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 organization'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 you are discussing will vary depending on your organization’s goals, who you are 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

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I. Why Advocate

Defining Advocacy

Advocacy is about educating and influencing decision-makers to support public policies, funding, and social investments that help your institution and your community thrive. It is an essential part of your museum's public role—not just an optional activity. While some confuse advocacy with partisanship or lobbying, nonprofit advocacy is about sharing your story and your impact, building understanding, and shaping a supportive environment for your work.

Outside resources:

- Why Should Your Nonprofit Advocate? (National Council of Nonprofits)
- What's the Difference Between Advocacy and Lobbying? (Bolder Advocacy)
- Federal Law Protects Nonprofit Advocacy and Lobbying (National Council of Nonprofits)

The Broader Value of Advocacy

A strong advocacy practice can yield powerful benefits.

- **Attracting public funding**: Government leaders allocate funding where they see clear community impact and where institutions are actively communicating their needs and contributions. Advocacy helps ensure your museum is seen as an essential part of the community's learning, workforce development, and public engagement ecosystem.
- **Demonstrating leadership**: Active advocacy shows that your institution is a leader on critical community issues, whether advancing STEM learning, improving educational access, or fostering civic engagement.
- **Attracting private sector and philanthropic partners**: Corporate and foundation partners are drawn to institutions that are visible leaders in their communities and that are working proactively to shape a better future. Advocacy demonstrates your institution's relevance and influence.

Advocacy is a Shared Responsibility

Some organizations employ full-time staff dedicated to government relations and public policy—but most do not. A strong advocacy strategy does not require dedicated staff if it is embedded in your organizational culture (see Section VII below). As described in this toolkit, your leadership, staff, board members, and community supporters can all play meaningful advocacy roles and even occasional advocacy activities—such as hosting a legislator or submitting a public comment—can build relationships that position your museum for future success.

II. How to Get Started in Advocacy

Identify Your Issues

Start with the policy areas that most directly impact your work, such as:

- Federal, state, or local funding for museums, informal STEM learning, workforce development, and research and development.
- Public investments in infrastructure, cultural organizations, and economic development.
- Regulations and policies that affect nonprofit operations, charitable giving incentives, or education systems.

But don't stop there. Many science centers and museums are natural advocates for broader societal issues related to their exhibits and programs. Your institution might also advocate for:

- Investment in scientific research and discovery
- Environmental stewardship and climate action
- Greater accessibility and inclusion in education
- Community resilience and disaster preparedness

By engaging on a broader range of issues—beyond direct funding—you demonstrate your institution's thought leadership and relevance, which makes your voice stronger when you do need to advocate for funding or other support.

Read more: ASTC's Civic Engagement and Policymaking Toolkit provides a guide for science centers and museums and other science engagement organizations to thoughtfully identify and implement ways to nurture civic experiences like these across their work or deepen ongoing civic initiatives for meaningful change within their communities. As a part of ASTC's Community Science Initiative, that toolkit provides resources to help strengthen your organization's role as an agent for civic change.

Identify Your Audience(s)

Effective advocacy targets the right people at the right time. Consider reaching out to multiple types of audiences, each of whom may play a different role in your strategy. You might engage some of these audiences separately with targeted messages, while at other times bringing them together—such as at a community STEM day or workforce roundtable hosted at your museum. Building a coordinated advocacy strategy that involves multiple

audiences ensures your message is heard through multiple channels and at multiple levels of government.

When considering audiences in an advocacy and policy context, this toolkit and most other sources will talk about the key individuals, the elected or appointed official (also sometimes referred to as the "principal"). These individuals rely heavily on their staff and often have key staff who work on specific policy issues or who are responsible for liaising with specific constituent groups or organizations. As an advocate, while it is always great to have a meeting or host a visit by the principal, it is also important to meet and build relationships with key staff members who will be responsible for implementing your ask for their office.

Audience	Why Engage Them?
Local elected officials (mayors, city council, county commissioners)	Control local funding and ordinances; influence community priorities; important allies for demonstrating local support
State/provincial legislators and agencies	Allocate funding for education, workforce, culture, and science; create state-wide policies affecting museums
National policymakers* (Congress, Parliament, ministries, agencies)	Set national budgets for science, education, and infrastructure; influence STEM and workforce policy
Government agencies and program staff	Implement grant programs and oversee regulations; key partners in programmatic work
Civic leaders and coalitions	Help align your advocacy with broader community goals; can amplify your voice
Corporate and philanthropic partners	Potential funders and advocates for your work; may have aligned policy interests
The general public and your visitors	Constituents whose voices elected officials listen to; potential grassroots advocates

*While most of this toolkit is aimed at the majority of ASTC members who are based in the United States, many of the core principles apply regardless of which government system you are operating in.

Outside resources:

- Stakeholder Mapping Tools (Community Toolbox)
- Strengthening Your Impact through Collaboration (Union of Concerned Scientists)

III. Tackling the Fundamentals

Even seasoned advocates benefit from a reminder of best practices. These core skills form the foundation of effective advocacy—helping you communicate clearly, build trust, and make a lasting impression on policymakers and their staff. Mastering these fundamentals will help you approach every advocacy opportunity—whether sending a quick email or leading a museum tour—with confidence and clarity.

Drafting Effective Advocacy Emails

Advocacy emails should be clear, concise, and actionable. Lawmakers and their staff often receive hundreds of messages daily, so getting to the point quickly is essential—as is getting a personal and customized email. In the same way that digital tools make it easy for large numbers of templated emails to be generated and sent to lawmakers, lawmakers are using these same tools to filter out clearly mass-generated emails—making your personal and direct email stand out all the more!

Advocacy Email Best Practices:

- **Start with who you are:** Include your name, your role and connection to the museum, as well as your connection to the lawmaker (e.g. you're a voting constituent, or your institution serves their voting constituents, or your partners also work with the policy area of the agency, etc.)
- **Be specific:** Name the funding program, legislation, or issue you are addressing.
- **Make it local:** Include an example of how the issue impacts your museum and community, and how that community overlaps with the priorities of the policymaker.
- **Ask for something concrete:** Request a vote, support for a funding level, or co-sponsorship.
- **Thank them:** Express appreciation for past support.

Sample Advocacy Email Structure:

1. **Greeting:** Address by name (Dear Senator Lopez, Dear Representative Chen).
2. **Introduction:** Identify yourself and your museum and your alignment with their interests.
3. **The Issue:** State the policy or funding matter.
4. **Local Impact:** Share a short impact story or statistic.
5. **The Ask:** Make a clear, specific request.
6. **Appreciation:** Thank them for their time and service.

How to Request and Make the Most Out of Meetings

Requesting an in-person meeting with a lawmaker, their staff, or an agency program official is one of the most effective ways to build relationships and convey your message. Face-to-face conversations allow you to share your story in a personal and compelling way, answer questions in real time, and demonstrate your credibility as a trusted local resource. These meetings also create opportunities to learn about the policymaker's or agency's priorities, helping you align your future advocacy and partnership efforts.

Requesting a Meeting:

- Email the scheduler in the policymaker's office (findable on their website).
- Be clear about who you are, what you want to discuss, and who will attend.
- Offer flexibility on timing and location.

Meeting Location:

- Capital Meetings (state or national): Tend to be shorter and more fast-paced—come prepared to make your points quickly.
- In-District Meetings: Often more relaxed, with more time for conversation. Great for building long-term relationships.

During the Meeting:

1. Start with introductions and find common ground (e.g. ask if they have a favorite museum to visit).
2. Share your main message and one or two stories of your institution's impact.
3. Make your ask clearly, and make sure it's an ask within the power and scope of the specific lawmaker who you are meeting with.
4. Leave behind a one-page handout that reiterates the ask and the impact it will create.
5. Ask how you can be a resource to them in the future (e.g. can you provide insights into what is happening in your community, or host an event for one of their priority projects).

After the Meeting:

- Send a thank-you email summarizing your conversation.
- Follow up on any promised materials or answers.

Preparing Talking Points for Calls and Meetings

Developing a set of focused talking points will help you get the most out of the engagement with your lawmaker or official or their staff, whether it is a quick call, an update meeting, or a conversation during an extended visit. Below are a set of basic elements and examples to include in your talking points.

- **Briefly introduce yourself and ask them introduce themselves.**
    - Even in short meetings or even shorter phone calls, remember that lawmakers and their staff may take a dozen meetings a day, so spending a few minutes up front getting to know them for the first time—or following up on some key element of a previous conversation—helps strengthen the relationship.
        - *Ex*: I am [name], the [role] at [science center] and we serve about [number] visitors from your district every year.
        - *Ex*: [How long have you been working in Congresswoman X's office? Have you been able to spend much time in the district?]
- **Lead with your main message.** Put your bottom-line up front and make sure they know right away why you asked for the meeting or phone call.
        - *Ex*: I know that you've visited our museum before, but did you know that we provide STEM learning to 120,000 students annually, and we couldn't do that work without the funding provided by the state's department of education.
- **Prepare 2–3 supporting points.** Use short, evidence-based statements, specific examples from your institution.
    - While it's very helpful to echo general messaging provided by national or statewide coalitions, the most important thing you can do is talk about the work of your institution—specifically, national advocacy organizations hear repeatedly from lawmakers repeatedly how much they value hearing specific examples of the impact of federal support in their local communities.
        - *Ex*: Museums are drivers of economic development (national message), and in our community alone, government funding directly or indirectly supports X jobs at our institution (specific example).
- **Include a personal story or fun anecdote.** Humanize the impact with a specific example or a fun memorable experience.
    - It may be useful to have a couple of different anecdotes prepared so that you can select an anecdote that aligns with what you learned about the lawmaker or staff person when they were introducing themselves.
- **Ask for more information about their priorities.**
    - Whenever possible, carve out enough time in your meeting or call to ask them about their priorities for related policy areas.
    - In some instances where you can craft a couple of talking points to ask about specific policy priorities, in other instances, you may want to simply ask broadly what their education or economic development policy priorities are

for the coming year(s). Let this be informed by research you've done on your lawmaker (their committee assignments, sponsored legislation, etc).
    - *Ex*: Knowing [you/your boss] sit on the education subcommittee, we'd love to hear about your top priorities for education in our state over the next year.
    - *Ex*: Are there any upcoming legislative efforts or agency initiatives in science, technology, or education where you see opportunities for partners like us to contribute?
- **Close with your ask.** State clearly what you want them to do.
    - Align the ask with the scope of authority of the lawmaker (e.g. an ask for agency funding is stronger for a legislator who sits on the appropriations committee that funds that agency) and is timely with the work they are doing (e.g. the bill is actively being worked on in the chamber).
    - Consider writing a couple of options of how to frame your ask so that you can frame your ask to directly address the priorities that they share.
    - Do not feel like you need to be a deep policy expert, you can often make the ask in a way that flatters their policy expertise.
        - *Ex*: Our museum benefits directly from grants provided by the National Science Foundation's Advancing Informal Science Learning (NSF AISL) Program, which is with the STEM Education Directorate, so you should support $1.2B in funding during the appropriations subcommittee markup next week.
        - *Ex*: One of the very real challenges our museum is facing is knowing that federal agencies are still reliable partners and that we can count of funding that has been awarded, so we are asking you to ensure that future appropriations bills contain legal prohibitions against agencies canceling grants unless there has been some violation of the terms.

Requesting and Hosting Visits

In *Section V. Leverage Your Strength*, this toolkit gets into additional detail about how ASTC members can leverage their facilities, programs, and core work to engage lawmakers, government officials, and advocacy partners.

This section describes the fundamentals of requesting and hosting a high-level visit from a lawmaker. This outline can be used as an internal guide for your staff on the meeting's proceedings, and can also be provided to offices who typically require key pieces of information answered ahead of a visit.

Requesting a Meeting/Tour

- Email the scheduler in the policymaker's office (findable on their website), as well as other relevant staff persons with whom you may have a relationship.

- Be clear about who you are, the purpose of your on-site invitation, and who will attend.
- Offer flexibility on timing and location.

Private Meeting/Tour/Event Overview

- Date & Time
- *Location*: Provide the museum's name, address, and any key exhibits or programs the elected official will interact with
- *Host*: Museum name and logo
- *Museum Primary Point of Contact*: Name, title, contact information

Purpose & Objectives

- Highlight the museum's role in and value to the community and share stories that illustrate the impact of federal funding investments
- Build or strengthen relationships with your elected official, further positioning your museum as a resource for constituents
- Articulate field wide key messages

Pre-Event Logistics

- Coordinate with congressional staff on date, security, access
- Prepare a customized briefing packet:
    - Museum mission + stats
    - Any leave behinds
    - Personal stories from staff, board members, and volunteers
- Develop talking points for staff and volunteers
- Confirm photography/media policy with congressional office – photos can be particularly valuable to both the museum and the official's office

Post-Event Follow-Up

- Send thank-you email with photos and quotes
- Tag office on social media (if appropriate)
- Debrief with your internal team for lessons learned
- Consider setting up follow-up meetings to discuss policy impact

IV. Engaging Partners

Why Partnerships Matter in Advocacy

In advocacy, your voice is stronger when it is part of a chorus. Policymakers are far more likely to act when they hear from a range of trusted community voices. For many science centers and museums—especially those operating locally or regionally—partnerships multiply your influence, helping your message carry farther and gain greater credibility.

Forming or joining advocacy partnerships allows your institution to:

- Speak as part of a broader community need, not just a single organization's request.
- Share the work of outreach, messaging, and follow-up across multiple institutions.
- Build deeper, long-term relationships with government leaders and civic organizations.
- Create lasting coalitions that can mobilize quickly when urgent needs arise.

There are two main types of advocacy partnerships your museum might consider:

Type of Partnership	Purpose	Example Activities
Mission-Aligned Coalitions	Partner with similar organizations (museums, cultural institutions, STEM educators) to advocate for shared goals.	City or state funding for museums, public investment in STEM education, cultural recovery funding.
Broader Civic Coalitions	Join cross-sector groups focused on larger community goals where your museum is a contributing voice.	Environmental sustainability, economic development, workforce pipelines, education equity.

Both types of coalitions expand your reach and deepen your institution's relationships across sectors.

Case Studies of Local and State Networks

Boston Cultural Consortium

A coalition of museums, performing arts organizations, and other cultural institutions working together to secure increased municipal and state funding for arts and culture. Beyond funding, they promote the cultural sector's contributions to education, tourism, and civic life.

Utah Informal Science Education Enhancement (iSEE)

The informal Science Education Enhancement (iSEE) is a collaboration among nonprofit informal science education organizations in Utah, including Clark Planetarium, Discovery Gateway Children's Museum, HawkWatch International, Loveland Living Planet Aquarium, Natural History Museum of Utah, Ogden Nature Center, Red Butte Garden and Arboretum, Thanksgiving Point, and Utah's Hogle Zoo. These groups have advocated to receive funding from the Utah State Legislature to provide science experiences to students and teachers across Utah who would otherwise not be available to them.

How to Start an Advocacy Coalition: A Practical Example

If your museum wants to advocate for, say, increased city funding for informal STEM learning, here's how you might start:

1. **Identify Likely Partners**
    - Reach out to other science centers, museums, afterschool programs, libraries, and STEM nonprofits who share your goals.
    - Example: You form a small group with two other museums, a local Boys & Girls Club with STEM programming, and a community college STEM department.
2. **Hold an Initial Meeting**
    - Share your goals and motivations.
    - Brainstorm shared interests and messaging.
    - Discuss what each organization can contribute to the effort.
3. **Define a Shared Goal**
    - Example: Secure $500,000 in the city budget to support free STEM programming for youth in underserved communities.
4. **Develop a Joint Advocacy Plan**
    - Identify key city councilmembers and other officials to meet.
    - Assign who will request meetings, prepare talking points, and gather stories of impact.
    - Plan for joint testimony at budget hearings.
5. **Take Action Together**
    - Hold joint meetings with elected officials.
    - Submit op-eds or letters to the editor.
    - Mobilize your combined audiences to contact councilmembers.
    - Celebrate Wins and Plan for What's Next If successful, celebrate publicly as a coalition. Even if your initial goal isn't fully met, reflect on lessons learned and plan future advocacy efforts together.

Growing Over Time

Small wins build trust among partners. What starts as a one-time effort can evolve into a standing coalition that advocates year after year—and potentially grows to include new partners, broader goals, and deeper relationships with government and civic leaders.

V. Leveraging Your Strengths

Your Institution as a Community Hub

Many science centers, museums, and other science engagement organizations already serve as trusted convening spaces, hosting: public forums and town halls; STEM career fairs; workforce development trainings; youth leadership programs; teacher professional development; science cafés and public dialogue events.

Your facility, your programs, and your role as a convener are among your strongest advocacy tools. By intentionally aligning your programming and partnerships with your advocacy priorities, you build relationships that position your museum as an essential partner in your community's policy and funding landscape.

Better Leveraging Existing Programs for Advocacy

Museums can turn existing programs into advocacy opportunities by:

- Inviting policymakers to attend or speak at public programs, workforce development trainings, or STEM career fairs, giving them first-hand experience with your impact.
- Engaging government agency officials and staff as speakers, panelists, or attendees to build relationships and align your work with their priorities.
- Including advocacy partners and coalition members in program planning and execution, reinforcing your role as a convener.

Example: If your museum hosts an annual Earth Day event, invite local and state environmental agency staff, city councilmembers, and climate-focused nonprofits as speakers or guests, creating an informal space for relationship-building around environmental issues.

Creating Programs Around Advocacy Priorities

You might also design new programs (or thematic series) to align with topics of interest to your targeted lawmakers or advocacy goals.

For example:

- If your state legislature is considering new STEM workforce legislation, organize a forum on building the STEM pipeline, inviting lawmakers, local employers, and educators to speak.
- If federal or state government is focusing on broadband access, host a community dialogue on digital equity, bringing together local agencies, tech companies, and impacted community members.

This approach allows your museum to demonstrate leadership on timely policy issues, creating platforms where stakeholders and lawmakers engage directly.

Offering Your Space Strategically

Your museum facility is an asset. Consider ways to offer your space to deepen partnerships and relationships, such as:

- Hosting coalition meetings or public events for free or at reduced cost to show support for their work.
- Allowing a lawmaker to host a nonpartisan event, like a town hall, in your space to build goodwill and increase their understanding of your mission.

Important Consideration

Any time your museum offers space for use by elected officials, it's important to:

- Ensure that the event is nonpartisan and open to the public or aligned with your educational mission.
- Avoid supporting campaign-related or partisan activities.
- Develop a clear policy governing space use by external groups and elected officials to comply with nonprofit regulations (such as U.S. 501(c)(3) rules).

Integrating Advocacy into Program and Exhibit Planning

Advocacy can be woven into your museum's programmatic choices:

- Select topics for temporary exhibits or program series that align with timely policy conversations and advocacy goals.
- Use these projects as platforms to invite new partners into your work, creating deeper ties with industry, government, and academia.

For example, if your museum is developing a temporary exhibit on Artificial Intelligence, you could:

- Invite local AI companies, university researchers, and workforce development agencies to serve as exhibit advisors.
- Partner with these groups to develop public programs and panel discussions.
- Align with state-level conversations about AI workforce training and economic development, positioning your museum as a partner in those discussions.

These collaborations create new relationships that can be activated in advocacy efforts, whether for state funding for STEM workforce programs or broader community initiatives.

VI. Engaging Your Board of Directors in Advocacy

Boards as Amplifiers of Your Advocacy Voice

Your Board of Directors represents some of the most influential voices connected to your institution. Board members often hold leadership roles in business, education, philanthropy, and the civic sector. Their support alone—whether visible or behind the scenes—can carry significant weight with policymakers and partners.

Importantly, Board members do not need to personally lobby legislators to support your advocacy work. There are many ways they can contribute to your institution's public leadership and help advance your advocacy goals, often through their existing community and professional networks.

Ways Board Members Can Support Advocacy—Without Lobbying

Even if they are not directly involved in legislative visits or testimony, Board members can:

- **Mention their board role** when engaging with policymakers, business leaders, and civic groups, helping raise awareness of your museum's value in the community.
    - Example: At a Chamber of Commerce event, a Board member might introduce themselves as a "Vice President at XYZ Corporation and a proud board member of the Science Center," subtly reinforcing the museum's credibility.
- **Attend museum-hosted events** with policymakers, lending visibility and credibility to your institution's work.
- **Help identify and cultivate advocacy partners**, such as corporate leaders, civic groups, or other nonprofits that could join your museum's advocacy efforts.

- **Provide strategic advice** on advocacy plans, based on their own business or community experience.
- **Ensure the board allocates sufficient time and resources** for the museum's advocacy work, including staff capacity and travel to advocacy events.

Aligning the Museum's Advocacy with Board Members' Own Interests

Many Board members, particularly those from the business or academic sectors, are already involved in advocacy for their own industries or communities. Often, these interests overlap with the museum's goals. With a little coordination, both objectives can be advanced together.

For example:

- A Board member whose company is advocating for strong STEM workforce policies may support state or federal funding for job training programs, STEM education, or internships. These programs often align with funding streams that could support your museum's STEM learning programs or workforce development partnerships.
- A Board member leading a sustainability initiative may already be engaging with government officials on climate resilience. The museum's environmental education programs and sustainability-focused exhibits could be a natural platform for collaboration.

Encourage Board members to look for win-win opportunities, where their professional or civic interests and the museum's mission intersect.

Managing Hesitant Board Members

Some Board members may worry that advocacy is political or risky. It's important to:

- Clarify the difference between nonpartisan advocacy and political campaigning. Advocacy for science, education, and community well-being is entirely appropriate for nonprofits.
- Provide clear guidance on what is allowed under nonprofit rules and your organization's policies.
- Offer easy, low-pressure ways to participate, such as attending an event or sharing a story about the museum's impact.

Over time, your board can become a powerful network of advocates, whether through their personal engagement or their behind-the-scenes leadership.

Outside Resource:

- BoardSource Advocacy and Ambassadorship Publications

VII. Engaging Your Staff in Advocacy

Advocacy as Part of the Museum's Mission-Driven Work

Staff members at all levels—from educators to exhibit designers to guest services—are some of your institution's best messengers. They see firsthand the impact your museum has on learners, families, educators, and community partners.

However, for many museum professionals, advocacy may feel outside their job description or comfort zone. That's why it's important to cultivate an organizational culture where advocacy is viewed as a natural extension of your mission to serve your community, advance STEM learning, and foster civic engagement.

- If your museum's mission is to inspire scientific curiosity, then advocating for public investment in science education is part of that mission.
- If your work helps build the future STEM workforce, then advocating for workforce development policies aligns directly with your institutional goals.
- If your museum is committed to equity and access, then advocating for policies that reduce barriers to education and opportunity is mission-driven work.

Building a Culture of Advocacy

To help advocacy feel natural and empowering for staff:

- **Talk about advocacy** in staff meetings and orientations. Make it clear that this is not separate from your mission, but part of it.
- **Celebrate advocacy successes**—whether attending an event, influencing a policy change, or hosting a successful legislator visit—as part of your institutional achievements.
- **Provide basic training and talking points** so staff feel equipped to describe your impact in conversations with the public, funders, and policymakers.
- **Encourage staff to share stories of impact** that they experience in their day-to-day work—these can be powerful parts of your advocacy messaging.

Ways Staff Can Participate in Advocacy

Staff can engage in advocacy in a variety of ways, depending on their roles and interests.

Role or Activity	Advocacy Contribution
Educators	Share stories of student engagement with policymakers or visitors.
Development staff	Communicate how public funding supports your impact in grant proposals and donor updates.
Communications staff	Amplify advocacy messages on social media and newsletters.
Guest services	Welcome elected officials and help create positive visitor experiences that demonstrate your public value.
Exhibits and programs	Help frame your content in ways that align with community and policy priorities (e.g., STEM workforce, climate resilience).
Leadership team	Develop strategy and relationships with advocacy partners and coalitions.

Staff do not need to lobby legislators—but they should feel empowered to share the story of your impact, recognize how public policies affect your work, and participate in creating a strong, community-serving institution.

Creating Opportunities for Staff Engagement

Practical ways to involve staff include:

- Collecting impact stories and program outcomes that can be shared with policymakers.
- Offering feedback on policy issues that affect their programs or audiences.
- Helping prepare for a legislator visit or public event at your museum.
- Serving as spokespersons (if comfortable) for local media or public meetings about your institution's role in the community.
- Participating in Museums Advocacy Day or state-level advocacy events.

A strong advocacy culture doesn't rest solely on the shoulders of your leadership or government relations team. When advocacy is embraced as a shared responsibility in service of your mission, your institution's voice becomes stronger, more authentic, and more sustainable.

VIII. Engaging Your Community in Advocacy

Your Community as Your Most Authentic Advocates

The people who visit your science center, participate in your programs, and benefit from your work are your most compelling advocates.

- Lawmakers want to hear directly from their constituents.
- Stories from families, teachers, and students carry powerful emotional and community resonance.
- A thriving visitor community shows elected officials that your museum is not only relevant but essential to the community's well-being.

Your museum can provide your community with simple, meaningful opportunities to advocate for the public resources that make your work possible.

Helping Visitors See the Role of Government in Your Work

One powerful way to involve your community in advocacy is to help them understand the role that public funding, and other government support, plays in enabling your work. Many visitors do not realize that federal, state, and local government agencies often support:

- Exhibits and capital improvements (e.g., NSF, NEH, state or city capital funds)
- STEM education programs for youth and educators (e.g., NASA, Department of Education)
- Accessibility initiatives (e.g., IMLS, local government accessibility grants)
- Environmental and climate programs (e.g., NOAA, EPA, state energy offices)
- Workforce development training (e.g., Department of Labor, state economic development agencies)

You can:

- Include more prominent signage in exhibits or messages programs funded by government grants.
- Thank government partners publicly in brochures, websites, and event remarks.
- Host "behind-the-scenes" tours for visitors that showcase how public funding enables your impact.

Encouraging Visitors to Thank Lawmakers

Help your visitors and participants become advocates by encouraging them to:

- Thank their elected officials for supporting public funding for science, education, and museums.
    - Example: A family who attended your free STEM summer camp could be encouraged to send a thank-you note to the state legislator whose advocacy helped secure funding for the program.
- Send a thank-you postcard or email on-site or from home.
    - You can provide templates or simple tools like QR codes linking to action forms.

These simple expressions of gratitude help reinforce to lawmakers that their investments matter to real people in their districts or states.

Ongoing Community Advocacy Activities

Beyond thank-you efforts, your community can be engaged in other simple advocacy actions, such as:

- Signing a petition or open letter supporting continued investment in informal STEM learning.
- Participating in a STEM Day at the Capitol event coordinated by your museum or partners.
- Sharing personal testimonials that you can use in advocacy materials.

Frame these opportunities as ways for your visitors to help sustain the museum they love and ensure that future generations have the same access to learning and inspiration. Advocacy is most powerful when it is personal. Your community members' voices remind policymakers why science centers and museums matter—not as abstract institutions, but as life-changing community resources.

IX. Three Advocacy Actions to Take Every Year

This toolkit covers a range of long-term strategies to integrate advocacy into your organizational culture, working with partners and advocating for aligned community priorities, and strengthening your organization's approach to broad civic engagement. However, the fundamentals of advocacy do not need to be complicated or time-consuming. The most effective advocacy strategies are consistent, authentic, and built into the rhythm of your organization's calendar.

By taking just **three key advocacy actions each year**, your institution can stay visible, build relationships, and reinforce the importance of public support for your work—and will set you up to build on these core actions over time.

1. Contact Lawmakers Supporting Annual Funding

Every year, city councils, state legislatures, and Congress make decisions about funding programs that support your museum's work.

Make it a regular practice to:

- **Send emails or make brief calls** to your local, state, and federal lawmakers voicing support for public funding streams that benefit your institution and your community.
- Include **specific examples** of how that funding enables access, learning, and innovation at your museum.
- Encourage your board members and community partners to do the same.

Tip: National and state associations (like ASTC and your state nonprofit, arts, or STEM coalitions) often provide annual talking points or sample messages. Use these to ensure you're aligned with current funding priorities and legislative timelines. (See links at the beginning of the toolkit).

2. Meet with Lawmakers to Share Your Impact

At least once a year, schedule a brief meeting with your local, state, or federal legislators or their staff to:

- Thank them for past support.
- Share a story of how public funding has made a difference.
- Ask for their continued support in the upcoming budget cycle.

You can:

- Join a **statewide or national advocacy day**, like Museums Advocacy Day in Washington, D.C. or a museum or education state capitol day.
- Meet with legislators while they're in-district during recess.
- Pair your visit with a program, exhibit opening, or public forum you're already hosting.

The goal is to be **seen as a trusted, local expert** on science, learning, and public impact—and to keep the relationship active.

3. Invite Lawmakers to Visit Your Museum

Nothing is more powerful than helping policymakers **see your impact firsthand.**

Make it an annual priority to:

- Invite lawmakers to **visit your museum or science center**, meet program participants, and tour exhibits.
- Ask them to **speak at an event**, attend a ribbon-cutting or celebration, or participate in a public dialogue.
- Highlight the ways their support enables the work they are seeing—whether it's summer camps, school visits, teacher training, or public exhibitions.

These visits:

- Deepen your relationships with decision-makers.
- Build awareness of your museum's leadership and relevance.
- Create opportunities for future collaboration and support.

Key Takeaway

Advocacy is most effective when it's part of your **annual cycle of engagement.** These three actions—writing, meeting, and inviting—help ensure that policymakers know who you are, understand what you do, and recognize why your work deserves their continued support.