

How to Advocate to Your Lawmaker

WORKSHEET FOR DEVELOPING A COMPELLING MESSAGE

CHOOSE A STORY YOU'D LIKE TO SHARE

You'll want to share a story—your own, or the story of a friend, family member, neighbor, group, client, or of something that's happening in the community. To generate ideas, reflect on these questions:

- What's your reason for getting involved in advocacy?
- How does the lawmaker's work impact you or people you care about?
- How does homelessness impact specific populations?

INCORPORATE THAT STORY INTO A CLEAR AND CONCISE MESSAGE

The story you choose to share is only one element of your overall message. You'll also want to tap into the lawmaker's own values, ask them for something specific, and make sure they have the information they need. But you need to do this concisely. The template below can be helpful. Use it to structure your message, but of course use your own words and speak in a way that feels natural for you.

Hello, my name is _____ and I'm from _____.

I am here to talk to you about _____ [issue you're concerned about].

Knowing of your interest in _____ [policy issue of interest to the lawmaker] we think you'll be interested.

This is important to [me / us] because _____ [personal story].

That's why we really hope you'll _____ [ask].

I'd like to follow-up by _____ [follow-up steps].

Can I get contact information for all the appropriate people in your office?

Thank you so much for your time!

REFINE YOUR MESSAGE

As you refine your message, make sure it has four key characteristics, which you can think of as **TIPS**.

- **Timely:** Ask your lawmaker for something they can do in the short term (not after the opportunity has passed or too far in advance of the time when they can take action).
- **Informative:** Back up your story with supporting information, such as:
 - » Number of people in your community experiencing homelessness
 - » Increases or decreases in the homeless population
 - » Specifics about your program (If you represent an organization)
- **Personal:** Make sure you're sharing a story about the impacts of homelessness on real people—yourself or someone else.
- **Specific:** Be as specific as possible about what the policymaker can do. For example, “we would like you to cosponsor a bill” or “we would like you to visit our shelter” is better than “please do something about homelessness.”

EXAMPLE

Here's an example:

I'm here to talk with you today about increased funding for the Tenant Based Rental Assistance Account (**Specific**). Let me tell you about one of our clients, Sally, who's 17 years old. Her mom worked two jobs but was still unable to pay rent, and she and Sally wound up in one of our family shelters. Because of the upheaval, Sally began to struggle in school. She had been an A student, but her grades plummeted. Her counselors were concerned because Sally had been a strong candidate for a scholarship (**Personal**). We were able to provide Sally's mom with a housing choice voucher, and we helped her locate an apartment (**Informative**). Now Sally is thriving again. She's back on track to graduate in May and will be going on to college shortly after that. We wouldn't have been able to offer Sally's mom that voucher without the support from the Tenant Based Rental Assistance Account (**Timely**).

PRACTICE

Once you have a draft of your message, practice it a few times by delivering it to a friend, in the mirror, or by recording yourself on your phone or computer. This can feel awkward, but it's important so that you can work the kinks out prior to your meeting with your lawmaker.