



Association of Science and Technology Centers

A photograph of four children of diverse backgrounds standing in a museum or science center, reaching out to touch a large, blue, glossy globe. The globe is mounted on a blue base and shows a map of the Americas. The children are seen from behind, with their hands pressed against the globe's surface. The background is slightly blurred, showing other museum exhibits and colorful flags.

Strengthening Your Institution's Year-Round Advocacy Strategy

Greetings from ACM + ASTC

Welcome!
from
ASTC and ACM



ASSOCIATION OF
**CHILDREN'S
MUSEUMS**



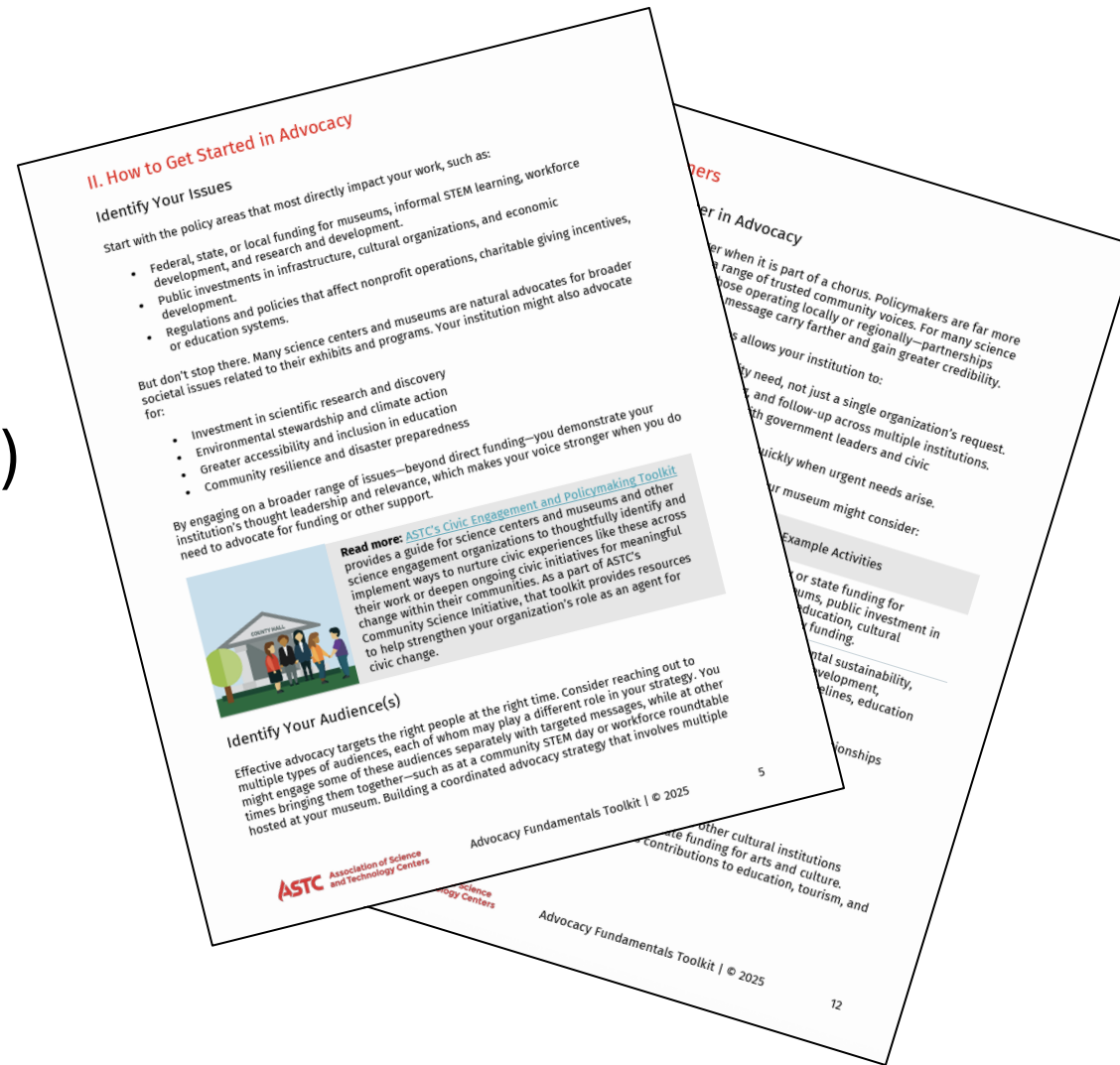
**Association of Science
and Technology Centers**

- ▶ Together, ACM + ASTC are partnering to **amplify** advocacy efforts for joint members
 - Summer 2025 – Targeted FY26 Appropriations Campaign
 - Fall 2025 – Field Wide Advocacy Webinar

- ▶ Goal: build member capacity for **sustained** advocacy, positioning our field for long term success (field elevation, conducive policy, increased funding)

Agenda

- Welcome + Introductions (5 minutes)
- Framing the Toolkit (20 minutes)
- Operationalizing the Toolkit (25 minutes)
- Q+A (10 minutes)



Audience Polls

- ▶ **Question 1: What is your advocacy experience level?**
 - New to advocacy
 - Familiar with advocacy
 - Experienced with advocacy

- ▶ **Question 2: Does your institution have a dedicated government relations staff member or team?**
 - Yes
 - No



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Framing the Toolkit

Advocacy Foundations Toolkit

- ▶ Developed by the ASTC ACE Committee
- ▶ Supports embedding advocacy fundamentals into organizational practice
- ▶ Repository of existing resources, templates, and case studies
- ▶ For advocacy beginners and seasoned professionals



navigate to the toolkit here!
Scroll to: "Our Resources"

Level Setting

- ▶ **What the Toolkit IS**
 - A set of structures and examples that will help you put in motion relationship building with your lawmakers
 - That relationship building will allow you to advance key issues

- ▶ **What the Toolkit IS NOT**
 - A specific set of policies or funding requests
 - ASTC + ACM will help develop timely messages, campaigns

Advocacy Toolkit Definitions

- ▶ **Lawmakers**
 - elected officials at every level of government – local, state, federal
 - the elected official themselves **and** their offices
- ▶ **Annual Cycle of Engagement**
 - an institution's calendar of activities and initiatives
 - takes into account local, state, federal calendars but may not align to fiscal years
- ▶ **Advocacy**
 - Relationship building
 - Impact storytelling

Demystifying Advocacy

- ▶ Advocacy is ensuring your lawmakers understand your impact

- ▶ You can (and should!) engage in advocacy without being...
 - A lobbyist
 - A policy wonk
 - A government or political science major

- ▶ You already have a unique advocacy superpower

How-Tos from the Toolkit

- ▶ Define advocacy and its value
- ▶ Identify your issues and audiences
- ▶ Tackle fundamentals – meeting requests, talking points and more
- ▶ Coalition build
- ▶ Leverage existing programs and build new initiatives with an advocacy lens
- ▶ Engage your board, your staff, your community



Advocacy Fundamentals Toolkit

Helping Science Centers, Museums, and other
Science Engagement Organizations
Amplify Their Voice in Public Policy

Introduction

Science centers and museums are trusted community anchors that inspire learning, foster innovation, and create vibrant, resilient communities. Advocacy ensures that these contributions are understood and valued by policymakers, funders, and the public. This toolkit is designed to help ASTC member institutions strengthen their advocacy practice—whether they are just getting started or seeking to deepen their impact. This toolkit aims to be relatively short and direct, providing clear case-studies and easy-to-follow steps wherever possible, in many sections there are links to outside resources that provide more in-depth information.

Current Issues, Policies, and Asks

This toolkit covers how to get started in advocacy and make it a part of your organizing's culture and work that will build the relationships with lawmakers that position you to advance key issues and make "asks" on behalf of your organization or coalition. The specific set of policies or funding requests that are discussing will vary depending on your organization's goals, who are you talking to, and the given year.

This toolkit provides examples of how you might craft messages to advance specific issues, but for current talking points, issue briefs, or policy asks being advanced on behalf of ASTC-members and other like-minded organizations, you should visit:

- [AAM Advocacy Alerts](#)
- [Afterschool Alliance – 21st Century Community Learning Centers](#)
- [National Council for Nonprofit – Everyday Advocacy](#)

If you're asking these questions

- ▶ What's the difference between advocacy and lobbying?
- ▶ How do I position the value and benefits of advocacy to my key internal audiences?
- ▶ What's a good definition of advocacy?



Navigate Here:
I. Why Advocate

If you're asking these questions

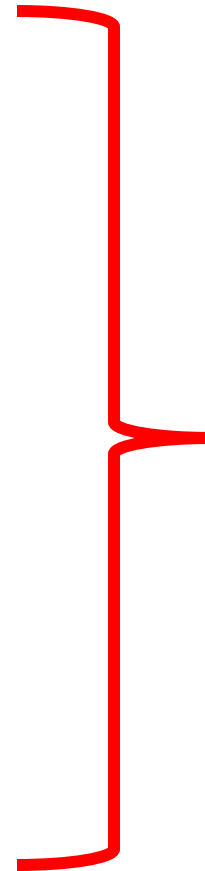
- ▶ How do I identify which policy areas align to my institution's work?
- ▶ Beyond federal lawmakers, what policy and advocacy audiences should I consider engaging?



Navigate Here:
**II. How to Get Started
in Advocacy**

If you're asking these questions

- ▶ How do I draft an effective email to a lawmaker?
- ▶ How do I request a meeting with an elected official's office?
- ▶ How do I make the most of my in-person time with my lawmaker?
- ▶ My lawmaker is coming onsite – how can we best highlight our museum?



Navigate Here:
**III. Tackling the
Fundamentals**

If you're asking these questions

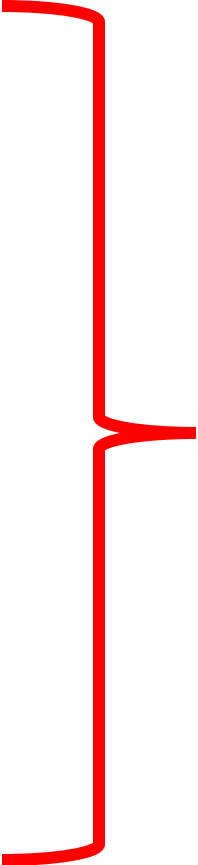
- ▶ We don't have a dedicated government relations team. How can we amplify our efforts?
- ▶ How do we start a coalition? On what scale should we be working?
- ▶ What does a coalition look like in practice?



Navigate Here:
IV. Engaging Partners

If you're asking these questions

- ▶ How do we engage lawmakers in work that we are already doing?
- ▶ Does advocacy belong in our exhibit and programmatic offerings?
- ▶ Can I offer my space to elected officials?



Navigate Here:
V. Leveraging Your Strengths

If you're asking these questions

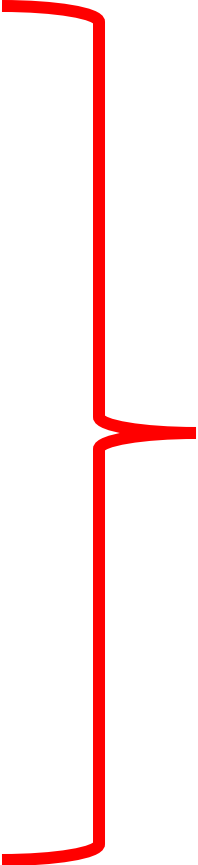
- ▶ How can I strengthen advocacy practice with our board?
- ▶ How do I manage advocacy-hesitant board members?
- ▶ Should board members personally lobby lawmakers?



Navigate Here:
**VI. Engaging Your
Board of Directors in
Advocacy**

If you're asking these questions

- ▶ How do we engage staff whose job descriptions seem outside of advocacy work?
- ▶ What does a "culture of advocacy" look like within a team?
- ▶ What are some tangible advocacy "roles" that staff should take on?



Navigate Here:
VII. Engaging Your Staff in Advocacy

If you're asking these questions

- ▶ How can I help visitors see the important role of government in our work?
- ▶ I know lawmakers are interested in hearing constituent voices. How can I activate our visitor community?



Navigate Here:
**VIII. Engaging Your
Community in
Advocacy**

Three Advocacy Actions to Take Each Year

1. **Contact** Your Lawmakers to Support Annual Funding
2. **Meet** with Your Lawmakers to Share Your Impact
3. **Invite** Your Lawmakers to Your Museum



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Operationalizing the Toolkit

Develop an Institutional Advocacy Strategy Plan

- ▶ Establish Your Institutional Advocacy Goals
- ▶ Set Objectives Toward Those Goals
- ▶ Create an Institutional Advocacy Calendar

Sample Goals – Two Tracks

Foundational

1. Make Advocacy Sustainable
 - a. Embed advocacy within your organizational culture
 - b. Align advocacy with your operations
2. Establish Key Relationships
3. Demonstrate Impact in Storytelling

Veteran

1. Deepen Organizational Advocacy Culture
2. Elevate Institutional Profile as A

3. Refine Storytelling Practices

Goal: Embed Advocacy into your Organization

Foundational

1. Make Advocacy Sustainable
 - a. Embed advocacy within your organizational culture
 - Train staff and board members on advocacy value and foundations.
 - Create an internal advocacy guide with annual high-level messages and FAQs
 - Dedicate an advocacy lead responsible for tracking opportunities and reporting progress.
 - b. Align advocacy with your operations

Veterans

1. Deepen Organizational Advocacy Culture
2. Review plan (goals, internal advocacy guide with staff and board members) annually.
3. Establish an internal advocacy task force of staff and trustees to meet monthly
4. Celebrate advocacy successes by sharing stories in staff meetings and newsletters.

Goal: Make Advocacy Sustainable

Foundational

1. Make Advocacy Sustainable

- Embed advocacy within your organizational culture
- b. **Align advocacy with your operations**
 - Create advocacy calendar aligned to institutional plans and lawmaker calendars
 - Use an “advocacy lens” checklist for planning exhibits, events, and communications.
 - Integrate advocacy priorities into annual budgeting and fundraising planning.

Veterans

1. Deepen Organizational Advocacy Culture

2. Review plan (goals, internal advocacy guide with staff and board members) annually.
3. Establish an internal advocacy task force of staff and trustees to meet monthly
4. Celebrate advocacy successes by sharing stories in staff meetings and newsletters.

Goal: Build Solid Relationships

Foundational

2. Establish Key Relationships

- Build a database of lawmakers
- Aligned to the advocacy calendar, reach out to lawmakers to schedule meetings and invite their offices to your institution
- Review key partner lists and identify other-values aligned organizations in your community and consider a meeting to discuss collaboration (coalition building)

Veterans

2. Elevate Institutional Profile

- Create topic aligned calendar of events (ex: climate focused initiatives, programs, communications)
- Beyond immediate lawmakers, create plan to establish relationships with committees and caucuses who align to your work

Goal: Use Storytelling to Share Impact

Foundational

3. Demonstrate Impact in Storytelling

- Establish key messages
- Establish key data points that make your case as a community resource
- Ensure standardized data collection practices

Veterans

3. Refine Storytelling Practices

- Review key data points and review positioning in alignment with your lawmaker's priorities
- Develop an advocacy-aligned visitor testimonial collection campaign (or ensure your current feedback processes include opportunity for advocacy questions)
- Align your annual “Impact Report” with advocacy priorities.

Advocacy Across Organizational Functions

▶ Exhibit Planning and Development

- Feature rotating exhibits tied to timely policy themes (climate, health, AI).
- Invite elected officials to exhibit openings and position them as advocates for community science learning.
- Ensure exhibits recognize federal funding sources.

▶ Communications and Marketing

- Create monthly “spotlight stories” for newsletters and social channels that highlight advocacy key messages.
- Develop shareable one-pagers and infographics linking museum impact to policy priorities.

▶ Events and Public Engagement

- Build advocacy elements into flagship annual events (“meet your representative” sessions, elected official welcome remarks).
- Train staff to incorporate advocacy messages into welcome remarks and media interviews.

▶ Audience Engagement Strategies

- Use visitor surveys to capture stories about impact and share them with decision-makers.
- Conduct dedicated advocacy outreach campaigns (postcards to policymakers, etc).

Activating Advocacy on Boards

- Host Advocacy Training session for Boards
- Institute Standing Advocacy update in Board Agendas
- Cull Networks for Potential Relationships with Elected Officials
- Ask Board Members to Provide Their Perspective on Strategy
- Encourage Board Members to Look for Win-Win Opportunities
- Prepare key messages/talking points for Boards
 - For Community Events (their own events)
 - For Institutional Events (that you plan and execute)

Sample Calendar of Engagement (Federal)

▶ **Winter**

- Reach out to offices to share support of federal investments in mission aligned work (Informal STEM learning, play-based learning)
- Attend Museum Advocacy Day in February, align your key messages to the field-wide priorities and messages

▶ **Spring**

- Ensure invites for annual fundraising or programmatic events include lawmakers
- Develop and submit appropriations (Congressionally Designated Spending or Community Project Funding) request, if applicable

▶ **Summer**

- Provide updates on your programmatic efforts and impact, and align them to any federal budget priorities
- Reach out to invite lawmakers to your institution during August Recess

▶ **Fall**

- Share impact report or annual report, ensuring the document includes key advocacy messages
- Conduct visitor messaging campaigns (postcards for policymakers) to prepare for beginning of year outreach



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