

# The Advocate's Guide To Effective Policy Change



**Together, we can be effective voice for Oklahoma's children and our future.**



**INSTITUTE  
FOR CHILD  
ADVOCACY**

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# Advocacy 101: Your Voice Matters!

## WHY IS ADVOCACY? IMPORTANT?

Democracy is something we cannot take for granted. Our state, our communities and our families are likely to thrive when we participate in the democratic process. By showing up on Election Day to vote or participating in legislative advocacy, our involvement in the democratic process is critical to creating a better future in Oklahoma.

Showing up on Election Day to mark your ballot for the candidate of your choice and voting on critical state ballot initiatives is the first step to ensuring that your voice

matters. However, it doesn't stop at the ballot box; it's not enough to simply send elected officials to the Capitol through the voting process. We must do our part to develop relationships with our elected officials and maintain a constant line of communication with those who cast votes on our behalf.

For more than three decades, the Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy has been and will continue to be dedicated to helping citizens be voices for Oklahoma's future. The best way to do this is by educating more Oklahomans about the fundamentals and importance of advocacy. We want people to know advocacy doesn't have to be a complex or intimidating process. In fact, advocacy doesn't have to be complicated at all. Advocacy can be as simple as picking up the phone to call an elected official or writing a letter to the editor of a local newspaper to create awareness around an issue that is close to your heart.

We know how hectic life can be for Oklahoma families and how difficult it can be to find time in the day to make your voice heard. When you're spending most of the hours each day working, raising a family, taking care of sick or elderly loved ones or any number of life's responsibilities, advocacy may not seem quite as simple or important and indeed can feel quite impossible.

Unfortunately, if we don't exercise our right to vote and become civically engaged, we often times find ourselves a little less better off than if we make our voices heard. This is why advocacy is so important and why, through this resource guide, we've developed the most effective and efficient tools to ensure our collective efforts are creating strong voices for Oklahoma's future.

The first step to being an effective advocate is understanding how the political system works in Oklahoma, including how bills are considered, the general timeline and flow of the legislative calendar and who the chief decision-makers are in the legislative process. Having a familiarity with the rules and procedures of the legislative process - where to find important information about the legislative session, how to find your elected officials and, most importantly, how to interact with them efficiently - is also helpful.

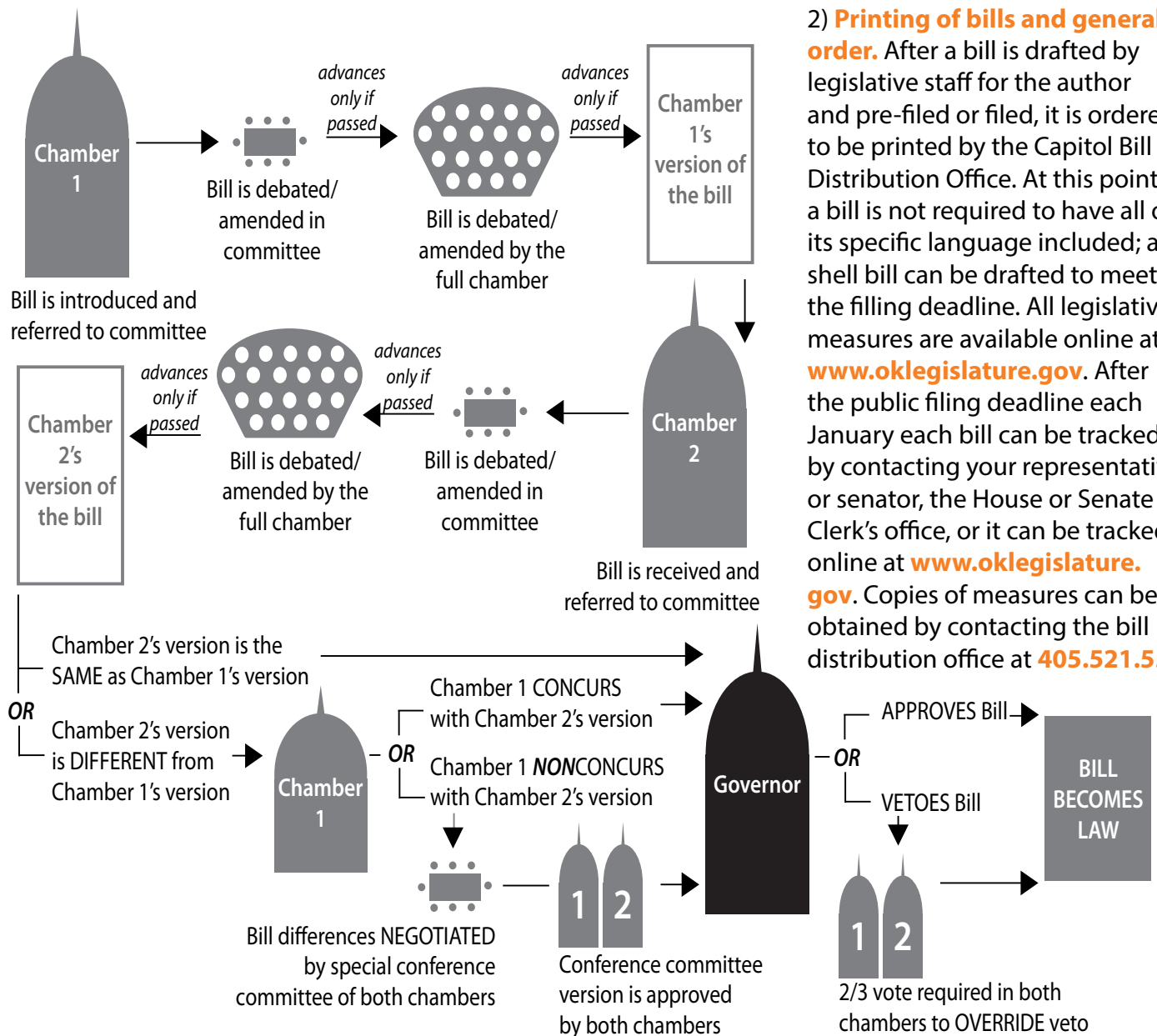
# Oklahoma Legislative Process: How a Bill Becomes Law

There are eight basic steps through which a bill normally passes before it becomes a law in Oklahoma. As follows:

## Prior to the Opening of the Legislative Session

1) **Drafting and bill introduction.** Only individual legislators can introduce a bill or resolution. A citizen may give suggestions or proposals to legislator for a bill introduction or amendment. It is up to the citizen to find a legislative bill author, in either the House or Senate and it is at the discretion of an individual legislator to accept responsibility to sponsor (sign) a particular bill.

2) **Printing of bills and general order.** After a bill is drafted by legislative staff for the author and pre-filed or filed, it is ordered to be printed by the Capitol Bill Distribution Office. At this point a bill is not required to have all of its specific language included; a shell bill can be drafted to meet the filing deadline. All legislative measures are available online at [www.oklegislature.gov](http://www.oklegislature.gov). After the public filing deadline each January each bill can be tracked by contacting your representative or senator, the House or Senate Clerk's office, or it can be tracked online at [www.oklegislature.gov](http://www.oklegislature.gov). Copies of measures can be obtained by contacting the bill distribution office at **405.521.5514**



## During Session

3) **Reading and reference of bills.** The introduction of a bill is its formal presentation in its chamber of origin - either the House of Representatives (House) or Senate. The bill's first reading occurs on the same day it was filed. The next legislative day constitutes the second reading where the bill is assigned to a standing committee for consideration. Very rarely, the committee consideration is skipped and sent directly to the calendar. This requires a move of suspension from the rules.

4) **Consideration by standing committee.** The committee meets, holds hearings, discusses the bill and formulates recommendations. At this point the committee either decides to not take action on a bill, not pass it or pass it with or without changes. The bills passed are then scheduled on the calendar for floor consideration. Committee hearings are a great time for citizen input. All meetings are open to the public. Check the Legislative website for meeting notices and membership or sign up for our action alerts at [oica.org](http://oica.org) for kid and family related bills.

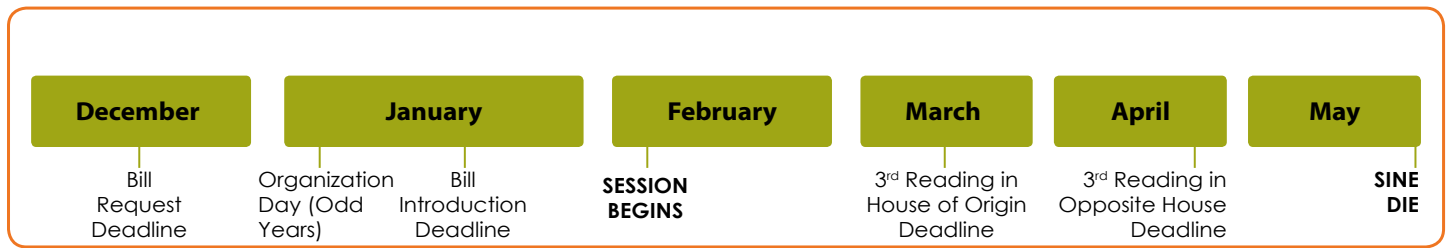
5) **Final action.** If recommended for passage by the Standing Committee, the bill is placed on the calendar under the heading of third reading. Once it is scheduled for a floor hearing in the full chamber, legislators at this time can be recognized for debate in favor of or against the bill. Finally, a roll call vote is taken to determine if the chamber will pass the bill, which must receive 51 or more House votes or 25 or more Senate votes.

6) **Action by the second chamber.** Having passed the first chamber (chamber of origin), the bill is sent to the second chamber where the same procedure as before is followed. If the second chamber passes the bill without amendment, it is "enrolled" (i.e., printed in its final form for consideration by the governor). If the second chamber amends the bill and the first chamber concurs (agrees to accept the amendments), the bill also is considered finally passed. If the first chamber disagrees with the amendments, a conference committee is appointed to work out an agreement. When both chambers have approved the report of the conference committee by a majority of all members on a floor vote, the bill is considered finally passed.

7) **Action by the governor.** The governor has ten days after receipt of the bill to act on it. If the governor does not sign a bill within five days (excluding Sunday) from receipt, the bill automatically becomes law. The legislature must be in session for this to occur. The governor approves most bills passed by the legislature. However, the governor may veto a bill by refusing to sign it and returning it to its chamber of origin with objections. Here the Legislature has an opportunity to override the veto. In appropriation (funding) bills only, the governor may veto some of the items and approve the others by signing the bill. This is a line-item veto. The legislature may override a veto by a two-thirds vote of both chambers, until the final adjournment (sine die) of the legislative session. If the bill is received in the final days of the legislative session, the governor may also pocket veto a bill by keeping it fifteen days after the Legislature has adjourned without taking official action. With this approach, the Legislature does not have an opportunity to override the veto.

8) **Publication of laws.** An act of the legislature is not in force until the enacting bill has been published so that the public has proper notice that it is law. Publication notice occurs in the session laws no less than 90 days after adjournment of the session in which it was passed, unless an emergency clause is attached and passed with the bill. In this event, the bills become effective immediately after passage and approval. The legislature and secretary of state publish the bills. The bills can be accessed through a search on [www.oklegislature.gov](http://www.oklegislature.gov) or [www.sos.ok.gov](http://www.sos.ok.gov). Copies of bills and legislation may be obtained through contacting the Capitol Bill Distribution Office.

This timeline provides the general dates each year for crucial deadlines in the legislative process



You can always count on the bill request deadline falling somewhere in the middle of December, session to begin the first Monday of February and end (Sine Die) by 5 p.m. the last Friday of May.

For specific deadlines each session, look to the calendar on the House or Senate website: [okhouse.gov](http://okhouse.gov) or [oroksenate.gov](http://oroksenate.gov). If you sign up for the Institute's legislative action alerts, you will conveniently find those dates in your email inbox each time they are approaching. To sign up, go to our website at [oica.org](http://oica.org).

Once you have the dates, have a general understanding of the legislative process and know where to find help along the way, you can plan out your issue campaign. Our *5 Practical Advocacy Tools* will help you create awareness around your issue and mobilize other fellow grassroots advocates to move an issue from idea into law. The *5 Practical Advocacy Tools* are proven tools used by the Institute and our partners to be effective voices for Oklahoma's future - will make it easier than ever for you to advocate for issues about which you are passionate.



# 5 Practical Advocacy Tools

## PRACTICAL ADVOCACY TOOLS

### 1 Prepare a Good Fact Sheet

Fact sheets introduce on issues in a format useful to busy people. Good fact sheets recognize busy people (like elected officials) need something short and punch to grab their attention. A good fact sheet says, "Read me! I'm a painless way to get acquainted with an issue."

Anything long and complicated may be ignored and counterproductive.

**Keep it short, accurate and interesting!**

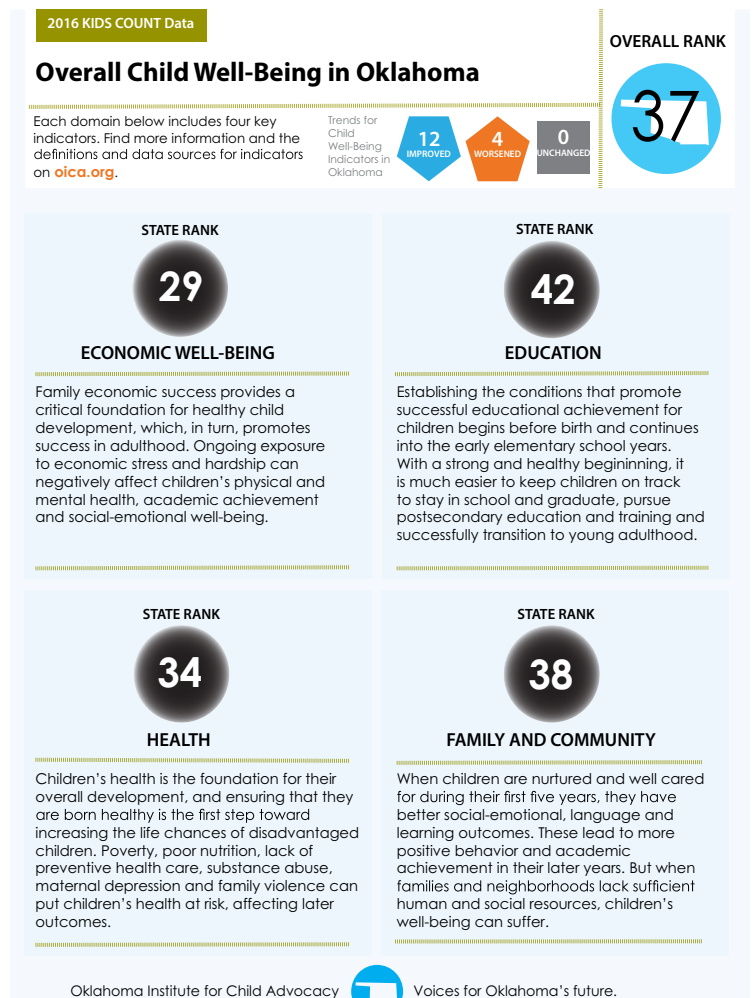
#### The purpose of a fact sheet:

- Present the facts: key statistics, figures or comparisons.
- Identify a group with a particular issue
- Provide answers to common questions about the issues (Fact sheets are often found in a Q & A format.)
- Show information using graphs, charts, or pictures
- Inform, persuade or educate
- Make an argument for a particular policy

#### A good fact sheet:

- Is only one to two pages long
- Doesn't use long sentences or wordy paragraphs
- Is easy to read, with sub-heads, bullet points and graphics
- Includes only the most compelling, useful statistics and does not exaggerate
- Has a specific call to action (Be clear about what you want readers to do.)
- Includes contact information of the organizing group

For more information about Oklahoma KIDS COUNT Data visit: [datacenter.kidscount.org/OK](http://datacenter.kidscount.org/OK)





## 2 Utilize Social Media

A tweet with the right hashtag; a Facebook event page, status change or well-promoted update; or a blog discussion can generate a virtual “buzz” that manifests itself into true momentum for your issue. If you are not using social media to promote your cause, it’s time to start.

### Good news about social media:

- It’s FREE!
- Ease and accessibility for everyone - mobile devices, Wi-Fi, etc.
- Speed in creating awareness - quick check online gets attention
- Connections and reach of the posts - broad scale for target audiences



### Challenges of social media:

Social media are often misused because many advocates are unaware of how to *efficiently* and *effectively* get a simplified but powerful message out to the public!

### Tips for better results:

- Know who to follow and how to get followed.
- Make your posts relevant and concise.
- Properly use mentions, Twitter handles of others and hashtags for specific buzz.
- Be sure your social media posts are engaging followers in conversation. Ask them specific questions or prompt them to post pictures. It’s not just about your number of likes or followers, but that people are involved in your social media discussions.
- Remember, practice makes perfect. Just maintain a constant social media presence and you’ll get better at it each day.

### Find the Institute and current initiatives on Facebook:

Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy

### You can also find the Institute and its initiatives on Twitter:

Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy - @OklaChildAdv (Ex. of conversational hashtag we use: #OKFuture)

**We are constantly hosting conversations, events and creating posts that engage our social media networks to amplify our voices for Oklahoma’s future.**

## Write a Letter to the Editor or Submit a Guest Commentary

Every Oklahoma newspaper publishes letters to the editor. While we know only a small percentage of newspaper readers scan the Editorial page, 100 percent of your community's decision-makers read every editorial, guest column and letter to the editor.

### Key Tips for Successful Letters to the Editor and Guest Commentary

- Use e-mail. E-mailing your letter enhances the likelihood of publication and reduces the chances your letter will be incorrectly transcribed. Always include your name, address and day phone number.
- Refer to a recent news article or editorial in the first sentence of your letter. Ex.: "Your coverage of the critical need for DHS reform (December 15) is welcomed." Using this opener gives the letter a point of reference and provides relevance to the timeliness of your opinion.
- Keep your letter concise: 4-5 paragraphs, 2-3 sentences each. If it's too long, it will either be rejected outright or could be edited. (A rule of thumb is less than 250 words)
- Do not take shots at political leaders by name.
- Give readers a chance to understand your stake in the issues without getting too personal. It's proper to write, "As a parent, I'm concerned..." Or, "With all we've learned about the importance of quality early child care, I believe that..." is fine, but "I'm angered at the idiocy of politicians who are intent on..." is not. Do not hurt your case by seeming shrill or even on edge.
- Never miss a chance to say "Thank You" to a business leader, civic volunteer or political official who has provided extraordinary service. Giving gratitude publicly is always well-received, as long as it is merited and documented.
- If your letter does not appear within a week of submittal, send a polite and brief e-mail asking whether it is being considered. Major papers receive many more letters than they have space to publish. Simply try again.
- If you have more to say than a letter permits, you may consider submitting a guest column. Call the editorial page editor and ask for the paper's specifications (re: length limitations and best timing for submittal). You may e-mail a photo as well, if requested. Make sure the photo is a current, clear and well-composed headshot.



# SAMPLE LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Newspaper Editor Name  
Newspaper Name  
Date of the Letter

Dear Editor

As a parent and advocate for a more safe and healthy (name of town, Oklahoma), I'm writing to publicly ask the school board to support keeping the lights on and their doors open after hours for use by the community for recreational purposes.

Schools have long been viewed as the heart and soul of most every community and this community is no exception. Having grown up here, I remember when schools were the places where moms and dads gathered at night to watch their children's basketball or softball practices. It's where friends gathered for Girl Scouts and where my grandparents walked around the track for their recommended daily exercise. It's where my friends and I came to play on the playground, keeping us safe and out of harm's way.

Sadly, schools have been forced to close their doors in recent years for fear that costly lawsuits will further drain their already weakened budgets. Thankfully, The Shared Use Project, removes liability concerns and allows for partnerships to begin between schools and community groups so they can share the costs for keeping schools open and central to the health and vibrancy of the community.

Schools add value to every community and shared use agreements allow schools to show that value in a powerful way. Shared use agreements have the ability to truly make a difference in the safety and well-being of all our citizens and our towns for generations to come. It's time our schools say "Yes!" to keeping their lights on and doors open.

Regards,

*Your Name*

## 4 Make a Phone Call

You can call elected officials at their office or contact them at home. They represent you and should be easily accessible to you. Lists of local elected officials, including school board members, city council members, state legislators and statewide elected officials, can be found by contacting your local chambers of commerce or on these government websites:

**Schools Board Members:** Oklahoma School Board Association // [ossba.org](http://ossba.org)

**City Councilors:** Oklahoma Municipal League // [okml.webs.com](http://okml.webs.com)

**State Legislators:** Oklahoma Legislature // [oklegislature.gov/findmylegislature.aspx](http://oklegislature.gov/findmylegislature.aspx)

**Statewide Elected Officials:** OK.GOV // [ok.gov](http://ok.gov)

### Tips for Calling Your Elected Official:

- Identify the issue you wish to talk about by name.
- Briefly state your position and how you would like your elected official to vote.
- Ask for your elected official's stance on the issue.
- Don't argue if the elected official has an opposing view or hasn't yet decided.
- If you don't know the answer to a question, do not guess. Simply say you don't know, but that you will find out and get back with her/him with the information.
- If elected officials or their staff need more information, supply it as quickly as possible.
- **Never be abusive or use threats.**
- Follow up your call with a note restating your position and thanking them for their time.

\*Elected officials are often away from the office, so you may end up talking with a staff person instead. That's great! Use the same basic rules. Staff members are reliable and will pass along your message.

### Tips for Using Voicemail:

- State your name and address.
- Identify the specific issue you are calling about.
- Briefly state your position - either support, opposition or some combination.
- Keep the message simple.



**EXAMPLE: "Hello, this is Jane Smith at 123 Main Street in Oklahoma City. I'm calling to let you know I fully support SB XXXX, which would, therefore creating a better community here and a better future for our state."**

## 5 Go Visit Your Elected Official

Personal visits are a highly effective way to help elected officials understand your position on an issue. Elected officials welcome visits from constituents. They want you to be involved. However, they are busy people so time is extremely valuable. Plan ahead and use the time well. If you make an appointment, remember there is no guarantee the elected official will be able to keep it. Their schedules can change at a moment's notice. Don't take it personally - that's just how it is.

### Before the Meeting:

- Make an appointment in advance and expect to get about 15 minutes.
- Make it easy for your elected official to meet with you. Offer several possibilities and do your best to accommodate them.
- Prepare a good fact sheet (refer to Advocacy Tool #1).
- Try to learn in advance where your elected official stands on your issue. They may have their own websites, Facebook pages or Twitter profiles.
- Be prepared to explain how the issue will affect you and other voters in their district.
- Dress for the appointment. Normal business attire is appropriate.



### During the Meeting:

- Be on time.
  - Be prepared, polite and brief.
  - Start with your 90-second speech.
  - Give the elected official your fact sheet.
  - Be firm but friendly. Don't be afraid to ask for a commitment to support your bill.
  - Attack the issue, not the person. Remember - you may be asking for her/his support on a completely different issue in the future.
  - Don't disparage government or politics.
  - Don't use jargon, technical terms or acronyms.
- Don't underestimate public officials. With very rare exceptions, they are honest, intelligent and good-hearted people.
  - Before leaving, ask how you can be of help to them. (Can you get them more information? Talk to others?)
  - Thank them for their time, even if they will not support your cause.

### After the Meeting:

Follow up with a thank you note and any information that was requested.

# Additional Tools

## CRUCIAL 90-SECOND SPEECH

### The Crucial 90-Second Speech

Memorize a quick speech before your meeting. It's not only handy for talking to elected officials, but it will also serve you well when explaining your issue to media persons, fellow advocates, or anyone really.

### Your Speech should include

- Who you are and any group or coalition to which you belong.
- The topic you came to discuss.
- What you want them to do.
- A reference the fact sheet you have brought along. Your fact sheet is crucial. If your meeting gets interrupted, you'll still get your point across and the elected official will know how to find you or your group if they have further questions. If not, you can elaborate your points in your fact sheet.

### Example

"Hi, I'm Mary Jones. I'm a parent at Wilson Elementary, which serves more than 5,000 children each year. I'd like to talk to you about Senate Bill 1882/Shared Use and why keeping schools open as centers for recreation and physical activity helps add value to the community, keeps our kids and families safe and creates a healthier Oklahoma. I'm hoping you'll help me with The Shared Use Project here in \_\_\_\_\_, Oklahoma. When parents are more engaged at school and have strong ties to the school, children's grades improve as does their behavior. We also know schools truly add value to the community. Taxpayers believe schools should be open to the community who supports and pays for them. Oklahoma has room for improvement when it comes to our health. We rank 48th in overall health. One in three of our children is either overweight or obese. Furthermore, we rank nearly dead last in the amount of physical activity we get on a daily basis. Schools play a vital role in helping shape the health of the community and the health of our children. Keeping the lights on and doors open at Oklahoma schools through more shared use agreements with community groups will shape a healthier and safer Oklahoma. Can I count on you for your support?"

**It's simple: Say what you mean and mean what you say.  
And, of course, keep it short and simple.**

# BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

You may find yourself in a position which needs an interview from a reporter regarding the issue. Here are some tips for a successful interview.

- Develop a **sound bite** - take home message that is short, sweet and to the saying your sound bite so you feel comfortable using it in conversation.
- Develop **2-3 key points** to discuss about the topic.
- Come up with or decide on a catchy, relevant slogan, as they are often included in the interview segment. (Ex.: The Child Care Tax Credit helps parents find quality child care for their young children while they further their education and/or go to work, helping create a better economy and a better future for Oklahoma.)
- Think of key questions and be prepared with responses.
- Participate in a **mock interview** for practice.

# DURING THE INTERVIEW

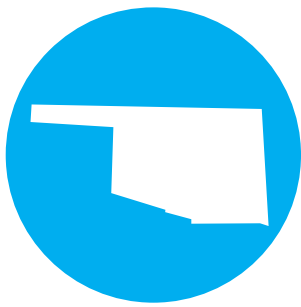
- Keep the interview **conversational**.
- Make **eye contact** with the reporter or interviewer. For televised interviews, do not look at the camera.
- Always give **honest answers**. If you don't know with the reporter. Do not fabricate an answer.
- Communicate your **main message** within the first 30 seconds of an interview, if possible.
- **Stay on topic**. Do not allow yourself to go on a tangent, regardless of what question is asked. Always find a way to bring your answer back

to the main point.

- **Avoid jargon** and the use of extensive statistics in your answer.
- Always have a "**last line**" ready in case they ask if you have anything to add.
- Keep going, even if you fumble your words. Do most likely, the audience won't even notice.
- Be an **active listener**. You'll be more able to stay engaged in the interview.
- When providing a website or phone number, give the information twice...**s-l-o-w-l-y**.
- Beware of the uhms, uh-huhs and nervous laughter. They will distract the audience.
- In radio, be sure to vocalize yourself. Head nods and facial expressions cannot be heard.

# OTHER KEY POINTS

- **Be early** to your interview.
- Talk in brief, complete thoughts while using terms that are easily understood by all.
- Dress for success!
- **Be confident!** Remember, you are the expert.
- Anything you say can be used . There is never an "off-the-record" moment.
- **Be enthusiastic!** Show your genuine passion for the topic.
- Keep it local. People care more about what's happening where they are.



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