

# Inform & Influence

ADVOCATING FOR SERVICE-LEARNING

## A Step-by-Step Guide

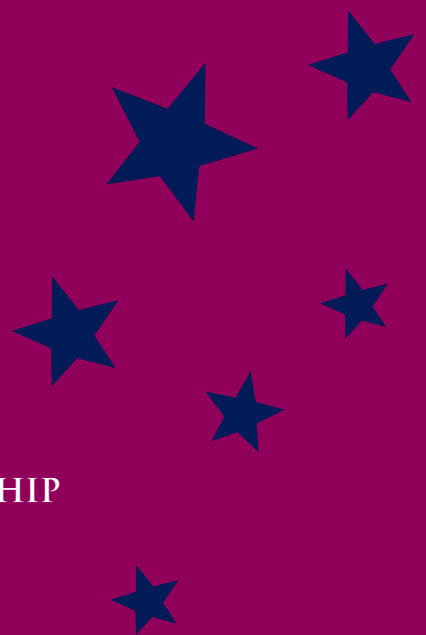
Prepared by

**NATIONAL SERVICE-LEARNING PARTNERSHIP**  
at the Academy for Educational Development

with

**NATIONAL CENTER FOR LEARNING AND CITIZENSHIP**  
at the Education Commission of the States

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### III. TIPS AND TOOLS

*The Tips and Tools section of this guide, including up-to-date resources, prototypes, checklists, and other essential information about advocating for service-learning, is available on-line in the Take Action section of the National Service-Learning Partnership's website.*

<http://www.service-learningpartnership.org>

### IV. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## WHAT THIS GUIDE OFFERS YOU

This guide is for people like you who believe that service-learning should be a part of every student's education and who want to contribute effectively to expanding use of service-learning.

### Advocacy Examples

You may see something of yourself in one or more of the following real-life situations that lead a service-learning supporter to become advocates in order to spread or sustain service-learning practice:

- The principal, faculty, and student body at a local high school are convinced that their school-wide service-learning initiative is a primary cause for improved student achievement and attendance. The state department of education, using federal Learn and Serve America dollars, funds the high school for a modest level of service-learning teacher training and project development. The school community thinks that increased federal support for service-learning would help create conditions more favorable to service-learning practice. **School community members want to know how they should approach their members of Congress to advocate for increasing funding for service-learning.**
- A high school teacher works with the city historical society to pioneer a popular service-learning project where students research local community heroes and then write and publish "community stories" about local residents. The students share these stories at a town meeting attended by students, parents, civic leaders, policymakers, the media, and family members of the local community heroes. **This teacher and representatives from the historical society want to spread the project to other district schools.**
- The staff at a small environmental organization serve as the expert community partner to a service-learning gardening project operated by local elementary schools. The community partner employees witness firsthand the excitement and pride generated by the experience and the way in which students apply their reading, math, science and civic skills in a relevant, hands-on context. **The community partner staff would like to work with schools and district staff to expand this project in their community and perhaps throughout the state.**
- A father is dismayed that a teacher who offered his son one of his best educational experiences is leaving at the end of the year. Under this teacher's guidance, his son's eighth grade class put on a health fair for residents of the neighborhood surrounding their middle school. Parents were impressed both by what students learned from this service-learning project and by their excitement about contributing to the local community. **The father wants the local middle school to continue the project despite the teacher's departure so more students (including his younger daughter) can experience the many benefits of the project.**

- A high school junior learns that the state department of education plans to drop funding a program that created service-learning civic participation courses for seniors at schools across the state. Her older sister's class created an original theater production that focused on the needs of the physically disabled and the complexity of the surrounding public policy issues. The service-learning project received significant attention from the media, policymakers, and the local disability community. **The student wants to organize her classmates to advocate for the continuation of this senior year service-learning course.**
- A middle school teacher and her colleagues have been asked to include character education in their classes. These teachers are convinced that the curriculum would be strengthened by including a service-learning component. A month ago, the teacher conveyed this recommendation in a memo to the school district's curriculum coordinator but she has yet to hear more than "we are considering your suggestion." **The teacher and her colleagues want to try again to engage district leaders in a discussion about the merits of adopting service-learning as a core teaching strategy.**

### **Effective Advocacy is a Collective Act**

These service-learning proponents initially face obstacles to maintaining or expanding service-learning by themselves, but to address such obstacles they will have to decide to *act as advocates*, and they will have to work with others.

While each of these advocates-to-be confronts a situation that presents its own set of challenges, all of them must try to *inform and influence* the decision-makers who make policies affecting use of service-learning. These policy makers are a varied group, ranging from school administrators to state officials to members of Congress. In addition, advocates need to secure support from those who influence policy makers -- parents, teachers, young people, local leaders, and other "influentials."

### **Using This Guide**

As a proponent of service-learning, you may have participated already in advocacy activities aimed at such policy makers, including elected officials. If so, this guide offers you a comprehensive package of information to strengthen your efforts.

Like many others, however, you may be new to advocacy, and perhaps you find it intimidating, especially at first. This guide offers you the essentials for getting started, and as you get to know the policy process, you will find that functioning well in this arena mainly requires the kind of common sense, collaborative action, and persistence needed to bring about change in any arena.

Whatever level of experience you bring to the practice of advocacy, the scope of your efforts can vary dramatically from one situation to another. Some advocacy efforts will be relatively small-scale (such as trying to expand service-learning to more teachers in a district), others more ambitious (for instance, seeking to increase federal funding for service-learning). But regardless of the scale, your efforts will contribute to moving service-learning from the margin to the mainstream of American education.

As an advocate for service-learning, you will become of a pioneer. Systematic work to educate policymakers about service-learning is a relatively new phenomenon. So by all means make it a point to share the insights you gain through advocacy work with your fellow service-learning proponents.

This guide breaks the work of advocacy into discrete steps. As with virtually all categorization decisions, the ones made for labeling these steps are at times arbitrary. While the steps are presented sequentially, in real life you are likely to take some of them simultaneously. Furthermore, work described in one step may also fit with others. Nevertheless, by framing advocacy as a step-by-step process, this guide aims to demystify work that is often seen as complex and difficult but that can in fact be very manageable and effective. In addition, this guide provides information about tips and tools that will help you more through each step effectively.

Advocates should bear in mind that policy improvements are only part of what it takes to make change. Without follow up--for instance, attending to leadership, planning, implementation, and other sources of support--many policies never take hold.

### **Clarifying terms**

This guide focuses on *service-learning*, *policy*, and *advocates*. The following examination of what these terms mean should help all guide users start on common ground.

***Service-learning*** is a teaching method that engages students in solving problems within their schools and communities as an integral part of their academic studies. Students master important curriculum content by making meaningful connections between what they study and its real-life applications. Students also become effective citizens through acts of kindness, community stewardship, and civic action.

### **Examples: Service-Learning**

Math students make calculations that persuade the local authorities to install a traffic light near their schools so as to reduce accidents at a dangerous corner.

History students research local heroes identified on plaques in their community and share this knowledge at the annual Memorial Day ceremony.

Language arts students hone their writing skills by organizing a campaign to reduce bullying on their school buses.

Elementary school students tutor younger students as part of their academic and civic studies, and both groups improve their mastery of essential literacy skills.

Service-learning is now offered in about one-third of U.S. public schools. Many teachers and students testify to its power, and research is beginning to confirm that these positive reactions are justified. Well-implemented service-learning can boost students' levels of academic achievement while strengthening their civic-mindedness. This kind of balanced learning is what the American public wants from schools, according to a national poll conducted by Roper Starch Worldwide in 2000.

**Resource: Service-Learning in United States K-12 Schools**

For information on nationwide use of service-learning in K-12 schools in the United States, review *Service-Learning Delivers What Americans Want From Schools*, from Roper Starch Worldwide, and *The Impacts of Service-Learning on Youth, Schools and Communities: Research on K-12 School-Based Service-Learning, 1990–1999*, from RMC Research. Both of these are available at the National Service-Learning Partnership website at: [www.service-learningpartnership.org/service\\_learning/](http://www.service-learningpartnership.org/service_learning/)

Despite the promise of service-learning, advocates need to be realistic about the state of service-learning practice. Only a small proportion of teachers use service-learning, and often it is limited to a few teachers in a school or district. Also, the quality of service-learning practice is uneven, and in many schools service-learning activities are too sporadic to have a measurable impact on students' learning. Finally, educators need better resources to support their use of service-learning. These are the kinds of challenges service-learning policy advocacy seeks to remedy.

**Policy** covers many different kinds of decisions made at federal, national, state, tribal, or local levels. Policies can be as national in scope as major federal legislation, or as localized as a principal's decision about whether to allocate funds for teachers to learn service-learning methodology.

Policymaking can be *public or institutional*. Government entities make and enforce *public* policy. Essentially legislative bodies can tax, spend, and sometimes regulate. This authority gets translated into specific policies, which can be laws, requirements, regulations, standards, administrative procedures, or official statements of principle. Institutions such as schools make *institutional policy*, which can support or undermine public policy. All policies work in one or more of the following ways: they require, permit, encourage, resource, reward, prioritize, or prohibit.

**Advocates** organize activities to shape the decisions of policymakers. Through these activities, advocates attempt to attract, persuade, and influence policymakers to support service-learning. Advocates may target local policymakers such as school boards or superintendents, or they may target national policymakers such as senators and representatives. Yet no matter who they target, a successful advocate must be purposeful, pragmatic, and persistent.

**Examples: Advocating for Service-Learning**

A service-learning advocate can:

- arrange a meeting with a superintendent
- make a presentation to the school board
- contact and educate public officials such as a state legislator
- organize a school site visit for a congressperson
- testify before a legislative body
- build a coalition between different groups
- strategize with other advocates
- meet with a reporter
- develop an email campaign to support service-learning
- sign petitions to increase federal funding for Learn and Serve America.
- lobby a public official to support a bill to increase service-learning funding

## II. ADVOCACY STEPS

### STEP 1: SET YOUR SIGHTS ON WHAT YOU CAN ACCOMPLISH

You are likely to have your general advocacy purpose in mind. For instance, you may want to get your school district to promote service-learning or you may want to ask your member of Congress to increase funding for the federal Learn and Serve America program. Now is the time to nail down what you *can* accomplish by thinking through *what* you must do and *how*.

To assess your situation, the Advocacy Institute, a non-profit organization that helps advocates influence and change public policy, recommends examining nine key questions that focus on your needs and capability, as follows:

<i>Looking Outward</i>	<i>Looking Inward</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Objectives:</b> What do we want?</li> <li>2. <b>Audiences:</b> Who can give it to us?</li> <li>3. <b>Message:</b> What do they need to hear?</li> <li>4. <b>Messengers:</b> Who do they need to hear it from?</li> <li>5. <b>Delivery:</b> How can we get them to hear it?</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6. <b>Resources:</b> What have we got?</li> <li>7. <b>Gaps:</b> What do we need to develop?</li> <li>8. <b>First efforts:</b> How do we begin?</li> <li>9. <b>Evaluation:</b> How do we tell if we're succeeding?</li> </ol>

Once you have used such inquiry to create an advocacy agenda, an overall strategy, and a basic blueprint for action, you can use the rest of this guide to assist you in carrying out this work well.

### Restrictions on Advocacy

As you plan, you must keep in mind one set of restrictions that can apply to public policy advocacy at any level.

***Understanding allowable versus prohibited activities is important for advocates.*** If you work for a nonprofit organization with tax-exempt status or for an organization funded with public monies, you can always “educate and inform” elected officials. The following are all examples of *allowable activities* for those organizations with tax-exempt status or public funding:

<b>Allowable Activity</b>	<b>Example</b>
Educating elected officials	Students and their teacher invite an elected official (and the media) to visit their school to learn about a successful service-learning project.  A non-profit employee writes a letter to his congressperson explaining how federal funding through Learn and Serve America has allowed students to serve their community while learning critical academic skills.
Informing the media	A principal uses a major national holiday as an opportunity to write a letter to the local newspaper highlighting her students' service-learning.
Publicizing results	A superintendent testifies before elected officials about her district's increased academic and civics gains for students involved in service-learning.
Creating partnerships with government agencies	Non-profit organization staff work with their school board to help structure service-learning collaborations with schools.
Providing technical assistance to policymakers or legislative committees	A regional service-learning organization's staff provides their state legislator with examples of model service-learning policies from other states.

However, if you *lobby or engage in partisan political activity* (working for one candidate or political party), there could be consequences for your organization. Nonprofit organizations can lose their tax-exempt status, while programs operating with public funding (and sometimes philanthropic funding) risk losing that funding. The following are examples of *prohibited activities* for those organizations with tax-exempt status or public funding.

Prohibited Activity	Example
Lobbying an elected official on a specific bill	A tax-exempt non-profit employee wants to call his congressperson from work and urges him to vote for a specific bill that increases federal funding for service-learning. (Prohibited in most cases, <i>but see below</i> )
Engaging in partisan political activity by endorsing a candidate for public office	A teacher and his class want to work for a state legislator candidate because she promises to support a state service-learning policy.

Advocates who work for nonprofit organizations should confer with their directors to determine whether they can, as employees working during normal business hours, ask an elected member of a legislative body (a state legislator or member of Congress, for instance) to support a *specific piece of legislation*. This request is considered lobbying, an activity to which tax-exempt nonprofit organizations can devote only a small fraction of their total budgets. Furthermore, employees of nonprofit groups cannot use certain funding streams to support lobbying activity. Some foundation grants and some government programs fall under this restriction.

In sum, all employees can discuss with elected officials the merits and challenges of specific issues without jeopardizing their organizations' tax exemptions or funding, but some employees must not directly ask an official to vote a certain way on a particular bill. If this is the situation in which you find yourself, you are free to give officials information about how service-learning fits with specific pieces of federal legislation (such as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and the National and Community Service Trust Act), but you cannot ask an elected official to vote a certain way concerning these laws.

While the restrictions on advocacy are very real, some observers conclude that these rules tend to make advocates overly cautious about taking actions that in fact have no bearing on tax-exempt status or funding. Aside from partisan electoral activity and legislative lobbying, other advocacy activities are generally permissible.

Finally, it is important to note that anyone can lobby elected officials or engage in partisan political activity as a private citizen on their own time. As individual citizens, we all have the right to lobby or petition our elected officials.

**Resource: Advocacy Guide**

*Advocacy for Social Justice: A Global Action and Reflection Guide*, by David Cohen and Rosa de la Vega of the Advocacy Institute and Gabrielle Watson of Oxfam America explores the elements of advocacy and offers a toolkit for taking action, comprehensive case studies, as well as hundreds of resource listings ([www.advocacy.org/publications.htm](http://www.advocacy.org/publications.htm)).



## **STEP 2: LOOK BEFORE YOU LEAP**

Before you begin, review the advice of experienced advocates, distilled into the following six pointers. In the subsequent steps, you will learn more about how to make the most of these pointers.

### **1. Know Your Power**

One of the biggest obstacles to undertaking advocacy is the fear that the system has all the power. The system can be your local school district or the U.S. Senate. As an advocate, sooner or later you are sure to confront—either in your own feelings or in the reactions of others—the feeling that you are powerless.

The American Youth Policy Forum’s Samuel Halperin, a longstanding education advocate, urges you to adopt a different mindset. In *A Guide for the Powerless and Those Who Don’t Know Their Own Power: A Primer of the American Political Process*, Halperin writes “powerlessness is mostly self-imposed” because “the American political system is, to an amazing extent, open to participation and reshaping by laypersons. People of all kinds can access it and in America’s long pragmatic tradition, make a positive difference in their own lives and in the society around them.”

### **2. Stand in Policymakers’ Shoes**

The advocate’s challenge is to be perpetually optimistic but utterly realistic. Savvy advocates spend time learning about what matters to the policymakers they want to approach, how these policymakers *see* the issues the advocates are addressing, and which win-win solutions will satisfy everyone’s interests. They also recognize that they are not the only constituents asking for a policymaker’s attention and thus prepare carefully for any time together.

### **3. Do Your Homework**

Seasoned advocates gather pertinent “intelligence” about their issues and the policymakers who have the authority to address them. This kind of advocacy research is a critical prerequisite for effective work. Advocates must study the policymaking process and operational styles of the groups they need to influence, focusing especially on how they get and use information. They, like everyone, are inundated with too much information so advocates must be judicious with their communication strategies.

### **4. Keep It Real**

People closest to service-learning practice are among its most powerful champions. Effective advocates include them in meetings with policymakers and then help these service-learning experts, usually teachers and students, showcase their work for policymakers visiting their schools. Telling policymakers about service-learning can create interest, but showing them well-run service-learning in action is much more likely to win supporters.

### **5. Invest in Relationships and Trust**

Advocates are far more likely to get a hearing from policymakers if they already know one or more of the advocates, have a favorable impression of them or their coalition, and have received a positive recommendation from an aide or colleague. Above all, policy makers listen to those they trust. Trust is an advocate’s best strategic asset.

### **6. Use Smart Communication Strategies**

Advocacy experts make sure that every time they communicate with a policymaker they are

sending clear, compelling, and consistent information. In addition, sometimes securing media attention can be important.

### **STEP 3: DETERMINE WHOM YOU MUST INFLUENCE**

The following chart lists the range of policymakers who can make decisions affecting service-learning. At every level of action, legislative or administrative bodies can set public policies (some of which will be laws) with a potential impact on use of service-learning, while institutional leaders can create other policies that determine how the public policies are put into operation. Note that while public and institutional policy decisions are made by public officials and administrators, key “influencer organizations,” such as non-governmental groups, have a powerful impact on education policy. These groups include national education organizations and their state affiliates, parent associations, and civic or business organizations. They can be important allies in your cause.



The remainder of this section offers a closer look at key players in government.

#### **Policy Aides**

At all levels of government -- in Congress, a state legislature, a governor’s office, city hall, and in many large school districts -- top officials rely on aides, sometimes called staffers, to assist them with specific issue areas. Often the best starting point for convincing a member of Congress, governor, legislator, or school superintendent to take action to support service-learning is to communicate with the aide who handles the official’s work on education, youth, or service. Thus, when you contact top officials you should expect to be referred to an aide. Usually aides will know as much, if not more, about the details of your issue as the official they work for -- and more often than not, their support matters when the official must decide how to respond to your requests.

#### **Key Actors in the Federal Policy Process**

To influence federal legislation, you will need to follow two trails of congressional influence: members of committees, and the specific Members of Congress who represent you locally. To influence how federal legislation is *implemented*, you must work with staff in federal agencies as well as state and local agencies.

## *United States Congress*

- *Senators and members of the House of Representatives.* If you want to influence federal legislation, you should focus on those members of Congress who represent your state or congressional district. With all the powerful lobbyists and interest groups that shape federal legislation, you may wonder if grassroots advocates can hope to have any impact on these officials. The answer is yes. Members of Congress need to hear from their local constituents. Antennae go up when they receive a dozen or more constituent letters about a particular issue, especially if the letters do not have a form letter message, but sound as if the writers took the trouble to express their own thoughts.
- *Congressional committees and subcommittees.* Much of the important work in Congress occurs in its committees and subcommittees. Sometimes relevant committees will include one or more of your own Members of Congress. But if not, you can ask them to join you in bringing service-learning issues to the attention of their colleagues who do sit on the pertinent committees. By doing so, you will not only enlist their support, but will keep alive that important local connection.

Congressional committees with responsibility for service-learning include:

- National service and service-learning *policy*
  - Education and Workforce Committee (House)
  - Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee (Senate)
- National service and service-learning *funding*
  - Appropriations Subcommittee on Veteran Affairs, Housing, and Urban Development (both House and Senate).
- *Congressional staff.* Advocates should be prepared to interact with a number of different kinds of staff members in congressional offices. Depending on the office, their titles may vary, but typically you should expect to work with any staff listed below. Keep in mind that one staffer might handle education while a different staffer handles service issues.
  - *Education Legislative Aide* (a “L.A.”) -- handles education
  - *Education Legislative Correspondent* (a “L.C.”) -- assists Education Legislative Aide with policy matters and takes care of legislative correspondence on education
  - *Chief of Staff* -- leads the office staff and works with the member of Congress to decide legislative priorities. (In the U.S. House, this position is sometimes called an Administrative Assistant, or “A.A.”)
  - *Legislative Director* (a “L.D.”) -- works with the member of Congress to set the legislative agenda and oversees all legislative staff.
  - *Legislative Assistants or Aides* -- conduct research and advise a member of Congress on a particular issue area
  - *Director of Communications* -- works with the member of Congress and the legislative director to develop and carry out a communications strategy to promote the legislative agenda

- *Press Secretary* -- works directly with the media
- *Scheduler/Appointment Secretary* -- handles the member of Congress's travel and daily schedule

**Tip: Determining Who to Contact**

The Education Legislative Aide is often the primary point of contact. Contact the Communications Director to develop congressional op-eds or letters to the editor. Contact the Scheduler first when trying to arrange a congressional service-learning site visit or to arrange an appointment with the congressperson.

***Federal Government Agencies***

- *Corporation for National and Community Service.* The Corporation for National and Community Service provides opportunities for Americans of all ages and backgrounds to serve their communities and country through three programs: Senior Corps, AmeriCorps, and Learn and Serve America. Americorps volunteers sometimes support service-learning, but Learn and Serve America is the primary revenue stream for service-learning, providing grants to schools, colleges, and nonprofit groups. Also, Learn and Serve America serves as a resource on service and service-learning to teachers, faculty members, schools, and community groups. Learn and Serve America was created by the National and Community Service Act of 1990 and it is always funded by the Veterans Administration (VA) and Housing and Urban Development (HUD) appropriations bill.
- *United States Department of Education Staff.* This federal agency's staff carry out laws and set additional policies. The department delivers funds to states and school districts primarily through (1) formula-based grant programs administered under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (currently called No Child Left Behind, the principal legislation governing federal policy on elementary and secondary education), and (2) Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. In addition, the department serves as a clearinghouse for ideas, findings, and information on education, and supports 10 regional educational laboratories that provide materials and other assistance to states and to local educators. The department also oversees competitive grants programs that give states, schools, school districts, and community groups opportunities to try innovative approaches to educational practice. Many of these federal resources can be used to support service-learning.

## Key Actors in the State Policy Process

- The **governor** may propose policy, but the **legislature** has the final word on state policy, budgets, and distribution of state funds. Increasingly, state legislatures have come to exercise enormous power over education at the local level.
- **The state board of education** has primary responsibility for elementary and secondary education policy. State boards typically adopt education goals, set graduation requirements, establish teacher certification requirements, and develop assessment processes to monitor district and school performance.
- **The chief state school officer** is the CEO of the state education system and is responsible for translating state policy into practice.
- **State education agencies**, operating under the direction of the chief state school officer, write and enforce regulations that govern many federal and state programs, distribute state and federal funds to districts and schools, develop curricular guidelines, offer technical assistance, and implement state policy.
- **Staff** in state governance bodies and offices often include the same kinds of staff members who work in congressional offices (see the list under United States Congress).

## Key actors in the local policy process

Many of the most important decisions about schooling get made at the district or school level. Parent and student groups, unions, civic organizations, elected officials, business and civic leaders, members of the clergy and others all have an influence on the district- and school-level policies made by school boards, district officials, and school administrators.

### Resource: Local and State Advocacy

Advocates working at the state and local policy level will find this resource invaluable:

*Learning That Lasts: How Service-Learning Can Become an Integral Part of Schools, States, and Communities*, produced by the Education Commission of the States.

([www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/40/54/4054.pdf](http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/40/54/4054.pdf))

#### **STEP 4: MOBILIZE ALLIES**

On your own, you may initiate advocacy activity, but usually successful advocacy involves *working collaboratively*. As someone involved in service-learning, you very likely are already tuned into the power of collaboration, because after all, one reason to support service-learning is that it teaches teamwork to students.

#### **Finding Allies**

Where you look for allies depends on your starting point. For example, if you are a parent, it makes sense to reach out first to fellow parents. But wherever you begin, be as inclusive as possible in identifying supporters that can influence the policymakers you have targeted. The long list of possibilities includes individuals from all the groups listed in the chart on in step three (“Determine who you must influence”) as well as service-learning students who can testify to its results.

#### **Example: Identifying Allies**

***Be entrepreneurial.*** Karen Horne, Director of Policy and Evaluation for the South Carolina Department of Education, reached out to a state senator who also heads the Governor’s Council on Beautification and Litter. She talked to him about how her department could develop service-learning lesson plans that would engage students in the state’s beautification project. She also contacted another state legislator, a strong supporter of an adult service club, who secured a \$300,000 grant from that organization to support service-learning workshops for teachers.

***Look for new kinds of partnerships.*** Oregon state representative and former school superintendent Elaine Hopson points to a potential group of allies that she thinks is often overlooked: “It seems to me there is a natural connection between service-learning and businesses. Service-learning helps to provide better educated, more capable young people. Businesses help to provide opportunities for service-learning students and also employ these young people later on.”

#### **Have a Specific Request for Your Allies**

Many people are more likely to become allies if they are asked to do something specific for your effort. For example, once you’ve successfully introduced a member of Congress to service-learning, you might invite him or her to write a statement supporting service-learning to an influential congressional committee chair, or to co-sign legislation that increases support for service-learning. Locally, you could ask key organizations and influential individuals to sign a letter supporting service-learning to your local or school board or superintendent.

#### **Occasional Versus Regular Supporters**

As you recruit allies, you will find that some of them are people who give you only occasional help while others are people who work on a regular basis with you, perhaps as part of a formal coalition. Both groups of supporters can advance your work. Regardless of the intensity with which you work with allies, remember that to keep any alliance functioning harmoniously, you must capitalize on the strengths of people in the group, keep your discourse civil, and celebrate progress toward long-term goals.

**Resource: Coalition Building**

Since there is power in numbers, a coalition of advocates and organizations is a powerful way to proceed. For the nuts-and-bots of working in a coalition, consult *The Spirit of the Coalition*, published by the American Public Health Association. ([www.apha.org/media/](http://www.apha.org/media/))

## **STEP 5: LEARN HOW TO NAVIGATE THE POLICY MAKING PROCESS**

Policymaking processes can be hard for outsiders to grasp and maneuver, whether they exist in schools, districts, legislative bodies, or public agencies. Your best bet is to consult individuals or groups that are experienced and expert in whatever policy arena you need to “work.”

For instance, if you are trying to influence the passing of legislation at the federal, state, or municipal levels, experts suggest using the following guidelines:

### **1. Start Early**

Take advantage of the fact that a bill becomes a law in stages. Waiting until a bill is in front of a legislative body, rather than communicating your views to policymakers earlier, means you may be missing key opportunities to influence the final wording and substance of a law.

### **2. Secure a Sponsor**

Find a legislator to sponsor your proposed legislation. Use his or her advice as to how to secure backing from relevant leaders, committees, outside influencer groups, and the like.

### **3. Educate staffers**

Request a visit with staff members in order to introduce them to your issue, your advocacy group, and your “ask,” defined as what you want the policymaker to do (See step eight in this guide). Find out what they need to educate the policymaker they serve. Customize an information folder for the staff and legislator.

### **4. Get your issue on the record**

Ask your sponsor to submit a statement for the record describing the rationale for and value of a piece of legislation that has just been introduced.

### **5. Contact Relevant Committee Members**

Assign an advocate to reach out to each committee member, if possible. At the local level, it may be possible to reach out to all officials on an elected body. However, at the state and federal level, you may have to pick and choose. In addition to approaching your own elected officials, pay particular attention to members who are powerful by virtue of seniority, subcommittee assignment, or by being a member of the majority party of that legislative body.

### **6. Attend Pertinent Committee Meetings**

Be on hand for any committee hearings about your legislation, especially meetings where the committee decides whether the bill will be considered by the full legislative body.

**Tip: Follow Policymaking Timelines**

Align your advocacy to state and federal timelines for policymaking. For example, to affect funding decisions made by the U.S. Congress, start at the beginning of the year before and after the release of the President's budget. Follow-up should occur through the spring and summer. Most final federal budget decisions are made in the Fall.

Policymaking timelines vary from state to state, but for many states, spring and summer are the critical decision-making times. Check with local advocates or contact the National Service-Learning Partnership at [nslp@aed.org](mailto:nslp@aed.org) for assistance.

**Resource: Working with Policymakers**

The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development's Advocacy Kit has an excellent section devoted to working with policymakers. Although not specific to service-learning advocacy, the kit provides tips, links, and resources for education advocates. ([www.ascd.org/advocacykit/](http://www.ascd.org/advocacykit/))

## **STEP 6: BUILD UPON OTHERS' GOOD WORK**

As you prepare your case about why policymakers should support service-learning, as you hone a strategy for pursuing specific policy changes, and as you determine your “ask” of policymakers, you should take advantage of tips and tools that come out of other advocates' work.

By standing on the shoulders of others' work, you should be able to develop a sophisticated advocacy effort fairly quickly. Making others' experiences work for you is the trick to using a guide such as this one.

### **Resource: Tips, Tools and Examples**

Find checklists, models of others' work, and more in the *Take Action* section of the National Service-Learning Partnership website ([www.service-learningpartnership.org](http://www.service-learningpartnership.org)).

In addition, the service-learning community has now developed a cadre of experts who can consult with you and coach you about advocacy work. The Partnership can also help you locate these experienced advocates ([nslp@aed.org](mailto:nslp@aed.org)).

### **Examples: Policy Statements**

If you want your school district to consider establishing a policy favorable to service-learning, you can offer examples of policy statements that are in place elsewhere. And you can learn from others' experiences with adopting such policies. Find examples of policies in the *Take Action* section of the National Service-Learning Partnership website. ([www.service-learningpartnership.org](http://www.service-learningpartnership.org))

If you want to provide information about what states have done to support service-learning, you can use the Education Commission of the States 50-state policy scan to find out which states include service-learning in their standards, fund service-learning activities, permit service-learning activities to be applied to graduation requirements, or encourage service-learning as a strategy for increasing students' academic achievement or civic engagement. ([www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/23/77/2377.pdf](http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/23/77/2377.pdf))

## STEP 7: FOLLOW THE MONEY

Moving service-learning into the mainstream of public education will require new or redirected sources of funding. Public funding streams dedicated to education or youth are the most sustainable revenue source for service-learning. These funding streams are generated by laws and other policies at the federal, state, and local level. As a service-learning advocate, you will usually be pursuing increases or changes in these funding streams.

### Public Funding

Funding for service-learning is limited. Three federal sources can be accessed.

- ***Learn and Serve America.*** The federal Learn and Serve America program at the Corporation for National and Community Service is the only dedicated funding stream for service-learning. Through this program, most states receive an annual grant. Grant size varies by state, and typically states use the allocation to make smaller sub-grants supporting service-learning in local sites. In general, these funds are modest and account for only a fraction of what schools spend to support teachers' use of service-learning. As an advocate, you can alert local educators about these funds, and you can join with advocates across the United States working to expand these funds.

#### Resource: Learn and Serve America

For more information about Learn and Serve America funding in your state, contact Learn and Service America ([www.learnandserve.org](http://www.learnandserve.org)) or the State Education Network (known as SEANet) ([www.seanetonline.org](http://www.seanetonline.org)).

- ***Elementary and Secondary School Act.*** Other public funding streams can be accessed to support service-learning. The federal Elementary and Secondary School Act, which in its latest authorization is called *No Child Left Behind*, is the major source of federal funding for education. Although federal funding for education makes up only 7% of local school budgets, the legislation encourages or allows service-learning to be funded and implemented in specific ways in Titles I, III, IV, V, and VII.

#### Resource: Federal Education Funding

For more information on funding from the Elementary and Secondary School Act, consult "Opportunities for Service-Learning in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001," written by Shelley Billig and Stephany Brown of RMC Research. ([www.servicelearningpartnership.org/service\\_learning/nclb.cfm](http://www.servicelearningpartnership.org/service_learning/nclb.cfm))

- ***Other National Service Programs.*** Other federal policy initiatives that can provide resources for service-learning include AmeriCorps, SeniorCorps, and VISTA programs. As an advocate, you can work to obtain volunteers from these programs to helping coordinate service-learning in your school or school district. AmeriCorps volunteers can provide direct assistance for service activities and community partnerships. SeniorCorps volunteers can assist with planning and implementing service activities. VISTA volunteers can assist with building capacity for local service initiatives. In 2003, President Bush announced plans for 25,000 AmeriCorps and SeniorCorps volunteers to support youth service and service-learning activities in school and community-based organizations.

### **Linking Service-Learning to School Reform Initiatives**

Increasingly, advocates have been able to support service-learning within broader school reform initiatives. Indeed, there are many potential linkages between current school reform efforts and service-learning, and many school reform efforts provide a suitable context for service-learning.

#### **Resource: School Reform Favorable to Service-Learning**

For more information on connections between service-learning and school reform efforts, consult *Finding Common Ground: Service-Learning and Education Reform* by Sarah Pearson of the American Youth Policy Forum.

([www.aypf.org/publicatons/findingcommonground.pdf](http://www.aypf.org/publicatons/findingcommonground.pdf))

### **STEP 8: DETERMINE THE ASK**

When approaching policymakers, advocates have to make an “ask.” Quite simply, the ask is what you want the policy maker to do. Obviously the ask will be determined by which policy makers are being approached, what the scope and nature of their authority is, and how they can use their policy making role to advance use of service-learning.

While devising your ask, determine what concessions you are willing to make. And figure out who will negotiate for you as well as how, when, and where.

#### **Example: The Asks**

Parent advocates may ask the school board to adopt a policy statement that endorses use of service-learning in all district schools. Teachers may ask the district superintendent to make it a matter of policy that a portion of staff development time will be dedicated to helping teachers master rigorous service-learning practice. Civic leaders from across the United States may ask Congress to reauthorize the legislation governing the Learn and Serve America program and increase its funding.

## STEP 9: PREPARE MESSAGES AND MATERIALS

As you prepare a communications strategy to support your advocacy work, it is essential that you identify:

- Key messages with consistent, clear, and compelling language about service-learning.
- Appropriate messengers, and
- Relevant message forms.

Messages as well as language depend upon context—that is, to whom they are directed, why, when, where, and by whom. Your message should be carried by many people—you, your allies, service-learning practitioners and students, students’ families, educators, members of the media, community partners’ staff, civic leaders, and the like. Similarly, your messages can come in many forms – for example, a letter, an email, an information folder, a press release, a report, or a video.

### Communication Pointers

As you craft your messages and develop the materials and messengers to convey them, bear in mind these communication pointers:

- ***Keep it simple but don’t over-simplify.*** We are all swamped with information, and that’s especially true for government officials and other policymakers. Invest time in developing messages that are straightforward without sacrificing the essence of ideas that are central to your cause. Use succinct language and engaging images to make service-learning come alive.

### Resource: Communicating About Service-Learning

For more tips on how to communicate about service-learning, visit the National Service-Learning Partnership’s Take Action section ([www.service-learningpartnership.org](http://www.service-learningpartnership.org)).

- ***Avoid jargon.*** As you re-read something you have written, ask yourself if it sticks to the kind of everyday language used in a serious newspaper. Do not use acronyms and change or explain other language that might be known only to insiders. For instance, if talking about the federal No Child Left Behind legislation or the Learn and Serve America program, do not resort to NCLB or LSA.
- ***Strike the right balance.*** Your messages must reflect the concerns of your constituency. At the same time, they should take into account the priorities of the policymakers you are trying to engage.
- ***Think about how to reframe issues.*** You’ve probably had the experience of making a logical case for something you care about by citing relevant data, but finding that no matter how hard you try, opinions don’t budge. Communications expert Susan Bales says that advocates often find themselves in this position because the people they are trying to reach have deeply held preconceptions (or “frames”) that make them oblivious to new information. “If the facts don’t fit the frame, it’s the facts that are rejected ...” says Bales. Her answer is to change the frame. When attempting to reframe an issue, be persistent. We all cling to the stories we use to understand the world and it takes time and energy to persuade most of us to consider new ones.

**Example: Reframe Issues**

If you want your local school board to be more receptive to service-learning, try reframing board members' understanding of public schools by stressing they were established not just to teach academic subjects but to prepare students for citizenship. Tell them that service-learning is a powerful teaching method for advancing students' academic and civic learning simultaneously.

- *Send a unified message to elected officials.* Political leaders pay more attention to similar communications from a group of teachers, parents, and community leaders than to scattered letters or emails that deal with different aspects of the issue. And the impact of coordinated messages will be even stronger if some of them come from school board members and other community leaders who represent broader constituencies.

**Tip: Borrow and Adapt**

The National Service-Learning Partnership *Take Action* website section has many good examples of materials that have been used successfully to communicate with policymakers. Rework them for your purposes. Your time is too precious to spend reinventing the proverbial wheel ([www.service-learningpartnership.org](http://www.service-learningpartnership.org)).

## **STEP 10: ORCHESTRATE MEETINGS AND MEDIA**

As you roll out your advocacy plan, you must maximize the value you get out of face-to-face encounters with those you seek to influence. And you will want to capitalize on the power of the media by using this channel of influence very carefully. This section offers you advice on how to proceed with these challenges.

### **Maximize Meetings**

To further their purposes, savvy advocates make use of routine meetings and organize events such as site visits. Here are some tips for making three different kinds of meetings and site visits work for you.

#### ***School Board Meetings***

- *Make certain you can attend.* Some boards hold closed meetings. Before you plan to attend a session, make certain you can do so, and if you think you need to be at a particular session that will be closed, try to get it opened.
- *Ask to be put on the agenda to share your information, stories, and requests.*
- *Bring students, parents (or grandparents), teachers, administrators, community leaders, and other credible service-learning supporters to the meeting.* They can attest to the power of service-learning by providing information and testimonials about real service-learning projects and experiences.
- *Offer a clear explanation of service-learning, including its value, feasibility, and implementation.* Describe a specific service-learning project, what type of supports and structures need to be in place to ensure that its quality is high, and what teachers need to support such a project effectively.
- *Make a clear “ask” and have well thought out answers to the questions you are likely to get.* You will want to communicate very clearly what action you are asking the board to take, and you should anticipate the concerns members or other meeting participants are likely to raise. Be prepared to be very clear about any specific district policies that matter to you because they advance or inhibit service-learning.
- *Identify any school board members who are teachers or parents of students in the district.* They may be especially receptive to learning more about service-learning projects via observation and participation.

#### ***Meeting with Elected Officials***

Start working well in advance of when you would like to the visit to occur. Get the name, fax number, and email address of the elected official’s scheduler or appointment secretary and send that person a written request for a meeting with either the official or an aide. Be persistent and be prepared to follow up with a phone call. If you are trying to arrange a meeting with a member of Congress, be aware that the scheduler receives many such requests, so you may have to re-send yours.

**Tips: Meeting face-to-face with an elected official.**

*Confine your leave-behind materials to one or two pages*, but include details on where this information can be found on the web, if appropriate. Offering the information in a file folder with your name or your organization's name on the label will help ensure that the materials are put in a file drawer, as opposed to the round file.

*Limit the number of people you bring to the meeting.* Many elected official's offices are tiny. If you have more than five people in your group, you'll likely be standing out in the hallway. Plus, having so many people talking at once dilutes the impact of your message.

*Assume your listeners may not have detailed knowledge of a particular bill you'd like to discuss.* Thousands of bills are introduced into state legislatures and congress each session. Be prepared to provide information on the bill title, number, and general provisions.

***Visits to Classrooms with High-Quality Service-Learning***

A high priority for all service-learning advocates is to arrange for elected and appointed officials, other policymakers, or people of influence to see service-learning in action.

- *Select the project you would most like to showcase.* Choose well-run projects that provide a clear link between service and academic or civic learning. Also be on the lookout for activities that have successfully involved students in decision making and that seem to be having a very clear impact on their community.
- *Start by sending a written invitation to the scheduler, appointments secretary, or any other administrative aide.* For Members of Congress, you should preferably make the first contact two to three months before the time you would like the visit to take place. Also, try to schedule visits during congressional recess periods, when your congressperson is more likely to be in his or her district.
- *Include your superintendent, principal and school board in the visit.*
- *Ask local media to cover the visit,* and make it clear to media representatives and the visiting official's staff that the visit will include photo opportunities. Tell the official's staff which media outlets plan to be there.
- *Send a letter of appreciation* after the official makes the visit, including a restatement of the policy ask.

**Tip: Congressional Recess Periods**

Times when Congress is not meeting in Washington D.C. (and therefore at home and available for site visits) are called recess periods. Winter recess usually includes the month of December and early January; Easter recess includes the first three weeks of April; and the summer recess is usually the full month of August until after Labor Day.

**Resource: Site-visit checklist**

Access a checklist for an elected official site visit at the National Service-Learning Partnership *Take Action* website section. ([www.service-learningpartnership.org](http://www.service-learningpartnership.org))

**Mind the Media**

Outreach to members of the media—a reporter at local community newspaper, a staff member at a television affiliate, a radio talk host, or an editor for a national magazine—can be useful *if your advocacy work is ready for media attention*. If you are not ready for prime time, involving the media can result in the kind of negative publicity which can set your efforts back.

When you are ready to reach out to members of the media, use the following pointers to make success more likely:

- ***Decide whom you are trying to reach.*** You will need to determine which media outlets speak to the groups you want to influence. Consider traditional print and electronic media outlets such as news papers, magazines, radio and television stations. Also consider newer media outlets such as web sites and listservs.
- ***Determine your story.*** You must figure out both a news hook for your information and the specific messages you want it to convey.
- ***Attend to timing.*** Certain times are more opportune than others for securing coverage for education news. For example, encourage a reporter to write a story on service-learning when education legislation is on your state docket. Or try the end or beginning of the school year for pitching a story on how service-learning projects benefit the community.
- ***Use a full range of communication vehicles.*** You can reach media members through press releases, media advisories, newsletters, speeches, press conferences, editorial board meetings, op-eds (opinion columns on editorial pages), and special events such as award ceremonies recognizing students and teachers who worked on service-learning projects. Whenever possible, be prepared to supply the media with photos of students involved in a service-learning project or with other relevant visuals.
- ***Focus on local media outlets.*** Smaller and local media shops are likely to be receptive to covering your news if you offer local angles and spokespeople.
- ***Create positive relationships with relevant reporters and editors.*** For instance, some stories will be of more interest to the community reporter than the education reporter. You should read bylines to know “beat” reporters and talk with them about what they are covering. You can also cultivate local television stations’ news assignment editors. And many shows other than the 6:00 p.m. news spotlight community events. Consider how to get coverage from weekend talk shows, weekly public affairs shows, and specials.

- **Respect reporters' deadlines.** If a reporter needs information by a certain time, you should comply. Also, deadlines can limit how long and when a reporter can talk to you. For daily papers, you will not want to call a reporter after 3:00 p.m.
- **Identify "slow" news days.** You are more likely to receive media coverage during days when fewer publicly visible events are occupying the media's attention.
- **Choose a spokesperson.** Try to designate one of the members of your advocacy group of coalition as the point person for talking to the media. Reporters and editors are more likely to pay attention to your ideas and information if they have ongoing relationships with particular people. Of course, select a spokesperson who is particularly comfortable with the media.
- **Know your issues.** To the greatest extent possible, the advocates who pitch stories to the media or handle media requests and questions should be service-learning experts.
- **Invite a reporter to join in.** Arranging for a reporter to participate in a local service-learning project is one of the best ways to get a story out about service-learning. But be sure to select strong, well-run projects for visits.
- **Try, try again, if at first you don't succeed.** And read the Step 11 (Add Reinforcers) very carefully. It can make all the difference for the success of your efforts.

**Resource: Working with the Media**

Access sample tools for working with the media to support service-learning at the National Service-Learning Partnership's *Take Action* website section.

([www.service-learningpartnership.org](http://www.service-learningpartnership.org))

**Resource: Working with the Media**

One useful resource: *The Jossey-Bass Guide to Strategic Communications for Nonprofits: A Step-by-Step Guide to Working with the Media to Generate Publicity, Enhance Fundraising, Build Membership, Change Public Policy, Handle Crises, and More!*

([www.josseybass.com](http://www.josseybass.com))

**Resource: Working with the Media**

The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development's Advocacy Kit has an excellent section devoted to working with the media. Although not specific to service-learning advocacy, the kit provides tips, links and resources for education advocates.

([www.ascd.org/advocacykit/](http://www.ascd.org/advocacykit/))

## **STEP 11: ADD REINFORCERS**

Well-run coalitions, strong relationships, good communications, smart strategies and tactics: these are necessary but not always sufficient for advocacy success. Policymakers often ignore requests because it is not in their self-interest to act differently. The advocate's challenge is to alter this equation. This step will help you add a set of complementary interventions to the activities supported by following the previous 10 steps

### **Reinforcers**

Like everyone else, policymakers are more likely to respond positively to requests when they believe that there are clear advantages to themselves for doing so. Thus you need to organize "reinforcers" that help policy makers recognize the value and minimize the cost *for them* in saying yes to your ask.

Reinforcers function as incentives, reminders, and rewards. Advocates chose, invent, or orchestrate them to reduce or eliminate the obstacles keeping policy makers from backing the policy changes being promoted. Whatever these obstacles are, they have personal meaning for each policy maker, and it is his or her *wants or needs* that savvy advocates must address.

#### **Example: A Reinforcer for an Elected Official**

When advocates organize a site visit to an exemplary service-learning and help a policymaker get good media coverage in the course of his or her visit, that policymakers commitment to service-learning is likely to increase.

### **Social Marketing**

This way of thinking about the advocate's dilemma -- how to secure a policy maker's backing for a proposed policy change -- can be addressed through using a social marketing mindset. Social marketers use traditional marketing knowledge and techniques to advance important social objectives such as getting people in cars to "buckle up" or people who drink alcohol to rely on "the designated driver."

### **Think Long-term**

It may take several years to get the right constellation of factors in place to convince policymakers (at any level) to fully support your asks for service-learning. This is the advocate's life. To keep your spirits up, work in coalition.

**Example: Using Social Marketing to Add Reinforcers**

Suppose that a district superintendent has been asked to redirect some of her financial resources to support service-learning. To do so, she may think that she will have to reduce the resources allocated to something else. This in turn could arouse other constituents' ire and opposition. She is likely to *want* to avoid (or at least reduce) such a political cost. She may feel the *need* to avoid the risk and conflict that she envisions. Here is how the advocates who approached this superintendent might supplement their efforts in order to address her wants, and needs, and perceptions. They could provide her with:

- convincing evidence of strong parental support for service-learning.
- a real-life example of how some other districts managed the finances of supporting service-learning and a chance to consult with the superintendents of these districts.
- support from civic leaders who are willing to help teachers and students use service-learning to address important and well-known issues in their community.
- a briefing about how service-learning fits with other high-profile education reform initiatives (such as those focusing on academic standards, the civic mission of schools, teaching quality, character education, social-emotional learning, the reduction of bullying and school violence, performance assessment, mentoring, school-community partnerships, school-to-career education, comprehensive school redesign models, student engagement, drop out, prevention, and the like).
- assistance in developing a sound plan for convincing her school board that she knows how to support the growth and spread of high-quality service-learning practice.

## **STEP 12: ASSESS AND COURSE CORRECT**

Even when things are going well, it is wise to put aside time for assessment. If you sponsor a well-thought-out reflection meeting or retreat, you are sure to find out that there are some parts of your effort that could benefit from modification.

When you have done your best but your work isn't achieving the success you had hoped for, you face a moment when people start to drift away from the cause and coalitions fall apart. To prevent this from happening, reflect carefully on both the realities of the environment you are trying to influence and on what has worked, what has not, and why. Once you have made that assessment, you're ready to figure out how to change or refine your strategies and tactics by using the kind of thinking outlined in Step 11 (Add Reinforcers).

Whether you are caught up in the rush of a successful or problematic period for your work, it is tempting to put off stopping to reflect, because doing that takes time and energy that you could be devoting to immediate tasks. But ultimately, the investment in regular assessment pays off. This of course is something you know since reflection is a core element of service-learning practice.

### **III. TIPS AND TOOLS**

*The Tips and Tools section of this guide, including up-to-date resources, prototypes, checklists, and other essential information about advocating for service-learning, is available on-line in the Take Action section of the National Service-Learning Partnership's website.*

<http://www.service-learningpartnership.org>

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NATIONAL  
SERVICE-LEARNING  
PARTNERSHIP



The Partnership is dedicated to advancing service-learning as a core element of the educational experience of every elementary, middle, and secondary school student in the United States. Founded in 2001, the Partnership is a national advocacy network through which its members educate, organize, and mobilize each other for strategic leadership that promotes and strengthens the practice of service-learning. The Partnership's 7,400 organizational and individual members include teachers, administrators, educational leaders, community organization staff, researchers, policymakers, parents, young people, professors, and "influentials" in business and other sectors. The Partnership concentrates on strengthening the impact of service-learning on young people's learning and development, especially their academic and civic preparation. For the Partnership, service-learning is about educational excellence.

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