



HealthVoices

Health Advocacy 101: How Do I...Become a Successful Advocate?

Issue 3, 2013

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This "How to" brief is designed to be a handy resource for people interested in becoming effective advocates for an organization or issue. It contains useful web site addresses for the legislative and executive offices at the state and federal levels, along with techniques and tips for successful advocacy.

How Do I...

Find my elected official's name and contact information?

www.votesmart.org

This multipurpose web site is an easy way to identify which elected official represents a particular locale. By typing in a nine-digit zip code or a complete address, you can identify which federal and state officials represent any area of the state. The site is easy to navigate and provides a great deal of useful information.

Reach a member of the Georgia House or Senate?

www.legis.ga.gov

The Georgia General Assembly web site is an indispensable tool that professional lobbyists use on a regular basis. Once you access this site, simply click on the House or Senate tabs to locate a legislator by name along with contact information. Some legislators list a personal email on their bio page at the General Assembly site. Any legislator can be reached by using the following email format:

First.lastname@house.ga.gov

First.lastname@senate.ga.gov

Find and track a piece of Georgia legislation?

www.legis.ga.gov

If you know the bill number, just plug it in at the top of General Assembly web site and go directly to the page providing the current status and full history of the bill. Or, you may click **Advanced Search** to find a bill using the author's name or key words. Always click on **Open Current Version** near the bottom of the page once you find the bill you are searching for. Remember to distinguish between House bills, House resolutions, Senate bills and Senate resolutions when making your search. Bills have the effect of law; resolutions do not. However, constitutional amendments are introduced as resolutions since they do not have the effect of law unless passed on a general election ballot. Resolutions, including constitutional amendments, do not have to be signed by the Governor.

Know when General Assembly committees will meet?

www.legis.ga.gov

At the General Assembly site, click on the **House** tab, then **Meetings Calendar**. Under the Senate tab, click on **Committees**, then **Committee Meetings Calendar**. Sometimes committee meeting notices will also contain the committee's agenda. Agendas and meetings are ALWAYS subject to last-minute changes. If the agenda is important to you,

call the Chairman's office the day of the meeting and ask if the bill in question is on the agenda and if the meeting will be held as scheduled.

Testify at a committee hearing?

At the Georgia General Assembly every committee chair handles public testimony in his or her own way. To testify about a bill at a committee hearing, it is essential to contact the chairman's office and speak directly with staff about your request. Be sure to ask if there will be a time limit on your testimony. Specifics surrounding committee hearings change frequently and often at the last minute. Always check in the day before the hearing to determine if any details have changed.

Prepare written testimony for a committee?

Written testimony can supplement or replace oral testimony before a committee. While written testimony can be more in-depth than oral, keep in mind the harried legislator or staffer who has to read yours, along with several others during a hectic session. Written testimony should be to the point, contain charts, graphs, or statistics that support a thesis, and reach a conclusion. Be sure to answer the legislature's over-arching question: "What do you want us to do?"



At Healthcare Georgia Foundation, effective advocacy means providing accurate and timely information, raising the visibility of important issues, giving voice to underserved populations, or influencing the allocation of resources.

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Find out what's in the state budget?

www.opb.georgia.gov

www.house.ga.gov/budget

www.senate.ga.gov/budget

The first budget document available to the public is the Governor's Budget Report, generally made available in January about the third day of each new legislative session. It can be found at the Office of Planning and Budget (OPB) web site listed above. The House considers the budget next, followed by the Senate. Their respective changes can be found at the House and Senate sites listed above. The easiest document to use is the "tracking sheet." Georgia uses a "continuation" budget system. Thus, only those items that are being changed from the previous year are listed. If a line item exists in the current budget and is not being changed, it will NOT appear in the tracking document for the proposed budget. It will remain at the same amount as the previous year. If a line item was not in the previous budget and is not listed in the new budget by the Governor, House or Senate, it will not be included in the new budget. Georgia has recently begun requiring a few agencies each year to do zero-based budgeting (ZBB). This requirement rotates among agencies, but essentially will make all line items new for that agency.

Contact a state agency?

<http://georgia.gov/agency-list>

Contact information for all of Georgia's state agencies and offices is listed on this web site. If you don't know the name of the agency you need, you can also click on one of several categories (such as social services) to review an agency list.

Find Georgia's current law on a particular subject?

www.legis.ga.gov

To find out what the current law is on a given topic, go to the site above and click on Georgia Code. When you type in your search terms, be sure to **UN**click **Table of Contents Only**.

Make friends and influence legislators?

The key to any advocacy effort is developing relationships with people—elected officials, legislative and agency staff, the news media and lobbyists representing other organizations. That process takes time, but can be accelerated by attending committee and other meetings regularly, becoming a resource for information about your area of expertise, being accessible and responding quickly when others ask for information, and sharing information in a concise and easy to understand format. Always tell the truth and avoid exaggerating the positives or negatives of any issue.

Present information to legislators and staff?

A written communication can be successful only if it gets read. Don't waste time on an expansive "white paper" unless a legislator has requested it. Give officials and staff something that can be read quickly and is easy to digest. Complicated issues should be broken up into simpler parts. Bullet-point papers are popular for a reason—they get read!

Tell the truth. Those on the other side of the issue will be talking to the same legislators you do.

Work with other organizations?

<http://ethics.ga.gov>

www.galobbyists.org

Few major bills pass the legislature without being vetted or changed by one or more advocacy groups. Thus, it's important to engage with other organizations and concerns affected by the bill you support. To find out who represents which organizations, visit the state "Ethics" web site. You can search by lobbyist name or organization name.

It's important to understand that every organization has its own perspective on legislation. Therefore, be respectful of other points of view, and look for areas where you can compromise without overly diluting your position.

Above all, get to know other lobbyists in the Capitol hallways. One way to do this is to join the Georgia Professional Lobbyists Association. You can search for current members and learn more about lobbyist training events at the GPLA web site listed above.

Learning from other successful advocacy efforts may also prove helpful. Here is a list of organizations whose methods and approaches are worth observing:

- American Association of Retired Persons
- Georgia Budget and Policy Institute
- Healthcare Georgia Foundation
- American College of Physicians Georgia Chapter
- Voices for Georgia's Children
- Georgia Watch
- Georgia Equality

Learn more about advocacy at the state legislature?

www.healthcaregeorgia.org

Go to the Healthcare Georgia Foundation site listed above. Click on **Publications and Research**, then **HealthVoices**. There you will find a two-part series on Successful Advocacy at the State Legislature.

"Legislators listen to advocates because it's the advocates who know what happens when regulations meet reality."

—Senator Renee Unterman



HealthVoices

Engage the news media?

www.healthcaregeorgia.org

The news media can be an important player in your bid to pass, change or stop a piece of legislation. As always in the advocacy business, developing personal relationships with reporters and editors is the best way to accomplish your goals. For excellent guidance on dealing with the news media go to the Healthcare Georgia Foundation web site listed above. Click on **Publications and Research**, then **Grantee Publications**. Click on **Media Relations Strategy, Tracking and Evaluation Essentials for Nonprofit Organizations**.

Register to become a state lobbyist?

<http://ethics.ga.gov>

Questions about lobbying...Am I a lobbyist? Do I need to register? How much does it cost? When do I file reports? How do I register?...are all answered at the web site of the Georgia Government Transparency and Campaign Finance Commission (generally known as the Ethics Commission). Be very aware of posted filing deadlines. Penalties are severe.

Make a campaign contribution?

<http://ethics.ga.gov>

www.fec.gov/pages/brochures/fecfecsa.shtml

Campaign contribution rules differ for Georgia and federal level offices. For example, a business may make a direct campaign contribution to a state level candidate, but not to a federal candidate. Also, the limits for campaign contributions to candidates for state office differ based on the type of office and whether you are donating to a primary, general or run-off election. To see how much you can contribute to a state candidate, go to the state "Ethics" web site, click on **Candidates**, and then click on **Campaign Contribution Limits**. To access campaign limits and rules for federal level candidates, visit the Federal Elections Commission web site above.

If you do not know the precise name of the candidate's campaign, make your check payable to: First Name Last Name Campaign. Write "Campaign Contribution" on the "For" line of the check. Include your name, address and occupation with a letter stating the amount of your contribution. Mail it to the candidate, or better yet, attend a fundraising event and speak with the candidate in person. The candidate must report all campaign contributions. In Georgia, the contributor does not make a report unless his or her total contributions exceed \$25,000 per annum.

Contact my federal representatives?

www.uscongresshandbook.com

If you plan to take your case to Washington, an invaluable aid is the "U.S. Congress Handbook." To obtain one, go to the address above and order online. There are several editions to choose from (with different emphasis), all in the \$20 range. This resource contains all the contact information you will need except email addresses, which can be obtained by calling individual Congressional offices. When ordering, be sure to sign up for updates, as there is frequent staff turnover in Congressional offices. In the back of the book you'll find contact information for the Office of the President and more than 100 federal agencies, councils and boards. Additionally, there's a foldout map of central Washington with a close-up of the Capitol Hill area on one side. Congressional office buildings are shown and labeled.

Use email to contact your Washington representatives. Hard copy letters may take weeks to arrive because they are routed through security precautions far away from the Capitol.

Make sure I am in compliance with lobbying rules for Non-profits?

The IRS has issued this guidance:

In general, no organization may qualify for section 501(c)(3) status if a substantial part of its activities is attempting to influence legislation (commonly known as lobbying). A 501(c)(3) organization may engage in some lobbying, but too much lobbying activity risks loss of tax-exempt status.

Legislation includes action by Congress, any state legislature, any local council, or similar governing body, with respect to acts, bills, resolutions, or similar items (such as legislative confirmation of appointive office), or by the public in referendum, ballot initiative, constitutional amendment, or similar procedure. It does not include actions by executive, judicial, or administrative bodies.

An organization will be regarded as attempting to influence legislation if it contacts, or urges the public to contact, members or employees of a legislative body for the purpose of proposing, supporting, or opposing legislation, or if the organization advocates the adoption or rejection of legislation.

Organizations may, however, involve themselves in issues of public policy without the activity being considered as lobbying. For example, organizations may conduct educational meetings, prepare and distribute educational materials, or otherwise consider public policy issues in an educational manner without jeopardizing their tax-exempt status.

Organizations are strongly encouraged to also review the guidance provided in grants and contracts with respect to lobbying restrictions.



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Healthcare Georgia Foundation is a catalyst for better health and health care in Georgia.

Through strategic grantmaking, Healthcare Georgia Foundation supports organizations that drive positive change; promotes programs that improve health and health care among underserved individuals and communities; and connects people, partners and resources across Georgia.

HealthVoices is published periodically by Healthcare Georgia Foundation as an educational service to Georgians interested in health policy.

HealthVoices is available online at www.healthcaregeorgia.org. For further information, please contact Toni Almasy, Avatar Communications, 404-688-9005 or toni@getavatar.com.

Healthcare Georgia Foundation is a statewide, private independent foundation whose mission is to advance the health of all Georgians and to expand access to affordable, quality health care for underserved individuals and communities.

