

# Advocacy Toolbox and the Art of Persuasion

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## Lesson at a Glance

**Legislative Process Review and the Advocacy Toolbox (15 min):** Participants will put the legislative process cards in order and discuss where they can get involved in the process.

**Practicing Persuasive Writing (30 min):** Participants will choose issues to practice writing letters to their representatives and local policy makers.

**Conclusion (5 min):** Share out, legislative process and toolbox review, and questions.

## Learner Outcomes

### Participants will:

- Review the basic legislative process.
- Understand the many ways in which they can get involved in the legislative process and advocate for public lands and waters.
- Practice persuasive letter writing.

## Getting Ready

**Time:** 50 min

**Materials:** Multiple sets of legislative process cards based on groups size, flip chart, markers, paper, pencils

**Preparation:** None

**Location:** Indoor or outdoor with room to sit in a circle.

**Objective:** To create a public lands advocacy toolbox and practice persuasive letter writing and arguments.

## Legislative Process Review (15 min)

1. Explain to participants that having a basic understanding of the federal decision making process can help you be actively involved in federal public lands protection.
2. Divide participants into groups of 2-5 people and pass out sets of legislative process cards to each group. Allow 2-3 minutes for each group to put the process cards in order. Allow each group to report out and discuss the results. As you review the correct order, ask the group where they think it's possible for constituents to get involved in the process, noted by the \*\*.
  - a. **Idea for change** — an individual or group is motivated to make their community better. \*\*These come from you!
  - b. **Coalition building** — a group of concerned and/or affected people, businesses, and organizations work together to create a shared vision for a legislative proposal. \*\*Get involved with organizations that are part of coalitions looking to put forward legislation, attend informational meetings, tell businesses that you support their work, help gather letters of support and petition signatures.
  - c. **Congressional sponsor recruitment** — the coalition identifies and recruits a senator or representative to introduce the bill in Congress. \*\*Contact your elected official and let them know that you support or oppose potential legislation.
  - d. **Introduction into Congress** — the sponsor in either the House or the Senate introduces the bill for consideration.
  - e. **Committee consideration** — the bill is sent to one or more committees. The committees generally hold a hearing, amend the bill, then vote on the bill. If the committee passes the bill, it is sent to the full House or Senate for a vote.
  - f. **Floor debate or unanimous consent** — the bill goes to the floor of the House or Senate for floor debate prior to a vote. Bills that are not controversial bypass the floor debate process and get approved by unanimous consent. \*\*Contact your elected officials and let them know you support or oppose the bill.
  - g. **Vote** — bills must pass in both the House of Representatives and the Senate. \*\*Contact your elected officials and let them know you support or oppose the bill.

- h. **Presidential signature/veto** — if the bill passes in both chambers it is sent to the president. The president signs the bill into law or vetoes the bill and sends it back to Congress.
3. Discuss other tactics in the “Advocacy Toolbox”, including:
    - a. Visit your public lands and share enjoyment with all people
    - b. Stay informed and educated on public lands issues so you can weigh in
    - c. Join organizations that monitor public lands projects and support their work
    - d. Make public comments and participate in community hearings on public lands decisions
    - e. Use social media to amplify your voice in support of public lands
    - f. Volunteer to help maintain public lands near you
    - g. Call and/or write a letter to your federal and local policy makers when public lands bills are up for vote
    - h. Vote!
    - i. Run for office and champion conservation of our public lands for all people
    - j. Organize peaceful demonstrations, rallies and marches to encourage public engagement

### Practicing Persuasive Writing (30 min)

1. Explain that one of the most effective ways to advocate for what you believe in is to write, email, or call your representatives in Congress or local policy makers. Persuasive writing is an art and there are some basic tips that can help you get your point across clearly and concisely. Write the tips on paper or a whiteboard.
  - a. **Identify who you are:** Depending on the scenario, introduce yourself. If writing to a legislator, make sure they know that you are a constituent by including your address.
  - b. **Get to the point:** Early in your message you should highlight specifically what you are communicating about. Be as specific with this as possible. List the name of the bill or legislation if applicable.
  - c. **Identify why it matters:** Help your audience make a connection as to why it matters to them. Personal stories or anecdotes can be a good way of doing this.
  - d. **Call to action:** Finish the message with a call to action—either asking a decision maker to do something or asking people to help your advocacy campaign by doing something.

2. Ask each participant to identify an issue they care about. It can be related to the environment, conservation, or something different.
3. Ask each student to write one message. They can choose the issue, their stance, and their audience and the message can be in the form of an email, letter, or script for a phone call to their representative.
4. When the participants are finished with their message, ask them to pair up and share their message, offering feedback for their partner. Ask the participants to consider the following:

*Is it clear what their stance on the issue is?*

*Is there a clear call to action tied to the message?*

### Conclusion (5 min)

1. Ask the group if anyone is willing to share their persuasive message with the group.
2. Note that contacting elected officials has shown to be a very powerful way to advocate for issues that are important. Review the advocacy toolbox and solicit questions.

#### Adapt the lesson

For groups needing more physical activity, consider making the legislative process review into a relay race.

Consider assigning locally relevant topics for participants to craft their persuasive messages.

If more time is available, participants could practice persuasive speeches by role playing local lawmakers and concerned citizens. Allow time to frontload the roles and issues so participants can prepare their arguments and responses.