



Canadian
Paraplegic
Association
Ontario

Association
canadienne des
paraplégiques
Ontario

Advocacy Handbook



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The Art of Advocacy

A Handbook on Advocacy

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.”

- Margaret Mead

Far too often people sit silently while a real barrier is making them feel ill at ease and preventing them from participating to their full potential. Perhaps they feel that they do not want to bother people with their “complaints”, or perhaps for the bigger issues they prefer to leave lobbying and advocacy to the “experts”. Whatever the reason, silence does not bring around change.

With the right knowledge and skills, you – *yes, you!* – can raise public awareness of your issues, either on your own or with a group of like-minded individuals. Realize that you are in a position of power. You have the knowledge, insight and expertise of living with a disability. People making decisions need to hear what you have to say.

CPA Ontario works with you. We listen to what the issues are and bring them forward. We contribute to the legislative debate with important information that

prevents elected officials from making uninformed decisions that could have a detrimental impact on many of their constituents. As well, there is **“Strength in Numbers”**. Together we can offer support to one another and work towards a better Ontario for all of us.

The truth is anyone who cares about an issue and is committed to making a difference can be a “player” in the political arena. And that’s really what this handbook is all about – giving CPA Ontario members, the examples, resources and valuable information they need to achieve their own independence, self-reliance and full community participation.

What is Advocacy?

An advocate is someone who speaks up for others. The advocate may be an individual or an organization. Advocacy involves identifying, embracing and promoting a cause. Advocacy is an effort to shape public perception or to effect change. It is knowing what you need and speaking up for it.

Why Should You Advocate

- Because you care
- Because change doesn't just happen
- Because you can make a difference
- Because someone else isn't as strong as you are and, today, you need to do it for them

What is necessary for advocacy success?

- Positive self-esteem
- Assertiveness
- Knowing how to communicate so people will listen
- Understanding and researching the situation
- Understanding yourself and what your triggers are

Define your Power

There are different types of power that can affect how successful you will be in getting what you want.

Power over: You are exercising control over another or you are experiencing loss of control in a situation.

Power with: Indicates trust and may be described as win/win.

Power within: You have control of yourself; you do not need validation from others.

Successful advocacy is being aware of when someone is trying to have power over you and responding assertively.

Speak up for Yourself!

➤ **Be prepared!**

The most important step towards solving a problem is having an understanding of your problem. Some problems or goals (ways to solve a problem) are more straight forward than others.

➤ **Performing research: knowledge is power**

Research is important for determining what options are available to you.

➤ **Identifying the barrier or problem**

Clearly articulate what the issue is that you are advocating for.

➤ **Identify allies and opponents**

Allies can be anyone who is willing to offer support, even people you don't know. Opponents, on the contrary, are people/groups who do not support your goal.

➤ **The best approach: methods to advocate**

It is important to know whom to approach first and when. There are different methods to advocate: emails, letters, phone, and/or in-person meetings. Actions speak louder than words. Arranging to meet someone in person and going the extra mile to express interest in how to resolve the problem shows your commitment to the issue. The same rule applies to making a phone call instead of sending an email; the phone is more personal than email and communicates genuine intent or interest. Letters and email are nevertheless important and effective advocacy tools. The greatest advantage of these is that there is a concrete record of your correspondence (but be sure to keep a copy!)

➤ **Record-keeping**

Record-keeping and documentation are important because we forget things! Recording activities reminds you of what you have done, what you still have to do, and what activities others have to do on your behalf.

Effective advocacy takes organization. Not everyone organizes the same way, and there are a multitude of methods, however, every good advocate has a method that works for them. Effective notes or log entries, regardless of method, must be legible to the person; the information in the record must make sense; and the records must be complete.

Given the various methods of advocating, there are many forms of records including phone logs, notebooks, calendars, emails, letters, daytimers (written and electronic). Thus in addition to having a system for recording notes, it is important to have a system for managing your records. Some systems include:

- By files or envelopes: keeping all records of information from a particular person or organization in a folder.
- By advocacy method: keeping all phone correspondence in a phone log and all emails in a separate email folder.

➤ **Follow-up**

Get to Know Your Government

If your advocacy issue grows and becomes apparent that it is a systemic issue and requires capturing your government's attention; it is important to understand how municipal governments relate to the other orders of government in Canada – the provincial and federal governments.

There are three types of government:

- the Government of Canada, or the federal government
- the Government of Ontario, or the provincial government
- Your Local Government, the municipal level of government which also includes related boards and commissions such as school boards, is the level of government responsible for most community affairs.

Each level of government is responsible for providing certain services and has the ability to raise money through specific types of taxation.

The Federal Government

The federal government has the power “to make laws for the peace, order and good government of Canada” except for subjects where the provinces are given exclusive powers.

Among the many exclusive powers of the federal government are:

- regulation of trade and commerce
- the post office
- the census
- national defense
- employment insurance
- money and banking
- copyrights
- criminal law
- citizenship
- foreign policy

According to the *Constitution Act, 1867*, everything not mentioned as belonging to the provincial governments comes under the power of the federal government.

For more on the federal government of Canada visit

<http://canada.gc.ca/home.html>

The Provincial Government

The Provincial governments are responsible for issues that are explicitly given to them in Canada's written constitution – the *Constitution Act, 1867*.

Through the provincial legislature, the provincial government has the power to enact or amend laws and programs related to:

- natural resources and environment
- hospitals
- property and civil rights in the province
- education
- administration of justice
- social services

The province directly funds or transfers money to institutions to ensure the delivery of these important responsibilities, as well as provincial highways, culture and tourism, prisons, post-secondary education, and other services to Ontarians.

The provincial legislature also has power over all municipal institutions in the province.

For more on the provincial government

<http://www.ontario.ca/en/residents/index.htm>

Municipal Government

The powers of municipal governments are determined by the provincial government. Municipal governments in Ontario are responsible for providing many of the services within their local boundaries that you rely on daily such as:

- water and sewage
- public transit
- planning new community developments and enhancing existing neighbourhoods
- electric utilities
- library services
- fire services
- police services
- child care

- animal control and by-law enforcement
- property assessment
- long term care & senior housing
- ambulance
- provincial offences
- administration
- storm sewers
- garbage collection and recycling
- maintenance of the local road network, including snow removal
- parks and recreation
- public health
- arts and culture
- economic development
- airports
- tax collection
- side walks
- social services
- social housing

Municipal governments in Ontario spend billions each year to provide the public services that meet these important needs of Ontario residents.

Municipal governments raise most of the money for financing these services from the property taxes paid by residents and businesses in the local area. Additional funding comes from "user fees" or "non-tax revenue" from parking fines, for example, and some funding still comes from the provincial government.

For more on municipal government in Ontario, go to

<http://www.amo.on.ca/AM/Template.cfm?Sectoin=Home>

OR

Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing

<http://www.mah.gov.on.ca/Page11.aspx>

The Role of an MPP

as Legislator

As a legislator, an MPP will attend meetings of the Legislative Assembly to participate in the debating and making of laws. An MPP will also take part in meetings of legislative committees where draft legislation will be studied in detail, and where the public can participate to have face-to-face input into legislative proposals. An MPP may have additional duties as a cabinet minister, house leader or whip, or even as Speaker of the Assembly.

as Elected Representative

As a representative of his or her riding, an MPP meets with constituents, deals with the provincial government to solve problems, helps constituents find services that are available to assist them in different ways, and attends and supports community events. An MPP may be able to help with and present a petition to the Legislature concerning a specific problem or issue in the riding. An MPP has one or more locally-staffed offices to help constituents.

4 Things You Must Do Before You Start to Advocate to your Elected Official

1a CREATE A “WHO’S WHO” LIST

Make a list of all the governmental officials who are in positions of influence with regard to your issue. This list should include local MPPs and elected representatives and others with whom you might interact. Make sure you get complete (and correct!) contact information.

1b KNOW THE PLAYERS

Research your legislators. Learn their interests. Do they have any personal or professional ties to your cause? Most elected officials provide such information on their websites.

2 COMPILE USEFUL DATA

Nothing is more persuasive to a politician than a compelling story that demonstrates your reason for contacting them. Often, such personal stories become the basis for government consultations, press conferences and other media events.

3 BUILD A COALITION

Any piece of legislation has a greater chance of success if it has a broad base of support. Ask around to see if there are others in your region that could benefit from your proposed change. When it comes to lobbying, there is strength in numbers.

4 UNDERSTAND THE PROCESS

At every level of government, whether it's the House of Commons, provincial legislature or the city council, there is a prescribed process by which bills become law or funding requests become part of the budget. While professional lobbyists are paid to know the details of this process, you should set out to learn at least the basics, including deadlines to introduce bills, committees assigned to hear certain bills, and how to amend legislation as it makes its way through the process.

E-MAIL AS AN ADVOCACY TOOL

The role of e-mail in advocacy has increased dramatically in recent years. E-mail is now considered an acceptable means of communication especially if you have already established a relationship with an elected official. But, as e-mail communication has increased, so has the ability to ignore it.

However, e-mail does remain an effective and efficient way to communicate with staff. In fact, most staff prefer e-mail messages to phone calls. This practice emphasizes the need to see e-mail as only one component of a successful advocacy campaign. E-mail messages must be accompanied by phone calls, faxes, written letters and personal visits. And, as with written correspondence, staffers will tell you that if you are not a constituent, and if you do not provide contact information (including a complete postal address), do not expect your e-mail to be answered.

Writing a Letter to your Elected Official

Most elected officials will tell you that a well-written letter from a constituent is one of the most influential ways of communicating with them. Keep these thoughts in mind when composing your letter:

- Be sure that the elected official's title is correct.
- Keep your letter to only one page. You don't need to be an expert. Simply demonstrating your concern is just as effective.
- Be polite and cover only one issue in your letter. Use your own words; don't use jargon or unfamiliar acronyms.
- Type your letter if possible but make your letter personal. If using a form letter, add your own thoughts. Politicians receive many form letters – make yours unique and it will catch their attention. Form letters will receive form replies.
- Be sure to include the action you would like your elected official or his government to take.
- Ask a question, the recipient of your letter will be more inclined to send a prompt response.
- Be encouraging. If your elected official has taken a stand that favours your position, let your appreciation be known and thank him/her.
- While it is important to write your elected official, always send a copy to the responsible Minister as they have the power to change laws, regulations, policies or programs and need to hear from citizens directly. Similarly, when writing directly to a Minister, copy your local elected officials.
- Sign your letter above your typed or printed name and address. Envelopes sometimes get detached, so it's best to include your address on the actual letter.

Meeting with your Elected Official

1 CALL FOR AN APPOINTMENT

Don't just walk in and expect to see an elected official. Make an appointment well in advance and specify what you will be talking about. This lets the official prepare for the meeting or delegate to the appropriate staff person. Don't be upset if you are screened by a staff member first to find out as much as possible on your subject. Be forthright with the staff and be prepared to put in writing what the purpose of your meeting with that politician will be. Politicians hate surprises. Remember – if you can't meet with the legislator – spend time with the staff. It can be highly rewarding.

2 BE ORGANIZED

Have an agenda to keep the meeting from going astray. Remember, the elected officials and their staffers will form an opinion of you, your group and perhaps your cause. Know your subject, don't overstate your case, and maintain a business-like manner.

3 IF YOU ARE GOING AS A GROUP, KEEP IT SMALL AND HAVE A PRE-MEETING

Always take time to plan your meeting to ensure a smooth presentation. Decide who will present each topic. Choose a leader to direct the conversation and see that your agenda is followed. This is an instance where there is no strength in numbers.

4 ALWAYS BE A GOOD LISTENER

What the elected official will say will provide insight into strategy for follow-up or suggest who needs to be included in another meeting. Remember, the official needs to have his or her point of view understood as much as you do. Being attentive to his or her concerns and issues does not mean you have to agree or compromise your position. Leave time for questions.

5 BE ON TIME AND DON'T OVERSTAY YOUR ALLOTTED TIME

If an elected official asks you to continue, do so. But, remember they run on very tight schedules. If you are well organized, you can cover the critical aspects of your case in a limited time.

6 DON'T BE AFRAID TO ASK FOR SOMETHING

Don't merely ask for "support" – ask for something specific. Don't leave without asking to whom else you should be talking. Make sure you see them too.

7 DON'T BE AWED

Sure, it's an important job, but elected officials are people just like you. It's highly likely they won't understand your issue as well as you do – not because they're dumb or don't care, but because they must be "generalists" on a wide range of issues. Discuss the issue; don't lecture.

8 LEAVE FACT SHEETS - SHORT ONES

Emphasize the impact of programs or legislation on the elected official's constituents. Make sure your facts can be verified; if you quote numbers, be able to back them up. Offer to provide more information as requested.

9 NO POLITICIAN IS ABLE TO MAKE A COMMITMENT ON THE SPOT

The best you can do is say "I hope to hear from you soon."

10 REMEMBER TO SAY "THANK YOU" WITH A SMALL NOTE

Follow-Up

- Encourage questions and discuss them. Do not make up answers to questions. For questions you cannot answer, tell the staff that you will get back to them.
- Ask what you can do.
- Ask if you can provide further information.
- Leave written materials.
- Your elected official will file the materials and refer to them when questions come up later and/or when he/she votes on the issue. Be sure to leave your name, address and phone number.
- Thank him/her again.
- Recap the meeting as soon as you return home. Identify follow-up steps to which you or the elected official committed. Ask for a commitment and request a reply.
- Continue to build the relationship after you return home by informing all involved of your progress and/or updates.

After the Meeting: The Debriefing

- Set up a debriefing shortly after your visit while everything is fresh in your mind. In order to learn from the meeting with the elected official/staff person and identify the logical next steps, members of your group need an opportunity to express their feelings and thoughts about the meeting. The following steps will give everyone a chance to express themselves and decide about the next actions.
- What went well? Make a list together. No negative comments!
- How did the elected official/staff person respond to the group? Bored, hostile, encouraging, non-committal, distracted, uncomfortable?
- Was this due to his/her personal interest in the issue, or to other circumstances (such as interruptions, an upcoming re-election campaign, etc.)?

- How could you tell? Body language? Words? Length of the meeting?
- What did you learn about the elected official? Any insights into character, “world view”/philosophy, motivation to be in politics, areas where s/he feels vulnerable, areas where s/he feels confident, how much s/he relies on staff for information, or how s/he tries to “manage” meetings with constituents? Does the elected official or staff person have a relative or friend with a disability? If you met with the staff person, did they give you any insights into the elected official?
- What should the next step be?
 - A visit to the elected official by other citizens
 - A news story about this visit
 - A letter-writing campaign
 - An invitation to the elected official to meet with your group or a district group that may have more influence with him/her
 - Other
- Write a letter to the elected official/staff person thanking him/her for the meeting and restating key points?

The Importance of Working with the Media

The media can play an important role in your advocacy efforts. Elected officials read their papers daily and closely follow the issues covered by the media in their legislative districts. The more you can keep the media informed about your position, the louder your voice will be to those who count.

Here are a few ways you can strategically (and inexpensively) work with the media:

Write a Letter to the Editor

Local media is one of the most important advocacy tools at your disposal – there's no more efficient method of getting your message out to people. Writing a letter to the editor is one of the easiest ways to use the media. Keep the following points in mind when you're watching the news and reading the paper. If you feel strongly about an issue, make your opinion known.

- The letters to the editor page is the second most read page of the newspaper. (Front page is first)
- Most newspapers are eager to receive letters from the public. They need to fill the space.
- Letters to the editor are the quickest and cheapest way to communicate your message to a wide audience.
- Letters must be short and simple and stick to one point. Keep your letter to a maximum of 200 words. Don't ramble. If you have more than one point to make, write more than one letter!
- Write the way you talk and speak from the heart. Don't try to impress the editor with big words and encyclopedic knowledge. They want passion.
- Don't get personal. You can disagree with an opinion or action, but personal attacks distract from the point you are trying to make.
- Write the same day or the day after a story appears – the more current the topic, the more interest it will attract.
- Send a letter whenever you have an opinion. You can send two letters on two subjects on the same day.

- Always include your name, address and phone number. Most papers have a policy of phoning to verify authorship prior to printing.

If you are sending your letter by e-mail, put it in the body of the e-mail, do not attach it. Most newspapers today do not open attachments.

There's strength in numbers – try to get others to write also.

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.

Tips for Getting on Radio Call-in Shows

- Call in during open forum or relevant discussion.
- Contact station producers or staff members in charge of bookings to suggest discussion topics and guests.

Getting Yourself on a TV or Radio Show

- Your biggest asset is credibility. If you've been getting good coverage in other media, chances are that the editors on the show will know what you're about.
- Research the TV or radio show to determine the name of the producer through the Internet or by phone call.
- The best initial contact is a succinct letter of introduction to the producer containing background information on your issue plus a clipping or two and a suggestion of good news angle for the show.
- Follow up with a telephone call to the producer.

- Probe during your conversation with staff and listen for a focus that will meet your needs. Listen for ideas for further material you can submit to bolster your issue’s newsworthiness.
- Be patient. Let the show producers have time to call you. If this begins to seem like it may never happen, make a straightforward inquiry to see if a new angle should be developed. Present your case strongly, but don’t argue – you’ll lose even if you “win”.
- If, and when, you are set to appear on a TV or radio show, make sure the interviewer understands the angle you have agreed on with the producers. Follow this format within reason, but recognize there can be times when the only way to get the message across is for the spokesperson to shift gears in mid-interview.

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 project or the issues.
- You may also want to consider publishing 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 issues, the project, and the results. Invite reporters to attend and cover events such as issue and candidate forums.
- Consider creating your own website. Your site doesn’t have to be complicated but your information should be easily accessible, relevant and current. Drive traffic to the site by e-mailing friends and using other social networking tools such as Facebook and Myspace. Engage people who come to your site with a “call to action”.

How to Sustain & Increase your Advocacy Efforts

- Check your elected official's website regularly.
- Monitor their committee and legislative work, review agendas and, when possible, attend committee meetings.
- Give them credit whenever possible, but be sincere.
- Offer to write an article for your elected official's newsletter.
- Leave your personal politics at home.
- Always say "thank you".
- Support those who support you.

Acknowledgements

Habitat for Humanity Canada

Canadian CED Network

DAWN Ontario

Member Success Story

Disability Discrimination

There is an “accessible” gas station across the street from where I live. Like many other stations, this one has a store attached. For many months it was frustrating me that I couldn’t zip over to the store to get some needed things because their accessible entrance was... not. There was an ice box blocking the ramp into the store.

I requested the manager at this location and his general manager address the issue and have it rectified as soon as possible. In my mind, the solution was to move it to the other side of the gas station side walk.

Over the span of six weeks I spoke to the staff of the store continually requesting the removal of the ice box and pointing out that their inaction was actually a form of discrimination. I received no response. So, I got on the Internet and decided to see if I could get answers from a higher level and contacted the gas station’s head quarters to find out who I could speak to regarding this barrier and having the situation settled amicably. I was given a phone number of a local regional manager in Toronto.

“It was frustrating me that I couldn’t zip over to the store to get some needed things”

I then contacted the regional manager and explained the situation to her. I suggested that an easy solution would be to move the ice box and potentially even switch it with another display outside of the store which wasn’t as wide. I would then have enough room to get into the store via the accessible ramp. The manager stated that the ice box could not be moved because it was a ‘safety hazard’ to run electrical cable under the entrance doors and that customers

may trip. I gave her another solution to run the cable up the wall, over the doors and back down, but she chose not to use my suggestion. She ended up stating that she would look into it to see what could be done, and call me back in exactly one week's time.

One week passed, and no phone call. I waited for two more days and then it took another serious email to receive a phone call back. It was now a couple of days shy of two weeks from the time we first spoke. She told me that "the employees of the location have been informed of the situation and have no problem helping you get into the store anytime you need to go." I informed her that when one has a disability, the whole idea is to integrate into society and be INDEPENDENT with DIGNITY, not that you have to DEPEND on others.

I don't want to have to ask employees every time I go to the store to lift me up their curb, and, in fact, I know it's not safe.

"The whole idea is to integrate into society and be INDEPENDENT with DIGNITY"

Also, bear in mind that I am on their schedule, not mine. As already mentioned, this was so incredibly frustrating, emotionally/mentally stressful and unacceptable. To top it off, I was offered a gift card worth \$25, and told if there is

"anything else you need, do not hesitate to call." Those who don't have a disability should try to at least envision how being treated like this feels and imagine what it is like to be us.

Nothing seemed to be working, so I then contacted CPA Ontario and asked for help in finding someone who could help with this problem. I was given a phone number for a Global TV Reporter. I contacted her, and she did a segment on my story by interviewing me and bringing my issues to the local community.

Within a day or two after this segment aired, the gas company was already getting the ice box relocated. Then a follow up interview was done with me and the gas company representatives, with their apologies for letting this fall through the cracks when they claim to be accessible.

It's a sad day when you have to go the news reporters to get a Canadian corporation to respond to your age-old request to not face discrimination. They never bothered to listen before through all the shouts and cries. Regardless, I am happy that it has been done so now all people with disabilities can use the location without worrying whether or not they can get into the store.

As the world continues to turn and advocacy for people with disabilities grows, those who are responsible for ensuring accessibility in the city should take note: If the decision makers do not have a disability, they should seek opinions from people with disabilities. Then they can engineer and design accessible entrances with a much more thought-out perspective. As one of many who advocates for people with disabilities, I hope that one day we can be accepted for who we are and be able to live in a society and world that is inclusive of those with disabilities in its fullest sense.

Filippo

Notes