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VAM WHITE PAPER: Setting Up an Advocacy Network



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Know Your Allies

Before you step into the realm of advocating for your museum, it's important to take stock of who you have "in your corner" – stakeholders and other allies are vitally important as you prepare to make your case in front of legislators. Each of the following groups are your allies for different reasons, and they each benefit from your museum in different ways. It's important to consider these folks, and their viewpoints, as you prepare to be an advocate.

Family

- Members
- Staff and Volunteers
- Frequent Visitors / Users
- BOARD

Friends

- School Board / PTA / Teachers
- Convention and Visitors Bureau
- Chamber of Commerce

Colleagues

- Other Institutions
- State / Regional / National Organizations
- Affinity Groups

Identify Your Target

Once you know who your allies are, and **why** they are your allies, it's time to identify your advocacy target. Who does your message need to reach in order to be effective?

- Key Political Leaders
- Key Legislative Leaders
- Committee chairs and members
- Power bases
- Staff
- Public
- Media

Again, each of these groups is an important recipient of your message for different reasons. The media can broadcast your message far and wide, and find you allies where you may not have known you had them. However, the legislators themselves need to hear your message loud and clear – and preferably from various sources - before issues pertinent to your museum are voted upon.

Provide the Ammunition

Legislators today are pulled in every direction imaginable. And there are a great many ‘good causes’ that can get their attention. To rise above the din, you will need to provide proof that backs up any claims you make. Why should a legislator pay attention to your issue above someone else’s? Here are a few pieces of ammunition to consider:

- Facts and Figures
- Talking Points
- Contact Lists with addresses, phone, email, FAX
- Sample Letter Formats
- Sample Advertisements, Op/Eds
- Above all, provide INFORMATION about:
 - What’s going on
 - Time frames and deadlines

Battle Plans and Marching Orders

Find out where the battles will be fought over your issue! The following are important places where your issues will come to light and be debated:

LEGISLATIVE

- Committee Hearings
- Behind the Scenes
- Floor Debate

COMMUNITY

- Public Opinion
- Community Forums (“live” and online)
- Voting Booths
- Media (traditional and NEW media)

Make Sure You Are On the Field

When bills of interest to you are being proposed, debated, or voted upon, be sure you have coordinated with your allies to make sure you are “in the room” and part of the discussion. Visibility matters. And

because there could be a variety of places and times when you need to be part of the discussion, be sure to plan so that your voice is heard:

- Assign Duties: MAKE SURE YOU ARE COVERED!
- Keep Morale Up
- Beware of Loose Cannons
- Keep your message consistent

This is where having put the time into researching and compiling your data and talking points is important. Each member of your advocacy team should have the same message to deliver – a strong message that is backed up by proof. To find advocacy information for museums in Virginia, visit VAM’s website, click on Advocacy, and look for “Tips for Effective Advocacy.” We provide talking points, sample letters to legislators, facts about the importance of Virginia’s museums to education, tourism, and more!