



**Yale
Undergraduate
Prison
Project**

ADVOCACY TOOL KIT 2020

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Part I: About YUPP Advocacy

YUPP Mission

The Yale Undergraduate Prison Project (YUPP) is a student-run social justice organization with over 150 members. We believe that the dehumanization and discrimination driving the U.S. justice system is a product of the nation's history of white supremacy and structural racism. Our mission is to challenge these inequalities through educational programs and advocacy, while learning from and supporting others who share that vision.

At the heart of this work sits our dedication to work with formerly and currently incarcerated individuals and their families in their pursuit of educational, personal, and expressive goals. In the political arena, we contribute to social justice campaigns led by activists and organizations in Connecticut and beyond, always taking deliberate care to center the voices and experiences of those most affected by predatory and inequitable criminal justice policies. On campus, we promote dialogue around issues connected to mass incarceration with the hopes of engaging Yale community members in this work. We also support the development of a formal prison education program at Yale through our work with the Yale Prison Education Initiative

YUPP Advocacy Mission & Values

YUPP Advocacy partners students with local and national organizations and activists working to dismantle the prison industrial complex and support the needs of those it affects. We strive to prioritize the voices and experiences of those directly impacted by the criminal legal system, including those formerly and currently incarcerated and their families.

Carrying diverse backgrounds and experiences, we recognize the power and privilege that come from our affiliation with Yale University, and we strive to use these resources we have available in support of community-led organizations that have been doing the work. We are committed to the ongoing education of ourselves and members of the Yale community alongside action, dialogue and community-building in New Haven and beyond. Our advocacy efforts center on reducing the overall impact and scale of policing and incarceration, and investing in community-driven safety and wellbeing.¹

*Our mission, values, and practices are constantly evolving as we continue to learn about the nature and impact of systems of oppression and continue to better understand the best way to support the work of organizers and activists.

Guiding Questions:

Who am I? What experiences or perceptions do I carry?

What are the gaps in my knowledge? What do I need to learn?

What skills do I have? What communities can I activate? What resources can I offer?

¹ See [Critical Resistance's guide to Reformist Reforms v. Abolitionist Steps in Policing](#) for more information on this approach.

History of YUPP Advocacy

YUPP Advocacy began in the 2018-2019 school year. This first year, YUPP Advocacy was a small group of dedicated YUPP members advocating against inequities in the justice system. The following year, Advocacy was expanded to a group of nearly 70 members split into six different project groups.

Past YUPP Advocacy Initiatives

Since its formation, members of YUPP Advocacy have worked extensively with community organizations, local activists, and various on-camps groups. For a closer look at some of the initiatives YUPP Advocacy has focused on in the past, see the following:

2019-2020 - Project Groups

End Solitary

Working with formerly incarcerated people and community activists in the state legislature to end the inhumane practice of solitary confinement in Connecticut

Justice Impact Movement

Helping create a new legal bar association for formerly incarcerated and justice impacted people which will work to bring more justice-impacted people into the legal field.

Police Brutality

Building database of cases of police brutality in Connecticut. FOIA information on behalf of community activists and those who have been victims of police violence.

Free Prison Phone Calls

Working with the organization Worth Rises and mothers of formerly incarcerated people to pass a free prison phone call bill in the Connecticut State Legislature.

Book Drive

Directly empowering incarcerated people both by providing new reading material and up-to-date legal texts with which they can write their own appeals.

Unlock the Vote

Working with James Jeter and other Connecticut criminal legal groups to secure voting rights for Connecticut residents on parole.

2018-2019 - Project Groups:

New Haven Civilian Review Board 2017-18

Beginning in 2017, YUPP members, alongside Yale Law Students and People Against Police Brutality, joined a 20-year-long fight started by Emma Jones and other local, community activists to push for an All-Civilian Review Board, a New Haven commission that would work to investigate instances of police misconduct and seek justice for victims of police brutality. YUPP Advocacy met with key members of the Board of Alders to lobby for community-backed amendments, mobilized students to attend local actions, testified at an early

public hearing, produced several informative videos on the issue, created media for a targeted door-knocking effort in key aldermanic districts, and organized a 300 person text-bank targeting a swing Alder. On January 7, 2018, the New Haven Board of Alders passed an ordinance to realize this aim for police accountability.

Cannabis Legalization

In 2019, Connecticut's new governor and State legislature indicated a fresh willingness to go further with statewide cannabis legalization, but major bills lacked important restorative justices pieces demanded by the community.

Ban the Box at Yale-New Haven Hospital: 2016

In 2016, YUPP advocacy campaigned to ban the check-box on the Yale-New Haven Hospital application that asked job candidates to state if they have been convicted of a felony. Dr. Emily Wang and her colleagues at the Yale Primary Care Center drafted a community letter to support the national "Ban the Box" campaign, and urged Yale undergraduates to sign their letter of support in order to give community members with a criminal record a fairer chance in the hiring process.

Private Prison Divestment Petition: 2016

In April 2016, Yale students wrote a petition that urged the Yale Corporation and members of the Yale Administration to "renounce investment in the private prison industry." The petition went on to state that it is "time for Yale to consider its investments in enterprises that profit from gross injustice and racism," and requested that the Yale Corporation "immediately divest from the for-profit prison industry, publicly denounce the for-profit prison industry and affirmatively state that it will not invest in the for-profit prison industry in the future."

EMERGE CT: 2016

In 2016 Yale students partnered with EMERGE Connecticut, Inc, a nonprofit corporation that is committed to helping formerly incarcerated individuals re-enter society as law-abiding and contributing members of the community, and re-enter their families as responsible members. The "Earn and Learn" model of the program provides members with the capacity to learn marketable work skills, to improve their education skills, all while earning an income.

CT Bail Fund: 2016

Simone Siever ('17), Patrick Sullivan ('18), and Brett Davidson ('16) launched the Connecticut Bail Fund in order to address the issue of pretrial jail time. The Connecticut Bail Fund posts bail for their clients, thus allowing their clients to return home, keep their jobs, retain custody of their children, and fight their cases in court. "In the most basic sense," said Simone Siever in a New Haven Register article, "we feel that nobody should be locked up just because they can't afford bail."³

Second Look Bill: 2015

YUPP worked with the Yale Democrats and other student organizations to gather support from Yale undergraduates for sentencing reform legislation, nicknamed "Second Look." In July, 2015, Governor Dannel Malloy signed Second Look legislation into law, thereby formally declaring that mandatory life sentences for juveniles without the possibility of parole is unconstitutional.

² <http://www.emergect.net/what-we-do>

³ New Haven Register, "Yale group sets up bail fund to cut pretrial jail time," July 11, 2016

Part II: General Information

Workplace Systems

Slack: YUPP Advocacy’s main form of communication for all groups will be Slack. All members are encouraged to check announcements and resources. While each member is officially in one project group, you’re encouraged to stay updated on and get involved with other project groups’ work. To facilitate this, project groups will use open channels in Slack, which are accessible for all members to join/read.

Google Drive: YUPP 2020-2021

- Each project group will have their own folder. All YUPP Advocacy members will have access to all folders and documents in YUPP 2020-2021.
- Each group will place documents in their project group’s respective folder
- Any and all relevant resources and materials can be found on the drive.
 - Resources include:
 - Spreadsheet with contacts including:
 - Our 2020-2021 Partner Organizations
 - Previous Project Heads
 - Local Organizers
 - CT Student Social Justice Organizations
 - Examples of SMART Goals & RACI Templates to facilitate goal-setting & accountability

Google Calendar: All YUPP Advocacy Members are required to join our Google Calendar. Mandatory meeting dates are listed on the calendar. Additionally, events, teach-ins, and actions will be placed on the calendar as they arise. These are not mandatory but highly encouraged.

Zoom: Entire YUPP Advocacy Meetings will take place under this zoom meeting link:

<https://yale.zoom.us/j/94516846938>

Or Telephone : 203-432-9666 (2-ZOOM if on-campus) or 646 568 7788

Meeting ID: 945 1684 6938

International numbers available: <https://yale.zoom.us/j/94516846938>

Small group meetings will take place under a Zoom meeting created/shared by project heads.

Fall 2020 Meeting Schedule

All dates below are mandatory large group meetings. Details about the meetings can be found on the YUPP [Google Calendar](#). *The below dates do not include weekly small group meetings, which will have dates/times determined in small groups.. Small group meetings are also mandatory and project heads will take attendance*

September 17th 7pmEST: Larger Group Meeting
 September 24th 7pmEST: Larger Group Meeting
 October 1st 7pmEST: Larger Group Meeting
 October 8th 7pmEST: Larger Group Meeting
 November 19th 7pmEST: Larger Group Meeting

YUPP 2020-2021 Board Contacts

All members of the YUPP Board are available as a resource if broader support is needed with funds, fundraising, emailing the panlist, adding content to the website, planning/coordinating events, coordinating with direct service, and more.

Position	Name	Email
Co-Presidents	Jordan Ashby Anna Miliken Matt Post	jordan.ashbye@yale.edu anna.millikene@yale.edu matt.poste@yale.edu
Secretary	Isaac Spanjer	isaac.spanjer@yale.edu
New Ventures	Eunice Park	eunice.park@yale.edu
Treasurer	Hannah Ji	hannah.ji@yale.edu
Speakers and Events	Sasha Carney Nadja Umlauf	sasha.carney@yale.edu nadja.umlau@yale.edu
Advocacy	Kanyinsola Anifowoshe (312-626-4191) Willa Ferrer (413-923-4185)	kanyinsola.anifowoshe@yale.edu willa.ferrer@yale.edu
Current Events Coordinator	Leo Lehrer- Small	leo.lehrer-small@yale.edu
Men's Group Coordinator	Raphael Steiner	raphael.steiner@yale.edu
Project MORE Coordinator	Lara Schull	lara.schull@yale.edu

Part III: Member Responsibilities

As members of the Yale Undergraduate Prison Project we have the responsibility to:

- ...attend all large group and project group meetings.*
- ... do work to support community members, organizations, and activists.
- ... reflect on & meaningfully engage our positionality & privileges
- ...dedicate ourselves to continued education around the justice system.
- ... commit to working on projects and tasks outside of meetings.

**Attendance Policy:*

All large group and small group meetings are mandatory. We understand that you all juggle many responsibilities, (including work, classes, caring for family members) but to honor our commitments to those we fight alongside, we have to show up— consistently and reliably. If you have an unavoidable conflict for a large group meeting, you must notify Kanyinsola and Willa as well as your project heads. If you have an unavoidable conflict with a small group meeting you must notify a project head (they will keep track of attendance). If you miss more than two meetings in a semester (including small group meetings), Kanyinsola and Willa will schedule a meeting to check-in. This is not meant to be scary, but to have an honest student to student conversation about your commitments and capacity as part of this community.

Part IV: Understanding the System

GLOSSARY: Criminal Legal System Terms

Abolition: “PIC abolition is a political vision with the goal of eliminating imprisonment, policing, and surveillance and creating lasting alternatives to punishment and imprisonment. From where we are now, sometimes we can’t really imagine what abolition is going to look like. Abolition isn’t just about getting rid of buildings full of cages. It’s also about undoing the society we live in because the PIC both feeds on and maintains oppression and inequalities through punishment, violence, and controls millions of people. Because the PIC is not an isolated system, abolition is a broad strategy. An abolitionist vision means that we must build models today that can represent how we want to live in the future. It means developing practical strategies for taking small steps that move us toward making our dreams real and that lead us all to believe that things really could be different. It means living this vision in our daily lives. Abolition is both a practical organizing tool and a long-term goal.”⁴

Clemency: The President and state governors possess the power of executive clemency, which enables them to pardon offenses or reduce the sentences of people with federal or state criminal convictions. A pardon will erase the criminal record and restore the returning citizen’s civil rights. A commutation of sentence shortens the sentence to allow for early or immediate release. The Clemency Project 2014 began as an effort to solicit clemency petitions from nonviolent federal offenders who would have received a shorter sentence if tried today.⁵ See Part I for YUPP’s involvement with clemency following the 2016 Presidential election.

Collateral Consequences: The various consequences which are beyond the terms of the conviction under federal and state laws, but not intended by the judge while convicting. It is the result of the arrest, prosecution or conviction that is not part of the sentence imposed. For example, disenfranchisement, disqualification of education loans, loss of professional licenses, or eviction from public housing are the collateral consequences attached with the conviction for felony.

Correctional Education: Prisons are mandated to offer a certain level of facility-organized educational opportunity. At Manson YI, that includes GED education taught by teachers from the facility. We support this programming with supplemental tutoring. Our other programs are volunteer-based and run through family reentry. Formal prison education programs like the Bard Prison Initiative, Wesleyan CPE, and the Yale Prison Education Initiative offer credits outside the structure of USD #1, the largest public school district in CT, which operates entirely within the state’s prison system.

Halfway House: A halfway house is an institution designed to provide people with criminal backgrounds with the skills necessary to reintegrate into society. For a closer look on the role of halfway houses in New Haven reentry efforts, a look at their effectiveness, conditions, and availability, check out Madeline Colbert’s series “Prisons Outside of Prison” in *The Politic*.

Jail versus Prison: A **jail** is a facility that houses three types of incarcerated people: 1) people who have been arrested and are being held before a plea agreement, trial, or sentencing, 2) people who have been convicted of a *misdemeanor* criminal offense and are serving a sentence of less than 1 year, and 3)

⁴ <http://criticalresistance.org/about/not-so-common-language/>

⁵ <https://www.cjpf.org/clemency/>

people who have been sentenced to prison and are about to be transferred to another facility. A **prison**, on the other hand, is a facility that houses people who have been convicted of a felony criminal offense and are serving a sentence of 1 year or more. Whereas jails are operated by a county or city government, prisons are operated by a state government or the federal government.

Mass Incarceration: “Mass incarceration is a massive system of racial and social control. It is the process by which people are swept into the criminal legal system, branded criminals and felons, locked up for longer periods of time than most other countries in the world who incarcerate people who have been convicted of crimes, and then released into a permanent second-class status in which they are stripped of basic civil and human rights, like the right to vote, the right to serve on juries, and the right to be free of legal discrimination in employment, housing, access to public benefits...It is a system that operates to control people, often at early ages, and virtually all aspects of their lives after they have been viewed as suspects in some kind of crime.” – Michelle Alexander⁷

Parole: Parole refers to the decision to release an incarcerated individual from a confinement facility prior to the expiration of his or her sentence on the condition that the individual continue to be monitored and remain in compliance with certain terms and conditions for a specified period of time. For more information on the system of parole in Connecticut, check out Life on Parole, a documentary that follows four formerly incarcerated individuals during their first year on parole. In the state of Connecticut there is an effort to rethink the parole system. As a result, rather than immediately sending people who violate their parole back to prison, parole officers can choose to give people on parole a second chance for minor infractions; however, not all officers choose to operate this way.

Probation: Probation, like parole, is an alternative to incarceration, and the individual on probation is expected to follow certain rules and guidelines. However, while parole is an early release from prison, probation occurs prior to—and often in place of—prison time.

Pretrial Detention: Pretrial detention refers to the detaining of an accused person in a criminal case before the trial has taken place either because the accused person has failed to post bail or because he or she has been denied release under a pre-trial detention statute (ie: Bail Reform Act of 1984 authorizes a judge to detain a federal criminal defendant if the judge has reasonable doubt that the defendant will appear at trial, or if the judge believes the defendant will cause harm to the community).⁹ Yale students started the Connecticut Bail Fund (see Part I) in order to help address the former reason for pretrial detention: the fact that “thousands of people are jailed simply because they cannot afford bail.”¹⁰

Prison Industrial Complex (PIC): “The prison industrial complex (PIC) is a term we use to describe the overlapping interests of government and industry that use surveillance, policing, and imprisonment as solutions to economic, social and political problems. Through its reach and impact, the PIC helps and maintains the authority of people who get their power through racial, economic and other privileges. There are many ways this power is collected and maintained through the PIC, including creating mass media images that keep alive stereotypes of people of color, poor people, queer people,

⁶ <http://cleminfostrategies.com/whats-the-difference-between-prison-and-jail/>

⁷ Michelle Alexander, interview with *Frontline*

⁸ <https://www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=qa&iid=324>

⁹ <https://definitions.uslegal.com/p/pre-trial-detention/>

¹⁰ <http://www.ctbailfund.org/>

immigrants, youth, and other oppressed communities as criminal, delinquent, or deviant. This power is also maintained by earning huge profits for private companies that deal with prisons and police forces; helping earn political gains for “tough on crime” politicians; increasing the influence of prison guard and police unions; and eliminating social and political dissent by oppressed communities that make demands for self-determination and reorganization of power in the US.”¹¹

Reentry: Reentry refers to the process by which an incarcerated individual transitions into their community after being released from prison. Challenges of reentry include finding employment, housing, and a support system.

School-to-Prison Pipeline: This phrase refers to the national trend whereby children are “funneled out of public schools and into the juvenile and criminal legal systems.” Many of these students have learning disabilities or come from environments characterized by poverty, abuse, or neglect.¹²

Solitary Confinement: Solitary confinement is the isolation of an incarcerated person in a separate cell as a form of punishment. Over the past few years, YUPP advocacy has focused on initiatives aimed at curtailing the use of solitary confinement in Connecticut prisons (see Part I). David McGuire, executive director of the ACLU of Connecticut, has stated that “Solitary confinement is an outdated, ineffective, expensive, and harmful form of imprisonment.” In June 2017, Gov. Dannel Malloy signed a bill that will reform the practice by preventing anyone under the age of 18 from being placed in solitary confinement. However, many feel that the new law does not go far enough. A federal inspector general’s report determined that “isolation can cause anxiety, depression, anger, paranoia, and disturbances among prisoners” and those who have been held in solitary are “more likely to be repeat offenders and have problems integrating back into their communities.”¹³

¹¹ <http://criticalresistance.org/about/not-so-common-language/>

¹² <https://www.aclu.org/issues/juvenile-justice/school-prison-pipeline>

¹³ <https://ctmirror.org/2017/08/07/ct-civil-rights-panel-seeks-greater-protections-on-solitary-confinement/>

TERMINOLOGY: WORDS MATTER

“We need to break down the dichotomy of ‘us versus them,’ ‘clean versus criminal’” said Emily Baxter, director of the *We Are All Criminals* initiative. As an organization, YUPP believes it is important to change the way people speak about incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people in everyday language in order to reduce the stigma around felony convictions

In order to be mindful and supportive of those who are or have been involved with the justice system, we encourage YUPP tutors and mentors to refer to the language in the chart below¹⁴ when speaking to or about people who have served time in the United States’ prison system:

WORDS TO AVOID	WORDS TO USE INSTEAD
Ex-offender; Ex-inmate; Ex-felon; Ex-convict; Ex-con; Ex-prisoner	Individual, person, man, woman with prior or current justice system involvement; Justice-involved individual, person, man, woman; Formerly incarcerated individual, person, man, woman; Returning citizen; People affected by the justice system
Inmate; Prisoner	Person that is currently incarcerated; Incarcerated individual, person, man, woman
Convict; Offender; Felon; Criminal; Delinquent; Juvenile Delinquent; Juvenile Offender	Incarcerated individual, person, man, woman; Justice-involved individual, person, man, woman
Parolee; Probationer; Detainee	Person on parole; Person on probation; Person in detention
Homeless people	Persons or people experiencing homelessness

There are a number of people who argue that words such as “incarcerated individual” are too mild and fail to convey to the public the dehumanizing experience of being locked up. Consequently, such people prefer to use the words “inmate,” “prisoner,” or “detainee” to communicate the punitive and unjust experience of being behind bars and the degree to which incarceration strips one of his or her personhood.

Nevertheless, an article produced by Fortune Society, entitled “Words Matter,” reveals the degree to which words such as “inmate” and “prisoner” are dehumanizing labels, and terms such as “ex-inmate” or “ex-felon” serve to stigmatize people affected by the criminal legal system after their release. Fortune Society states that individuals should not be defined by their conviction history. By referring to someone as an “inmate” or an “ex-inmate,” one implicitly fails to acknowledge the incarcerated or formerly incarcerated person’s full identity, instead reducing one’s entire personhood to a noun conveying a past deed. Moreover, such terminology fails to acknowledge the capacity of those who have served time in prison to grow or change.

¹⁴ Fortune Society

Part V: Informational Pages

A Guide to Working With Community Members, Organizers, and Activists

Sources: [We Repair](#)

YUPP Advocacy 2020-2021

Introduction: It is important to acknowledge that all of our members come to YUPP with different experiences. Some have worked with organizers and activists closely, others have not. The goal of this guide is to provide all members with a baseline of things to keep in mind. This is not an instruction manual of how to go about every interaction you have with an organizer or activist. Instead, it's meant to promote respect for all persons we work with & to provide a framework for acknowledging our positions as Yale students.

I. Acknowledgement of The Work Organizers Have Done and Continue to Do

- A. While as YUPP Advocacy members you have taken the time and initiative to advocate for your respective project, most organizers and activists have been advocating for years. Additionally, many of them have personal connections to the community they are advocating for and/or the issue they are organizing around. Considering this, throughout your time working with community organizers and activists, incorporate acknowledgements of the work they have done and are doing. Direct acknowledgements in an email or conversation display an awareness of the space you are stepping into and what has been done to create that space. In addition to making direct acknowledgements, frame your suggestions, questions, and insight, in a way that builds off of the work that has already been done as opposed to building over it. Remember, the mission of YUPP Advocacy is to prioritize the voices of justice impacted persons and use the resources we have in support of the community members who have and continue to do this work.

II. Respectful Communication

- A. Respectful communication is important to have both within YUPP and when working with our partners outside of YUPP. Respectful communication involves fully listening to the statements of others and having the chance to consciously share yours.
- B. YUPP Advocacy consists of a variety of individuals with varying backgrounds and experiences. Additionally, as Advocacy members, we all share the privilege of

attending Yale. Considering both of those statements here are some additional points to keep in mind to ensure you are communicating respectfully. (via *werepair.org*)

KEEP POWER DYNAMICS IN MIND

Remember power dynamics change based on individual's identities. Be cognizant of the fact that some voices and identities have been given privilege while other voices and identities have been discriminated against.

1.

USE FACTS GRACIOUSLY - NOT TO SHUT DOWN A CONVERSATION

Remind people that this is a conversation. Everyone's personal experience matters. Recommend that people share information to deepen the discussion, not to shut down the conversation.

AVOID "RIGHT" AND "WRONG"

While some opinions are commonly accepted as "right," it is unproductive for conversations like these to cast someone's statements or beliefs as "wrong." Instead, refer back to speaking from one's personal experience.

2.

BE INTENTIONAL ABOUT YOUR LANGUAGE

Think about the language you are using, not just in terms of intent, but also in terms of impact. If someone says something you hear as offensive, consider that they may not realize they have said something hurtful. If someone calls you out for saying something offensive, remember that your intent can be different than your impact.

C. If you have invited organizers and activists to your meeting or conversation here are some tips about creating a space for respectful conversations. (via *werepair.org*)

ESTABLISH GROUP GROUND RULES

These could be formal, such as "whoever holds this spoon speaks," or "if you agree, snap your fingers." These rules could also be informal, including "whatever is said in this room, stays in this room."

1.

PROVIDE SPACE FOR EVERYONE TO HAVE A VOICE

Individuals who are most comfortable expressing their opinions out loud can dominate conversations. The facilitator should respectfully invite others to share their opinions if a few voices begin to dominate the conversation.

USE "I" STATEMENTS

Individuals can only speak to their own experiences. Do not look to others to speak on behalf of their race, gender, ethnicity, or other groups they may identify as being a part of.

2.

3. Other things to keep in mind:

- a) Is the space welcoming?
- b) Is the space accessible? (Can the information be shared with those without Zoom, can captioning be available?)

III. Self-Awareness

A. This guide seeks to provide tips and suggestions for communicating and working with organizers, activists, and all community members. However, every experience and communication will be unique and circumstantial. Therefore, while these tips and suggestions may be applicable in some scenarios, it is always important to have

self-awareness of your presence, the impact of your words, and the results of your actions.

IV. Doing Work for an Organization or Organizer

- A. When working in partnership with local organizations, community organizers and activists, our main goal is to dedicate our time and resources to them. Therefore, communicate with your partners to establish specific work, research, and organizing you can do for them. Hold yourself accountable to complete work assigned to your group in a timely manner.

V. Initiating Projects Related to the work of Organization or Organizer

- A. YUPP Advocacy also does work related to raising awareness at Yale along with initiating projects that can support CT organizers (for example CT Police Brutality Database). While the leadership and majority of work for these projects will fall on YUPP Advocacy members, it is always in the best spirit to loop-in your partners and offer them a convenient way or providing suggestions or input.
 1. If you are doing a teach-in - ask what topics they think it would be beneficial to talk about, what facts they would like you to include, and invite them to speak.
 2. If you are initiating a project find a time to meet and show them an outline with the mission and goals of the project. Ask for input and feedback. Emphasize that the intention of the project is to further support the work they're doing!

A Guide to Lobbying:

Sources: DC Bar: [DC Bar Pro Bono Center](#), [Preservation Action](#),

What is lobbying? Lobbying is defined as “attempting to influence legislation.”

Legislation includes:

- ... Actions by the Congress, state legislatures, city councils, or other elected bodies with respect to bills or resolutions
- ... Confirmation of an individual for office
- ... Ballot initiatives

Legislation does **NOT** include:

- ... Actions taken by courts, administrative agencies, or other executive branch bodies.

To influence legislation is to contact and/or urge the public to contact a legislative body and urge them to support the adoption or rejection of legislation.

Lobbying refers to the action and advocacy around a specific piece of legislation. If communication does not refer to or reflect a view on a specific legislative proposal it may be considered issue advocacy.

The Lobbying Process: Basics and How-To Guide



Lobbying and direct contact with policymakers are critical components of an advocacy campaign and can be instrumental in achieving the desired policy change. Lobbying refers to asking an elected official or key decision-maker to vote a certain way or take a specific stand on a piece of legislation, rule, issue or policy. One of the most persuasive forms of lobbying is a face-to-face meeting with your elected officials or her/his staff about the issue at stake, why you are passionate about the issue, and the position you'd like your member of Congress to take.

It's important to remember that lobbying is part of a comprehensive strategy to win on your issue or achieve the policy change you want. Lobbying builds relationships with elected officials and educates them, develops leaders and their credibility within your organization or network, and sets the stage for ongoing advocacy. Lobbying also serves as a complement to network- or base-building and media advocacy – all three strategies work together to create a successful advocacy campaign.

Meeting with your elected official does not have to be an intimidating process. After all, you hold a great deal of influence as a constituent! Below are some helpful tips to help you navigate the lobbying process.

Before the Meeting

Research the Issue and Lawmaker

Before setting up a meeting, it is important to make sure you have done your homework about the issue at stake and the elected official you would like to meet with in person. Some questions to consider include:

Issue questions

- Is lobbying the appropriate action for your campaign? Which public body is making the decision (e.g. Congress, Administration)?
- Who are the key decision-makers (e.g. committee chairs or members, caucus leaders, party leadership)?
- When is the issue or legislation coming up for a hearing or vote?
- Who is lobbying in support of the issue and who is lobbying against the issue? What are their arguments and messages?

Lawmaker questions

- Does your elected official generally support or oppose your issue?
- What is your lawmaker's voting record on the issue at stake or on similar issues? A good resource for voting records and issue ratings is Project Vote Smart: www.votesmart.org.
- If you are meeting about a specific piece of legislation, is your elected official a co-sponsor? This information can be located by visiting the Library of Congress website - <http://thomas.loc.gov> and entering the bill name or number and clicking on the co-sponsor list.
- What other background information would be useful in crafting your messages and your "ask?" This may include your legislator's party affiliation, whether your lawmaker is a "champion" on certain issues, the demographics of his or her district, and whether s/he is up for re-election.

Schedule the Meeting with your Elected Official

Most legislators are eager to meet with their constituents – your opinions are valuable! Keep in mind that you do not need to be an expert to get your point across. Brief background about the issue, a personal story and a clear “ask” is more powerful than presenting a ten-point plan or a litany of facts. There is also power in numbers – setting up a meeting along with 3-4 like-minded individuals can help showcase even stronger support for your issue.

Meetings with legislators or their staff can be scheduled at the district level or at their offices in Washington, D.C. Members of Congress typically like to use recess periods to spend time in their districts, which presents a perfect opportunity to set up a meeting close to home. Alternatively, members of Congress are impressed by constituents who are willing to make a personal visit to their Washington, D.C. office.

To request a meeting with your Senators or Representative

- Call the U.S. Senate Switchboard at 202.224.3121 or the U.S. House Switchboard at 202.225.3121. District telephone numbers can be found on your elected official’s personal websites or in your local telephone book.
- Ask to speak with the scheduler or appointments secretary, introduce yourself as a constituent, and mention where you live.
- Tell the scheduler which issue or legislation you would like to discuss with your elected official and request a meeting (usually 15-30 minutes). It is not uncommon to only receive a 10-15 minute appointment.
- If you cannot meet directly with your member of Congress, you can schedule an appointment with the legislative aide responsible for your issues.
- Be sure to send a follow-up letter or email confirming your appointment. Your follow-up letter should contain your name, address, and daytime phone number.

Finalize Pre-Meeting Details

If you are meeting with your elected official in a small coalition, it is important to determine prior to the meeting who your spokesperson or lead speaker will be, who will answer specific questions, who will take notes, and who will write a follow-up thank you letter.

Regardless of whether you are meeting with your legislator by yourself or with a group, you should be clear about:

- Your message
- The resources you want to leave behind
- Your ultimate “ask”

It is also a good idea to practice what you want to say and how you will deal with difficult questions before the meeting takes place.



During the Meeting: Tips for Success

- Dress nicely and be on time. First impressions matter – do not let your appearance detract from your message or credibility.
- If you represent an organization, introduce yourself and tell your elected official or staff person the name and mission of your organization, where it is located and the size of its membership. If you are lobbying as an individual, be sure to introduce yourself as a constituent and to mention any family, social or business ties you may have with the legislator.
- Start with a supportive statement. For instance, if the legislator recently voted in favor of a related issue you care about, mention that. At minimum, thank your elected official for taking the time to meet with you.
- State clearly and concisely what issue you want to discuss, what your position is, and what action you want your elected official to take. Use simple, understandable terms and avoid acronyms. Offer a few supporting facts about why s/he should take your position.
- Stress how the issue will affect the member's district or state, if possible.
- Share a personal story or concrete examples that highlight your experience with the issue and why you care about it.
- Mention other organizations, influential people, government officials and lawmakers that support your position.
- Be a good listener. After you make your pitch, allow the legislator to respond. Be prepared to bring the conversation back to your message and ask if the lawmaker goes off tangent.
- Answer questions to the best of your ability. If you do not know the answer, say so. Offer to provide the information promptly in a follow-up email or letter.
- Do not forget to explicitly make your "ask." Pose a direct, yes-or-no question to which the legislator can respond. An example would be "Can we count on you to co-sponsor the bill?" Be prepared for how you will respond to your member's position. Have a plan to turn a "Yes" into a champion, an "Undecided" into a yes, and to learn from the objections of a "No."
- Give the lawmaker a "leave behind" fact sheet (1-2) pages that outlines your position, explains what the bill does (if applicable), and why s/he should support your viewpoint.
- Always thank your legislator for his/her time at the end of the meeting, even if he/she did not agree with your position.

Adapted from the One Voice Summit 2009 Advocacy Guide and Wellstone Action's "Lobbying Basics."



After the Meeting

Immediate Steps

- After the meeting, write down what happened and any information you learned about the member's position so you can share it with others and use it to develop your legislative advocacy strategy.
- Always follow up with a timely thank you letter. In the letter, reiterate your key points and any commitments the members made to you. Include all follow-up information you promised to provide.

Evaluate Legislative Advocacy Strategy

- If the elected official was a "Yes" or longtime supporter of your issue, work to cultivate him/her as a champion. Champions are important in that they can assume a leadership role in influencing other legislators. For instance, if asked your elected official might be interested in circulating a "Dear Colleague" letter to garner additional support from other lawmakers about your issue.
- If the legislator was a "Maybe," make every effort to organize grassroots advocacy efforts to swing her/his opinion or vote.
- If the legislator was a clear "No," constituent pressure may persuade her/him to be absent at the time of the vote. Regardless, do not spend significant time trying to persuade someone who is opposed to your position - your energies are better spent on convincing the "Maybes" and cultivating "Champions."

