-2020

### Other Legislative Resources

Copies of bills and reports may be ordered by telephone, mail, or fax from the House document room:

House Document Room  
House Legislative Resource Center  
B106 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515  
202-226-5200  
Fax: 202-226-5208

Copies of bills and reports may be ordered by mail or fax from the Senate document room:

Senate Document Room  
B04 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510  
202-224-7860  
Fax: 202-228-2815

## Regulatory Information

The official notices of federal agencies are found in the Federal Register, published Monday through Friday, except on federal holidays. It includes proposed or final rules and regulations, notices of meetings, proposed and final funding priorities, and requests for grant proposals. These notices contain valuable information, including contact persons, effective dates, deadlines, and where to submit comments. The Federal Register is available in print in libraries or by subscription from the Government Printing Office (GPO). It is also available in a searchable database on the GPO's web site at [http://www.access.gpo.gov/su\\_docs/aces/aces140.html](http://www.access.gpo.gov/su_docs/aces/aces140.html).

Searching the Federal Register on GPO's site can be a slow process. However, the National Archives and Records Administration's (NARA) Federal Register site provides two very convenient options. You can view a copy of the current issue at [http://www.access.gpo.gov/su\\_docs/aces/fr-cont.html](http://www.access.gpo.gov/su_docs/aces/fr-cont.html). This will save having to search the database each day. You can also sign up to receive each day's Table of Contents with links to ASCII and PDF versions of notices by e-mail. Go to <http://listserv.access.gpo.gov/> to join. You may also find Federal Register notices on the issuing department's web site.

The Department of Education publishes documents on legislation, regulations, and policy guidance at <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/legsregs.html>.

The Department of Labor publishes legislative and regulatory documents on its "Laws and Regs" page at <http://www.dol.gov/dol/compliance/compliance-majorlaw.htm>.

The Department of Justice would publish new or proposed ADA regulations at <http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/newregs.htm> and publishes existing ADA regulations and technical assistance materials at <http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/publicat.htm>.

The Social Security Administration publishes requests for public input, possible program rules

changes and Federal Register notices at <http://www.ssa.gov/regulations/index.htm#top>.

As a service to the public, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (formerly HCFA) announces regulations and notices at <http://cms.hhs.gov/regulations/> at the time that they forward them to the Federal Register for publication.

The Access Board posts published rules and notices to <http://www.access-board.gov/indexes/rules&notices.htm>.

The General Services Administration (GSA) offers information and technical assistance on Section 508 and publishes regulatory items at <http://www.section508.gov/>.

## Print Documents

Print publications and documents can be ordered from the Government Printing Office. An online catalog lists Government periodicals and subscription services offered for sale by the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office (GPO). To order publications online go to <http://bookstore.gpo.gov/>; call 202-512-1800 or toll free 866-512-1800 between 7:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m., EST, Monday through Friday (except Federal holidays); fax 202-512-2250, or mail orders to: Superintendent of Documents P.O. Box 371954 Pittsburgh PA 15250-7954 You can inquire about orders via e-mail [gpoaccess@gpo.gov](mailto:gpoaccess@gpo.gov).

## Want to Be a Washington Insider?

In addition to [subscribing to AFB's WFW](#), *Words from Washington*, newsletter. . . .

The Congressional Quarterly, a leading political journal based in Washington, D.C. offers the FREE CQ Midday Update--the latest congressional news, trivia and political clippings -- delivered every weekday about 2 p.m. To subscribe go to <http://www.cq.com> and click on "Subscribe to the CQ Midday Update."

CNN offers their AllPolitics' free, weekly briefing on U.S. politics. It arrives via e-mail every Monday afternoon. Go to <http://www.cnn.com/EMAIL/> to sign up.

The Washington Post offers On Politics at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/politics/> and the Federal Page at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/politics/fedpage/>. Visit <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/email/front.htm> for a description of the several topical newsletters available via e-mail.

The New York Times offers its Politics page at <http://www.nytimes.com/pages/politics/>.

The Washington Times <http://www.washtimes.com/national/> publishes a "National/Politics" section with regular features on what's happening here in Washington.

Are you a C-Span junkie? Here's how to find out what's on! Sign up for C-Span Alert, daily listings of scheduled programming. Go to <http://www.c-span.org/watch/cspanalert.asp?code=Watch>.

And just for fun reading about Washington (especially if you are planning a visit). . . .

The Washingtonian magazine <http://washingtonian.com/default.asp> publishes a visitors guide, articles and information on restaurants and dining, arts and entertainment, travel, recreation, shopping and services, careers, real estate, and people.

## Part III: Get Ready

Now that you know the basics it's time to start the fun. The best advocates tend to be the most involved in their local community. They are active in civic, school, religious or other organizations. If this describes you, you probably already have the one critical ingredient you need as an advocate, a connection to policymakers. If you are not yet involved in this way, you will find that it is not very difficult to make connections with policymakers. So, let's start there and then focus on developing your advocacy strategy.

### Getting Connected

Advocacy is a person-to-person business. Public officials are very interested in hearing your views. They rely on contacts with active citizens for guidance and information. Look for opportunities to introduce yourself to your legislators and their staff. Civic meetings, advisory council meetings, even your neighborhood association are good places to start. First, they are good places to meet some of the most active and connected people in your community, people you need to know. Second, your legislator may have started a career in elective office through one of those groups.

Don't wait until you have a problem or you want something. A motivated individual with a compelling story about the situation of blind people in a community will be listened much more than you might think by a public official.

### Wooing a Legislator

Here are four good ways to start building a relationship with a legislator.

- Get involved. Volunteer in a campaign in support of a legislator. It is an excellent way to establish a relationship.
- Invite the legislator or a staff person to speak at a meeting of your group or to participate in an organization function, or to tour a facility or school.
- Be sure that your legislator and his or her staff are aware that you are available to answer questions about visual impairment or help newly blinded individuals who may contact the legislator seeking assistance. Typically, state and local elected officials have little or no staff help. Your role as a problem solver or the technical expert with the accurate answers will enhance your access to the office.
- Contact your own legislator when you begin to work on your issue. Even if this legislator is not on the right committee to be of help, he or she can be a very effective champion for you in putting you on the right track and providing guidance.

Contributions of time, effort, and yes, money, are very important to politicians. That is why volunteering for campaigns is a great way to get known by legislators and their staff. Stuff envelopes if that is what is needed. In a campaign every job is important. Let them know who you are. Making contributions of time and effort and establishing personal contacts can be influential. You may want to consider making a campaign contribution from your personal funds. In today's world, the influence of money in political advocacy is a reality. Therefore, do not be surprised if you receive a warmer welcome if you have made a contribution to a legislator's campaign fund.

Most of us like public recognition and politicians are no exception. If you are involved in a local agency or organization you have a golden opportunity to create publicity. Give your legislator an award. Create a photo opportunity or media event around the presentation. Invite a legislator or staff member for a tour of your agency or school. Organize a candidate forum to discuss issues of importance to your constituency.

Any opportunity to interact with your elected officials may benefit you and your cause in the future.

Legislators, whether in your state capital or in Congress, get a lot of requests from individuals for help. Their offices spend a fair amount of time trying to help people find services. You can be of great assistance by providing information about resources and services relevant to people who are blind or visually impaired. Members' offices frequently receive questions from constituents with vision problems. The office will be grateful to have you as a referral resource.

Be there! Keep a presence in the state capital, if possible, become acquainted with an issue-friendly person who does maintain that presence, and stay in close communication with a relevant national advocacy organization in Washington, D.C. A representative of your organization located in the capital would be ideal. If that's not possible, open a post office box with a capital address, maintain a toll-free number or a local answering service to take messages.

Above all, be accessible—return telephone calls promptly and make every effort to provide information when it is requested. The easier you can make the job of the legislator or staffer, the more likely they will be willing to help you.

Once you have begun to build a relationship, be sure you remain visible to the legislator, but don't be a nuisance about it.

## **Issue Development**

Obviously, the first steps you must take in an effort to change a policy is to gather information and define the issue or problem. The more preparation and experience you bring to your advocacy effort, the more effective it will be.

When confronted by a problem or an injustice, people often say, "there ought to be a law." Often, it turns out that there is a law or program to address the problem, but perhaps it is not being enforced. Because getting a law enacted is rarely easy, it is always a good idea to see if you can achieve what you want without legislation. You may be able to persuade a government agency to modify a program or more vigorously enforce a law. Or, perhaps the most effective action you can take is to pursue your legal rights under an existing law or help others to do so. Remember! There is not a legislative solution for every problem or injustice.

As you go forward, be honest with yourself—remember that your zeal and enthusiasm may cloud your good judgment and may result in your overlooking the realities of the situation. Try your best to analyze your problem or issue and the likelihood of achieving the result you want from the perspective of an objective, disinterested observer. In the end, you've got to decide if the fight is worth the expenditure of your time and money. You may decide not to use resources on issues that have no realistic chance of success.

Here are some questions to consider as you begin proposing solutions to a problem. Don't worry about answering each question in detail, the questions are intended to help you get a head start in assessing the political climate in which you will be working. Remember, help is much more likely to be forthcoming if you have prepared your proposal well and if you do not make unreasonable demands on the public officials you are attempting to persuade.

- Identify your goal and establish a timeline. What is the outcome you want to achieve? Are you trying to establish a new program, change an existing program or secure a legal right?
- Do you need to change a national or state policy?
- Is immediate action needed on your proposal or do you have the luxury of time?
- Will your proposal cost money? How much will it cost?
- Are you asking for government spending?
- Does your proposal impose requirements or costs on private businesses?

- If your ultimate proposal is too much to tackle all at once, can you break it down into incremental pieces that are achievable?

## **The Political Environment**

Be aware of the political effects of your proposed course of action, which may influence whether a public official is able or willing to support your position. In particular, consider the overall environment—fiscal and political—in which you will be advocating. Consider advice from the public official about the specific format your proposal might take, as well as whether it is appropriate or attainable at that time. Is your state making draconian cutbacks when you are seeking a sizable increase in spending? Is government being reorganized or downsized in a manner that affects your interests? What is driving such an effort—money, politics, greater efficiency? How can you "spin" or explain your issue in response to these environmental factors?

## **Developing a Legislative Strategy**

There is almost always an interesting story behind any piece of legislation. The story involves a partnership between legislators, other public officials and lots of individuals like you who helped carry out a strategy to get the legislation over the many hurdles it will encounter. Here are some considerations for developing a legislative strategy.

### **Identify the Players**

Spend some time learning about your legislature (see Part I for information about Congress and state legislatures). You will find it especially helpful to understand the role and importance of committees in the legislature.

- What committee of the legislature has jurisdiction over or responsibility for your problem or issue? Some complex bills are referred to more than one committee.
- Who are the members of the committee(s) of jurisdiction? Do you have friends or staff connections to members on the committee(s)?
- Do you have or can you find a champion in the legislature? Research the background of the legislators. Do any have a particular interest in blindness? Perhaps they have a spouse, child, or other family member who has a visual impairment. The legislator's personal biography or web site may be helpful in finding clues to this information.
- What government agency administers the program you're interested in? Government agency officials usually have a working relationship with the legislative committees that work on issues involving their agency.

## **Strengthening Connections**

Look for common links between your allies or constituents and legislators. Do any of your friends and colleagues know any of the members of relevant committees in the legislature or any key agency staff members personally?

Is anyone a constituent of a member of the committee with jurisdiction? Are they willing to write letters, make phone calls, or accompany you on personal visits?

Consider other connections such as religious affiliations, school and alumni associations, professional and trade associations, or club memberships. Maybe you even go to the same restaurant as a policymaker.

## **Timing Is Important!**

Legislatures work in cycles, usually two year cycles. So, timing is important in your strategy. If you begin an effort to enact a bill toward the end of the cycle, you will probably run out of time and have to start over again next year. Hopefully, you have the luxury of picking when to go to the legislature with your idea. Many state legislative sessions are relatively short, so you will need to move quickly.

## **Crafting Your Message**

You need to develop a clear and convincing statement describing your policy proposal. Keep it short and simple!! Here are some tips to help in crafting an effective message.

- Briefly enumerate the strengths of your position.
- Use everyday language. Avoid the jargon of your profession or field (unless you have defined the terminology).
- Address the weaknesses and criticisms of your position. Be realistic. Don't kid yourself into thinking that there are none. How can you minimize these weaknesses?
- Be sure to anticipate and prepare for counter-arguments.
- Use your fact sheet to quantify your issue by showing how big it is—the number of people impacted, cost to society due to lack of a service, etc.
- If you can, demonstrate the cost effectiveness of services rendered.
- Try to put a local spin on your message—legislators and their staffs always want to know how a particular program impacts people back home. If you don't have solid numbers, try to collect compelling anecdotes that will demonstrate your issue or show the member why a particular program is valuable to his/her constituents.
- Develop "talking points." "Talking points" are clearly-written, simply-stated facts (sometimes referred to as bullet points) about your issue. (preferably no more than one page) You may also choose to use them as handouts. (See [Appendix II](#) for sample talking points.)
- Remember! Your message must be effective and timely. Be careful not to spend too much time perfecting your position paper or fact sheet. If you spend too much time writing and polishing it you may lose your opportunity to get something done.

## **Nurturing Grassroots: Gathering Supporters, Dealing with Opposition**

A network of active and committed supporters is an essential part of a winning advocacy strategy. The network can be a group of individuals or a coalition of organizations, but the key is to have people who will work to develop legislative contacts, take action to educate legislators and help ensure the advocacy message heard. A network is also critical for gathering intelligence about problems and opportunities affecting your issue.

Begin by identifying other people that you believe share your interest in the issue, perhaps the members of an organization you belong to. In advocacy on disability issues it is especially important to involve consumers, families and professionals early on in your advocacy activities. This broadens the power of your message.

Not everyone will understand the issue or be as passionate about it as you are. But, remember that everyone can play some role.

To keep your network active and informed, conduct issue briefings and advocacy training. Develop a action plan with assignments for members of the grassroots network.

The action plan should include:

- Education of targeted legislators and government agency officials

- Research to identify additional information or data about the issue.
- Cultivation of reporters and media stories
- Outreach to additional supporters

Communicate as much as possible with your grassroots constituents. If you keep them informed and interested in your issue, they are more likely to respond when you need them.

### **A Few Words About Working in Coalition**

Besides your network of supporters, you might achieve even more success by uniting with other interests and organizations. After all, there can be strength in numbers. However, working in coalition is always a "balancing act" between what you gain from the coalition activity vs. the time, work, or money expended.

Potential allies include: other disability organizations, other interest groups such as AARP or the PTA, labor or business organizations, Lions or other service clubs, civic groups or religious groups.

Use the Internet to learn more about your potential coalition partners. Most organizations provide a great deal of information to the public on the World Wide Web.

Here are a few useful rules to help ensure an effective coalition. Share all documents that involve the coalition in advance for review and approval by the members. Never present or say what you think a coalition member's views are on any subject other than the specific advocacy effort you are working together on. Do not surprise your coalition partners by making a deal or compromise without consulting them. Above all, communicate, communicate, communicate.

Along with the benefits that come from working in a coalition, there are some challenges. You may have to alter your program to accommodate your partners, or you may have to make the policy you seek so broad to include others' interests that it severely weakens the likelihood of ultimate success. Alternatively, if your effort is successful, you may be asked to provide support for a coalition partner on an issue you don't care about. This is the quid pro quo for your partner's support of your issue.

### **Know the Opposition**

Never assume that no one will oppose your advocacy effort. Sometimes the opposition will come from an unexpected source. Spend some time analyzing who might oppose the idea you are developing. Are there special interests involved in this issue?

Research the positions and viewpoints of any likely opposition. You will need to learn and understand their arguments to develop your responses. Determine if they are influential. For example, do they have access to legislators?

Remember, opposition does not equal enemy. Don't write them off—differences may be negotiable. They may be a future ally on some other issue. Above all, don't lie about or belittle your opposition. How you conduct yourself when faced with opposition speaks volumes about you as a credible, reasonable advocate.

### **Master the Media**

Use local radio, television, newspapers, and other publications to educate legislators about your issue. Cultivate relationships with local reporters, especially those who are on the political beat. ([Appendix III](#) contains tips on mastering the media..)

### **Are You Ready?**

Is all of this planning and analysis hard to do? Not really—time consuming maybe—but your strategic approach distinguishes you from less experienced, and undoubtedly less successful, advocates. Once you are fully prepared, execute your plan with confidence!

## Part IV: Action!

Now that you've developed your plan, it's time to persuade policymakers to help you accomplish your goal. Communicating a clear message is key.

There are several methods you will need to use to get your message across. You will want to fit the form of communication to the circumstances.

There is nothing quite as effective as a meeting with a legislator to express your views. We'll provide more guidance about meetings later in this section. Of course, the good old-fashioned letter is also a very effective tool. However, postal delivery of mail to Congress is now quite slow because letters are first treated for possible anthrax contamination. Many Congressional offices are now urging people to fax letters rather than mail them. E-mail offers another useful possibility, but we do not recommend it unless you are sending it to a specific staff member or the office has asked you to communicate that way. And, don't forget the telephone, when time is short and the message is urgent and simple, there's nothing like a phone call. The World Wide Web or your local libraries are great resources for contact information for public officials.

Here are some points to remember about communicating with Congress.

Letters. Fax a letter if you can. Use a boldly designed cover sheet that will get attention. If you must send by mail, plan for a delay of at least two weeks for delivery. (See [Appendix IV](#) for the Do's and Don'ts of Advocacy Letter Writing.)

When addressing letters to elected officials, it is customary to use the term "The Honorable" before their name. In the salutation use the form Dear (title such as Senator, Governor, Representative) followed by last name. The appropriate forms of written address when contacting a member of Congress are:

The Honorable (or Hon.) Mary K. Doe  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Doe:

The Honorable (or Hon.) Samuel J. Jones  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Jones:

E-mail. Unfortunately, this quick and easy way to send a message is not yet generally recommended for contacting members of Congress. You should only use this form of communication to send directly to a legislative staffer if you know that the legislator's staff actually checks and responds to e-mail regularly. Also, some legislators will not accept e-mail unless you are a constituent.

Telephone calls. This is a good way to get a quick message of support or opposition to a legislator when

time is short. It's also a good way to find out the status of legislation or a legislator's position on an issue. Keep your conversation as short as possible.

The easiest way to reach either a U.S. Senator or U.S. Representative is through the Capitol switchboard.

Senate switchboard: 202-224-3121.

House switchboard: 202-225-3121.

## Meetings with Legislators

One of the most effective ways to influence the decisions of legislators is in face-to-face visits. Frequent contacts are necessary to associate your face and name with your cause. ([Appendix V](#) contains descriptions of personalities you might encounter and how to meet the challenge they present.)

### Before the Meeting

- Plan the meeting and pick just one or two issues to discuss. While coming to Washington D.C. is great for meetings with members of Congress, you might find it's even more effective (and convenient) to set up a meeting in the district. While Congress is in session, many members try to spend Mondays, Fridays and weekends back home in the district.
- Make an appointment. State the subject you want to discuss, the time needed to talk (usually no more than 15-20 minutes), and identify any other individuals who will attend. If you cannot meet with the legislator, be sure you will be meeting with the appropriate person. Dropping by a legislator's office without an appointment is not recommended. Don't be upset if a legislator cannot meet with you personally and asks that you meet with an aide. This is very common. Treat the aide with the same respect and courtesy that you would extend to their superior. Legislators depend heavily on their staff for advice and strategy on specific issues.
- Develop an agenda of a few key points you want to make.
- If you are meeting as a group try to limit the number to three or four individuals--larger groups often lose focus on the issue.
- Prepare a brief, clearly written fact sheet (incorporating charts and statistics, if appropriate) as a reference to leave with the policymaker. These handouts are very important, so you should take the time to be sure that the material is concise and that key points are highlighted. Provide information about how this issue affects constituents back in the legislator's district or state. If you are seeking more funding for a program, be sure to include a simple chart showing the dollars that would be spent on services in a legislator's district. Don't underestimate the added power of your message when it is presented in black and white.
- Assemble your fact sheets or other brief handout material. Keep it neat, but don't waste money on fancy folders.

### During the Meeting

- Be on time! Always introduce yourself and members of your group. Be sure to say where you're from if you are constituents of the legislator. Remember to reintroduce yourself and members of your group, even at a second or third meeting. Don't put a public official or the staff member in the awkward position of having to struggle to remember your name.
- Begin on a positive note. Thank them for meeting with you. If appropriate, express thanks for past support or interest in your issue. Legislators like to know that you are aware of their record.
- Get down to business quickly. Briefly describe the issue, your position, and what action you hope

the policymaker will take. If you're discussing a particular bill, state the bill number, title and the name of the legislator who is the bill's sponsor.

Stick to the topic. Stay focused on the issue or set of issues for which you requested the meeting. This will help you to avoid alienating the legislator who is likely to be prepared for a particular topic. Staying focused will also help you keep from getting sidetracked into a discussion not related to your issue.

Be specific. Be clear. Keep it simple. Present the facts in an orderly, concise, positive manner. Try to avoid jargon or uncommon terms and be sure to explain these terms if you need to use them.

Use personal stories or anecdotes. Remember, your job is to persuade ... and a personal story will leave an image that legislators will remember when they consider your issue.

Encourage questions and discuss them. However, don't lie or make up answers. Ask if you can provide further information, arrange a tour of your facility, or offer to facilitate a meeting with other experts. And, get back to them promptly with answers or information.

It is often useful to make a request during the meeting for something specific—say, information about the status of a particular bill—to ensure that you will maintain some contact with the legislator's office. Don't forget to ask for support for your position.

Don't make extravagant demands or expect to receive everything on your agenda right away. Remember, you've thought about and worked on this issue much more than the public official. Give them time to consider your position. You may need another meeting. Getting final agreement may require more than one visit.

If you are meeting with someone who disagrees with your position, politely state your views and do not get drawn into a heated argument. It's sometimes necessary to "agree to disagree." However, you may find that if you are ready with alternative solutions, you may be able to find agreement on a proposal.

Pay attention and listen. When meeting with a legislator or with staff you must be ready to listen and pay attention to responses. In other words, don't just talk—listen! When you are geared up to make your prepared presentation, it is hard to listen carefully to someone else, but listening is an essential part of being persuasive. First, you may discover a clue as to how you can best establish a rapport with the other person. Second, you need to observe how the other person is reacting. Finally, You need to listen to know when to "close the deal" and obtain a commitment for support or other action. Be sure to take yes for an answer. Sometimes, advocates keep talking after the official has agreed to what you ask. Politicians want to be a good host and won't ask you to leave, but listen for signals that they've heard enough to convince them.

You will also need to make "mental notes" or be sure someone in your group is taking careful, but unobtrusive notes. You will want to be able to keep track of what was said and be especially conscious of interesting details such as information about a legislator's relative or friend who is blind. Details such as body language, words, length of the meeting are important.

As you end the meeting, be sure the person you are meeting with has your name, address, phone number, and e-mail address; and who to contact if you are unavailable.

Finally, never threaten! Not only might you be unable to carry out your threat, you may also alienate a potential future ally.

## **After the Meeting**

Continue to build the relationship after you return home. Send a written thank you as soon as possible, recapping key points covered during the meeting.

Identify follow-up steps to which you or the legislator committed, and ask for a reply requiring a substantive response, e.g., a status report on the bill, a copy of an amendment, voting record, etc.

Keep your commitments, and always return telephone calls promptly.

If you met as a group, set up a debriefing shortly after your visit. What went well? Make a list together. Give everyone a chance to offer their impressions—good and bad. Did the legislator/staff person appear bored, hostile, encouraging, non-committal, distracted, uncomfortable? Can you build on the support or address concerns?

Brief your supporters, coalition members or other interested groups about the meeting.

## **The Next Steps**

A meeting is only the beginning of your advocacy campaign. Additional action will be required. The specific strategy will depend on whether you need to convince an official to support your position or bolster the support you have.

To persuade a public official to support your position, consider these steps:

- Organize a letter-writing campaign. Encourage your grassroots supporters to write brief (preferably one-page) letters describing why this proposal is important to them.
- Arrange a meeting with the official by other members of your network of supporters.
- Work with media to develop stories about the impact of this issue. Public officials pay careful attention to media reports.

To strengthen the interest and support by an official, consider these strategies.

- Inform local media about your positive visit with a legislator or other public official.
- Invite the official to visit your group or facility. This visit provides an excellent opportunity to express thanks and recognition. Be sure to notify local media, especially if you are giving an official an award.
- Periodically contact the legislator's office to remind the staff of your interest and to find out the status of the legislation. Don't do this so often that you become a pest, but keeping in touch is important to ensure that your issue is receiving attention.

As the campaign moves into its final phase, there are specific challenges you will likely encounter. You will learn about some of those in the next part.

## **Part V: The End Game**

Legislative change is by its nature incremental. More often than not, changes in law are made gradually over a period of time. Change does not always happen as quickly as one might like. You may not get all that you want the first time you try. Be prepared to work for as long as it takes.

Obviously, if your legislation is controversial or if it has powerful opponents, the legislative process will be slow and difficult. Similarly, if your legislation is a major departure from current law or if it is landmark legislation it may take longer to work its way through legislative drafting, hearings, testimony, amendments, mark ups, and votes.

### **What to Do When Trouble Strikes!**

There are many delays, snags and barriers in the way of getting policy enacted. So you should be prepared with a plan of action when that dreaded call comes to tell you that a carefully crafted deal is starting to come apart.

First, do not panic. All is not lost. You must respond! You've worked hard on this and you don't want to give up without trying to salvage at least part of your objective.

Start by defining the problem and what's causing it. Sometimes, it is opposition from an unanticipated quarter. Perhaps the proposal is seen as harmful by a trade or a professional organization or another disability group. If it involves government spending, you can almost count on some last minute challenges. Often, the policy you've worked on is held up in political jockeying among legislators. Sometimes, the legislator pushing your bill has many other policy priorities which are competing for his time and energy.

You need information. Politely ask your legislative contacts for information about the problem. Agency officials with an interest in your issue may also be useful sources of intelligence. Sometimes, a friend in another legislator's office can give you valuable insight.

Next, bring your allies or coalition members together to analyze the situation and plan your action.

You may need to quickly devise a strategy to address opposition. Or, you may need to find some help for your legislative champion to convince a legislative leader who is not supporting the bill.

Determine what kind of action is needed. Do you simply need to make a phone call or write a letter? Do you need to schedule face-to-face meetings with key legislators to head off opposition or shore up your position? Do you have a fall-back position?

### **Compromising Positions**

You may need to consider a compromise that achieves only part of your goal. Be sure to consult your allies before speaking for them. You may need to negotiate your fall-back position or compromise with them. Deal making is an essential part of passing legislation so you will very likely be asked to negotiate changes to the legislation you support. It is exceedingly difficult to know when to hold your ground or how much change to accept. To help frame your decisions, consider these questions:

How strong is your legislative support? Does the leadership of the party in power support your position?

How motivated are your grassroots supporters? Will they make last minute phone calls, hold meetings with their legislators or travel to the capital?

How much time is left in the legislative session? If time is short, you may not have time to mount the campaign necessary to achieve the depth of legislative support you will need.

Could you achieve most of what you want with less specific legislative language and vigorous implementation by the agency responsible for the policy? If you have a good relationship with the agency and you can rely on its staff, the strategy of accepting "watered down" legislation may work.

Finally, if elections are coming soon, do you believe that your position will be stronger or weaker after the elections? It may be useful to wait until next session if you expect to be in a stronger position. Conversely, you may want to get what you can now.

### **Light at the End of the Tunnel**

After you and your allies have worked out your approaches to address problems or respond to compromise proposals, remember to provide information to your broader group of supporters, the grassroots. If necessary, mobilize your grassroots. Send an alert. If you expect them to respond, let them know the urgency and any deadline they need to meet. Explain the problem and what they can do to help. Be sure to give them the information they need to respond effectively. Remember, even though it is tempting to use form letters or postcards they are not very effective, especially at this "end" point. Ask your supporters to write brief personal letters or make phone calls to the staff member who is working on the legislation or regulation. Finally, be sure to ask your supporters to provide you with any feedback or information they

receive.

Do not get discouraged. Continue the fight! You may lose a battle--that doesn't mean you've lost the war. The legislative and regulatory processes have several steps. You may have other chances to get what you want.

### **When It's Over**

There are few experiences so exciting as witnessing passage of a bill you've worked on or a bill signing ceremony. These are natural opportunities for you and your allies to celebrate and thank legislators, their staff and others who helped you. But, even if the legislature adjourns without finishing work on your bill, it is important to take time to celebrate what you did achieve and, equally important, thank legislators, their staff and others for their help. Policymakers, like everyone else, like to be appreciated, so whether you achieve your goal or not, find ways to show your gratitude to those who took interest in and promoted your idea.

A sincere thank you letter to legislative and other supporters is a must. This also may be a good time to present your legislator with an award. Remember, you probably will need their help on other issues during future legislative sessions.

Thank allies who helped you achieve victory.

And, don't forget to acknowledge the hard work of your own staff and your allies. Whether you were completely successful or not, a lot of people believed in the effort and you must find ways to let them know you appreciate their interest and support.

## **Part VI: Additional Resources**

The organizations listed in this section can provide further information on the subjects covered in this guide as well as more specific details about the legislative process and ways of contacting public officials or about disability-related issues. To obtain more information about legislation and advocacy related to a particular disability, it may be helpful to contact an organization in that particular field. The Directory of Services for Blind and Visually Impaired Persons in the United States and Canada published by the American Foundation for the Blind, available in print or in a searchable database at <http://www.afb.org/services.asp>, contains detailed listings of local, state, and national organizations in the field of blindness and visual impairment. A sample of national organizations is provided here. Listings of other disability-specific organizations may be found in the Encyclopedia of Associations published by Gale Research and in the Yellow Pages of your local telephone listings. A sample of such organizations is provided here. Many such organizations may engage in advocacy in their area and have legislative departments; they also frequently publish newsletters and other informational material. If you are interested in learning more about advocacy in the U.S. Congress, you may be interested in purchasing AFB's video and study guide entitled "Brief Encounters of the Right Kind: A Toolkit for Advocates," available from AFB Press at 800-232-3044 or from the Bookstore at <http://www.afb.org/default.asp>.

### **The Legislative Process**

League of Women Voters

1730 M Street, N.W.

Washington, D.C. 20036

202-429-1965

Fax: 202-429-0854

World Wide Web: <http://www.lwv.org>

The League of Women Voters, a national organization, and its affiliates conduct political action, citizen education, and research on government, politics, and elections. Links to state and local chapter web sites are available.

### **National Blindness Organizations**

American Council of the Blind  
1155 15th Street, N.W., Suite 1004  
Washington, D.C. 20005  
202-467-5081; 800-424-8666  
Fax: 202-467-5085  
World Wide Web: <http://www.acb.org>

The American Council of the Blind (ACB) promotes effective participation of blind people in all aspects of society. It provides information and referral, legal assistance, scholarships, advocacy, consultation, and program development assistance. Interest groups include the Deaf-Blind Committee and the Council of Citizens with Low Vision International. ACB publishes the *Washington Connection* available weekdays (except 2:00 - 5:00 p.m.) at 800-424-8666 and on line at <http://www.acb.org/washington/index.html>.

American Foundation for the Blind  
11 Penn Plaza, Suite 300  
New York, N.Y. 10001  
212-502-7600; 212-502-7662 (TTY/TDD); 800-232-5463  
Fax: 212-502-7777  
E-mail: [info@afb.net](mailto:info@afb.net)  
World Wide Web: <http://www.afb.org>

The American Foundation for the Blind (AFB) strives to enable people who are blind or visually impaired to achieve equality of access and opportunity that will ensure freedom of choice in their lives. AFB accomplishes this through agency-wide program initiatives and through the delivery of a wide variety of products and services at its headquarters in New York City and its other offices in Atlanta, Dallas, West Virginia, and San Francisco.

AFB also maintains a governmental relations office at the following address:

American Foundation for the Blind  
Governmental Relations Group  
820 First Street, N.E., Suite 400  
Washington, D.C. 20002  
202-408-0200 (Voice/TDD)  
Fax: 202-289-7880  
E-mail: [afbgov@afb.net](mailto:afbgov@afb.net)  
World Wide Web: <http://www.afb.org/gov.asp>

The Governmental Relations Group (GRG) publishes an electronic legislative briefing service, *Words from Washington* (WFW), which is available via Internet e-mail. WFW is published periodically while Congress is in session. WFW is a brief report on what's happening in Washington with frequent analysis of how developments in Washington affect individuals who are blind or visually impaired and the professionals who serve them. Generally no more than two or three pages in length, WFW is presented in a highly readable newspaper style format. To subscribe to WFW go to

<http://www.afb.org/Section.asp?SectionID=3&TopicID=25&DocumentID=1290>. *Words from Washington* and selected legislative and regulatory documents are available at GRG's web site.

Association for Education & Rehabilitation of the Blind & Visually Impaired (AER)  
4600 Duke Street, #430  
P.O. Box 22397  
Alexandria, VA 22304  
703-823-9690  
Fax: 703-823-9695  
<http://www.aerbvi.org/welcome.htm>

The Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (AER) is the only international membership organization dedicated to rendering all possible support and assistance to the professionals who work in all phases of education and rehabilitation of blind and visually impaired children and adults. It was formed in 1984 as the result of a consolidation between the American Association of Workers for the Blind and the Association for Education of the Visually Handicapped.

National Federation of the Blind  
1800 Johnson Street Baltimore, MD 21230  
410-659-9314  
Fax: 410-685-5653  
E-mail: [nfb@nfb.org](mailto:nfb@nfb.org)  
World Wide Web: <http://www.nfb.org>

The National Federation of the Blind (NFB.) strives to improve social and economic conditions of blind persons, evaluates and assists in establishing programs, and provides public education and scholarships. Interest groups include the Committee on the Concerns of the Deaf-Blind.

### **Other Disability Organizations**

American Association of the Deaf-Blind  
814 Thayer Avenue  
Silver Spring, MD 20910  
800-735-2258; 301-588-6545 (TTY)  
Fax: 301-588-8705  
World Wide Web: <http://www.tr.wou.edu/dblink/aadb.htm>

The American Association of the Deaf-Blind seeks to encourage independent living for individuals who are deaf-blind and provides technical assistance to persons who are deaf-blind, families educators, and service providers.

American Association of People with Disabilities  
1819 H Street NW, Suite 330  
Washington, DC 20006  
800-840-8844; 202-457-0046  
Fax: 202-457-0473  
E-mail: [aapd@aol.com](mailto:aapd@aol.com)  
World Wide Web: <http://www.aapd-dc.org/>

People with disabilities in America, plus their families and friends: AAPD sees the need for one unifying membership organization to leverage the numbers of people with disabilities and their families and friends

to access economic and other benefits to form an organization which will be a positive private-sector force to achieve the goal of full inclusion in American society.

The Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities (CCD)  
1730 K Street, NW, Suite 1212  
Washington, DC 20006  
202-785-3388  
Fax: 202-467-4179  
Email: [info@c-c-d.org](mailto:info@c-c-d.org)  
World Wide Web: <http://www.c-c-d.org>

The Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities is a Coalition of national consumer, advocacy, provider and professional organizations headquartered in Washington, D.C. Since 1973, the CCD has advocated on behalf of people of all ages with physical and mental disabilities and their families. CCD has worked to achieve federal legislation and regulations that assure that the 54 million children and adults with disabilities are fully integrated into the mainstream of society.

Justice for All  
E-mail: [jfa@jfanow.org](mailto:jfa@jfanow.org)  
World Wide Web: <http://www.jfanow.org>

Justice For All and the JFA E-mail Network were formed to defend and advance disability rights and programs. One JFA goal is to work with national and state organizations of people with disabilities to get the word from Washington D.C. out to the grassroots. For a free "Justice For All" subscription, send an e-mail message to [majordomo@jfanow.org](mailto:majordomo@jfanow.org) with the words "subscribe justice" in the body of your message.

## **Appendices**

### **Appendix I: Lobbying**

For information on the Lobbying Disclosure Act of 1995, contact

Clerk of the House  
Legislative Resource Center  
B-106 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20514  
202-226-5200.  
[http://clerk.house.gov/clerk/Offices\\_Services/lrc.html](http://clerk.house.gov/clerk/Offices_Services/lrc.html)

Secretary of the Senate  
Office of Public Records  
232 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510  
202-224-3121

### **Appendix II: Sample Talking Points**

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Assuring Quality Special Education for Children with Visual Impairments</b></p>
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## Summary of Recommendations

To ensure that children who are blind or visually impaired receive a high-quality education with related services Congress must:

- ensure that blind or visually impaired students are provided with timely access to classroom instructional materials and technology equal to their non-disabled classmates,
- require that assessments of students with visual impairments are designed with sensitivity to their unique needs, are administered by personnel with knowledge of those needs, and are provided in individually appropriate reading media;
- dramatically increase the availability of teachers and related services personnel trained to meet the unique needs of students who are blind or visually impaired;
- provide for a complete and accurate identification of students with visual impairments in need of special education and related services;
- address the need for a full range of appropriate transition services ensuring successful progress from school to work;
- guarantee placement of students with visual impairments in educational settings based on individual students' needs.

For further information, contact:

Paul Schroeder  
Vice President, Governmental Relations  
American Foundation for the Blind  
Governmental Relations Group  
820 First Street, N.E., Suite 400  
Washington, DC 20002  
202-408-8172  
[pws@afb.net](mailto:pws@afb.net)

## Appendix III: Master the Media

The mass media can constitute an important tool in your toolkit. If you are able to capitalize on newspapers, radio, and television you can get your message before many people for a proportionately small effort and multiply the effectiveness of your organization or coalition--and at the same time convince public officials of the significance of your issue. Although some people make careers of managing the media, there are some relatively easy steps that you can take, merely by refocusing the position paper and letters you have already written.

Define your news. Focus. What do you want people to know? You can't make every point every time.

Compile a press list of news media, including appropriate newspapers (don't forget neighborhood newspapers), magazines, organization newsletters, and radio and television stations with a contact person for each. Include a variety of departments. Different news is suited to different departments. Use the telephone yellow pages, your own knowledge of the community, and press lists of other organizations. Update the list regularly. Include fax numbers and e-mail addresses.

Develop a relationship with the reporters who cover your issue. It is possible to obtain press coverage through an editorial or a feature story as well as a news article. Invite reporters to attend and cover events such as issue and candidate forums.

A news release to your press list can garner media coverage of events, such as public meetings, forums, or awards ceremonies. Reporters often lift words directly from news releases when they write, so releases need to have all the information the story must contain.

Preparing a press release. Prepare your press release on your letterhead. Include the date of issue, a release date/time and a contact name and phone number. Make your headline succinct and informative. Use 1 ½ inch margins, indent paragraphs five spaces and double space the text. If a release runs more than one page use the word "more" at the bottom of each page and a shortened version of the headline on the following page, Type "###" (the media's code for "The End") at the bottom of the release.

Your first paragraph must answer at least two of "who, what, when, where, why" and should be quotable. The second paragraph should answer the other W's. Pick your priorities carefully. Releases should be long only if you have a long story to tell. Put important information first. Always include the title or description of the person you are writing about; include the names of all note-worthy participants. Never editorialize in a news release. Have a standard closing paragraph, stating succinctly the purpose of your organization. The press release should be in the hands of the media approximately one week before you want it published. Call your contacts to find out publication deadlines. Follow up with a phone call. Don't badger; just ask if they received the release and if they need any additional information.

Letters to the editor. Be brief and focus on one issue. Include the date and title of any relevant article or editorial. Ask readers to contact their legislators about the issue. Give your address and phone number. Most newspapers verify authorship before they print a letter. Clip your published letter to the editor and mail or fax it to relevant legislators.

Radio and TV news interviews. Be brief. Chances are they will only use 20 to 60 seconds. Get the important points in quickly and with punch. Don't ramble. Speak clearly and firmly, but be natural. Don't sound rehearsed or as if you are reading, even if it's a prepared statement. For TV, don't stare at the camera. Talk to the reporter in a casual conversational style, but be brief and positive. People watch TV in their living rooms. Act as if you're talking to someone in the room. Don't stare downward. Look as neat as possible, even if you're outdoors.

Other media options. Talk to features editors at your local papers and to the editors of disability-related papers. They may be willing to write, or to allow you to write, a longer article about the issue. Publish announcements of upcoming events, volunteer requests, synopses of the issues, and results of candidate surveys and interviews in newsletters and bulletins.

Television and radio talk shows, community service programs, and local cable channels can provide an ideal opportunity to talk about the issue. Find out who screens guests for radio and television talk or interview shows and write to suggest a good angle for a show (be sure to enclose your background material and press clippings).

World Wide Web. Post your position papers, press releases, talking points, or your testimony to your organization's web site. In today's increasing web-conscious society, a web site lends authenticity to your issue.

## **Appendix IV: The Do's and Don'ts of Advocacy Letter Writing**

Letters are the barometers that measure political interest. Letters are counted, and they do count! Not just any letter is influential. Just as people at the grassroots level have become more organized in their letter writing campaigns, legislators have become more savvy in distinguishing a drummed-up letter from an expression of personal concern. So, it is especially important that your letter be personal, thoughtful, specific, and concise. Your letters should be written with the expectation that they will be read by someone of intelligence, but one who is usually less well informed than you are on your particular issue.

Here are some do's and don'ts to consider in writing a convincing letter.

### **Do . . .**

- Spell the legislator's name correctly and know his/her appropriate title (Representative, Senator, Delegate, Commissioner, Director, etc.). All elected and appointed officials should be addressed as "Honorable."
- Write as an individual constituent. Because legislators pay the most attention to personal letters from their constituents, it is important that your letter express your own views. To make this clear, it will help to use personal stationery rather than a postcard or form letter; express your views in your own words rather than those of another; and refer to previous communications with the member, if possible. Using form letters entails a trade-off. What you gain in volume, you may lose in credibility. As in any other relationship, public officials respond better to the personal touch. Letters on your group or organizational letterhead may sometimes be helpful but they are no substitute for the personal approach of an individually written letter. Faxes and mailgrams can be used if time is short, and telephone calls can be effective as well. E-mail may not be reliable or easily handled in some offices.
- Write one page or less. Legislators are so busy, they do not have much time to read through a long, involved letter in order to discover your point. If your letter is limited to one page, they can scan it quickly. If you have more information than will fit on one page, include it as background material, clearly marked as such, and attach it to the letter.
- Cover only one subject and clearly identify it as such. For example, at the top of the page write, "Re: (name of bill or issue)." This will speed up the routing of the letter in the office. If you have more than one subject which you would like to cover, then write a separate letter for each one. Separate staff often cover separate issues.
- Be as specific as possible. Regardless of what you are writing about, be as specific as possible in describing it. If it is a particular bill, try to refer to its number, the person who introduced it, and what it will do. Similarly, if you refer to the legislator's position, it will demonstrate your specific interest in his/her actions. Show as much knowledge as you can, but don't hesitate to write merely because you are not an "expert."
- Make your letter timely. Legislators will appreciate having your views and information while the issue is before him/her.
- Ask the legislator to do something specific. It is important to ask for a specific action such as, "Please vote for (or against) [number of the bill]" or "We recommend the following changes to the proposed priorities."
- Include your name and return address on the letter.
- Hand write letters if they are legible; otherwise, type letters. Write each legislator individually, avoiding photocopies. Braille letters are fine if accompanied by a print transcription of the letter. Some legislators may not be able to transcribe your letter or reply in braille. This will delay their response to you.
- Use this generic outline:
  - I. Indicate who you are and the purpose or nature of your problem or request. If you are a voter in a legislator's district, mention this in your letter.
  - II. State specifically what you want the legislator to do about your problem or request.
  - III. Indicate why it is important to you that they take action regarding your problem or request.
  - IV. Put a "hook" in your letter. Ask for something that will require a substantive reply to your letter or communication. For example, ask a legislator if they are a cosponsor of legislation, ask for the status of pending legislation, or ask agency staff for the timetable for issuing regulations,
  - V. Indicate your thanks, reiterate your most important message, and say that you expect a response.

### **Don't . . .**

- Don't write letters that demand the legislators cooperation.
- Don't write a chain letter or form letter.
- Don't threaten a legislator with defeat at the next election.

- Don't adopt a politically partisan tone in your letter.
- Don't become a chronic letter writer. Choose your issues wisely.
- Don't use the legislator's first name in the salutation of your letter unless you know them personally.
- Don't be discouraged! You may not always receive a substantive response to your letters or communications, but following these suggestions will increase the chances that you will be heard effectively.

## **Appendix V: Personalities**

Don't let your own ego or need for recognition get in the way of what you are trying to accomplish. Always remember that you are trying to convince someone else to do what you want them to do. The reward to that person is recognition or credit--don't confuse this with your own performance as an advocate. If your lobbying target adopts your point of view, takes on your cause with gusto, and thinks it was his idea in the first place, inwardly congratulate yourself on being an effective advocate.

As with any other human interaction, you may not always like the legislator or staff person you are dealing with. Some of your targets will be delightful people with whom you may become personal friends in the future; others will drive you crazy with their uncontrolled egomania, lack of interest in your cause, or know-it-all attitude.

Legislators and their staff are people, too. They bring to their work the same biases, misconceptions, stereotypes, and insights possessed by the general public.

Don't assume that they will be knowledgeable about blindness or disability issues. You may have to do a little elementary explaining.

Most legislators and staff members are there to take information and, perhaps, to be of help. Your job is to stay cool and remain focused on what you want to accomplish. This may be very difficult to do, since some legislators and staff persons are experts at diverting you from your mission. Here are some techniques you can use when dealing with difficult people.

Mr. Bull Dozer believes he already knows everything about your issue and has the solutions all figured out. He may try to bully you, explode at you, or bombard you with facts and figures in an attempt to get you to agree with him. You may feel inadequate, frightened, and ready to retreat but standing firm in these circumstances is helpful. If you are confident of your position, you can have an impact on Mr. Dozer. Be prepared with your facts and figures. Maintain eye contact; don't allow Mr. Dozer to intimidate you. Stand up to him but do not be drawn into a debate; make your point forcefully without worrying about being excessively polite. Your firmness can win Mr. Bull Dozer's respect. Even the "Bulldozers" of the world can be helpful. They, at least, tell you what they will and will not do.

Mr. N.O. Bucks is a negative person who would like to help you as long as it does not cost money. In a group meeting, such a person can sap everyone's energy. To counter his influence, be prepared with a lot of background information on the feasibility of your proposal, alternative funding sources, and the like. Make an optimistic but realistic statement or proposal. Try to engage Mr. N.O. Bucks in your cause by asking him to help you solve the problem. Be alert to distinguishing between a person who is giving you his honest analysis and one who is looking for a quick way to get you out of his office.

Everyone likes a compliment, but Mr. U.A. Mazing People goes overboard about the courage, dedication, or self sacrifice of blind people or the professionals who serve them. He will wax eloquent about how wonderful "you people" are and before you know it, you are wasting precious time answering questions about "How do you do that?" instead of presenting your arguments. Don't fall into this trap. Acknowledge the compliment but then quickly move on to your agenda. Keep the conversation focused on the issue at

hand, not on such alluring but extraneous topics as how a blind person reads his watch, how handsome and well behaved his dog guide is, or how people with a visual impairment negotiate the subway. If necessary, make another appointment to talk about these topics.

You will have a wonderful meeting with Ms. Jess Wright, a staff member who is agreeable, smiling, and supportive. Or so you think. She is merely reflecting back what she thinks you want to hear and will not accomplish anything with her boss for you. Reassure such agreeable people. They often do not like to say no. Many have a need to be liked by everyone. Try to get Ms. Wright to stop being so acquiescent by asking about potential problems or political pitfalls to your position. In that way you may be able to learn what she really thinks. Ask open-ended questions and set reasonable deadlines for action.

This strategy can also work with people who tend to be silent and unresponsive head noddors or blank starers, who just will not say anything. If you can stifle your own urge to fill the awkward silences, they will probably open up eventually.

Finally, Mr. I.M. Wrong is always going to be wrong on the facts and you are going to have to correct him. Do so gently, without discrediting or embarrassing him. State the facts as you perceive them. Don't argue. Acknowledge that there may be other solutions that neither of you has considered. Always make clear, however, that your organization or other colleagues must agree to any counter proposals, unless you know you are in a position to make such an agreement.

Don't be intimidated by these personality types. The staff person you find to be most obnoxious may just be having a bad day. Legislators and their staffs are just people, too.