

Advocacy Tools

Jumping into doing advocacy can be intimidating if you have never thought of yourself as an activist. There may come a time, however, that you find that you want to tell an elected official about a problem or may want to ask questions about the position taken by a politician. Fortunately, there are tools to provide guidance on everything from framing your message and conducting good research to understanding the legislative process, setting up and conducting effective meetings and follow-up activities.

Be sure to investigate New York State resources, too, to be sure you have information specific to the state. There are a number of “handbooks” or “primers” available on the web. A quick search for the words “advocacy handbook” will yield a variety of resources from a range organizations and states. Be aware, however, when looking at materials from other states or federal organizations. Advocacy tips may be good, but the legislative process and the regulations vary from state to state and from the federal to the state level.

A good example of a general advocacy handbook is the [Child Advocacy Primer](#) from Voices for America’s Children. As a national organization for children’s issues, Voices also has a downloadable [2008 Electoral Advocacy Toolkit](#). Another example: The Center for an Urban Future publishes [Speak Up](#) .

Winning Beginning New York offers an [Advocacy Handbook](#) and Prevent Child Abuse New York has an [advocacy guide designed for parents](#) and [one for providers](#).

Employees of non-profits often question their ability to advocate or even talk to elected officials. Relax – according to the Alliance for Justice, “All nonprofits can engage in advocacy, although the scope and extent of their lobbying activities vary according to the tax exempt status of the organization.” If you don’t tout your successes or identify your problems, who will? Lawmakers responsible for appropriating money or setting policies need to understand the consequences of their decisions. For information on the federal legal aspects of advocacy, see [Alliance for Justice](#).

To get started, acquaint yourself with your state elected officials at the [Senate](#) and [Assembly](#) websites that contain lawmakers’ biographies, newsletters and the legislation they have sponsored. Each website also provides important information on the procedures used in each house to introduction and pass, as well as a tool for identifying your legislators. Or, you can check out the [Commission for Public Integrity](#) website.

[Thomas.gov](#) presents a wealth of information on Congress, congressional representatives and the federal legislative process. Use Thomas.gov to link to the [Senate](#) and [House of Representatives](#) websites, where you can learn about

federal legislative process in each house and visit the websites of individual members of Congress.

The Internet is a great place to learn about advocacy and gain insights into effective ways to impact the legislative process. Browse to find the many websites and toolkits to match your interests and experience level. For example, people interested in health and public health may find the [American Public Health Association](#) website helpful, while others may prefer to visit the [Child Welfare League of America](#) for advocacy advice. There are also many organizations in New York State with websites and resources to assist you.

Whatever your interests, remember that your expertise as an advocate is your experience working with children. Without your voice, the needs of children may not be heard in Albany, in Washington or in your own community.