What is Advocacy?

While all lobbying is advocacy, not all advocacy is lobbying. Advocacy is any action that speaks in favor of, recommends, argues for a cause, supports or defends, or pleads on behalf of others. It includes public education, regulatory work, litigation, and work before administrative bodies, lobbying, voter registration, voter education, and more. ([http://bolderadvocacy.org/afj-on-advocacy/glossary](http://bolderadvocacy.org/afj-on-advocacy/glossary))

Legislative Advocacy – What you need to know.

Legislative Advocacy: Efforts to change policy through the legislative branch of government. This may include lobbying or other communications with the legislative branch that do not meet the definition of lobbying. ([http://bolderadvocacy.org/afj-on-advocacy/glossary](http://bolderadvocacy.org/afj-on-advocacy/glossary))

Understanding the System:

- Three Branches of NYS Government:
  - Executive Branch – Governor
  - Legislative Branch – NYS Legislature (213 Members)
  - Judicial Branch – NYS Supreme Court (7 Judges)
- NYS Legislature is comprised of two houses:
  - NYS Assembly
    - 150 members; 2 year terms
    - Democratic majority in 2015 (104-44)
    - 2015 Speaker of the Assembly Carl Heastie (Bronx – D)
    - To determine who represents you in the Assembly, go to: [www.assembly.state.ny.us](http://assembly.state.ny.us)
  - NYS Senate
    - 63 members; 2 year terms
    - Republican majority in 2015 (33-30)
    - 2015 Senate Majority Leader Dean Skelos (Long Island – R)
    - To determine who represents you in the Senate, go to: [www.nysenate.gov](http://www.nysenate.gov)
  - Committees
    - All legislators are assigned to committees which focus on specific subject areas.
    - All bills must pass through the Assembly Ways and Means Committee, the Senate Finance Committee and the Rules Committee in both houses before they can be brought to a vote.
    - For a full list of Assembly committees and links to news and member lists go to: [http://assembly.state.ny.us/comm/](http://assembly.state.ny.us/comm/)
    - For a full list of Senate committees and links to news and member lists go to: [http://www.nysenate.gov/committees](http://www.nysenate.gov/committees)
Understanding the Process:

- Timing is everything!
  - The legislative cycle is two years long and consists of two sessions. Sessions begin in January with the Governor's "State of the State" address.
  - The Governor must propose a budget by the end of January each year and it must be approved by the legislature by April 1.
  - Once the budget passes, legislation becomes the focus of the session. Sessions usually conclude by the end of June with additional special sessions scheduled if there is urgent business.

- How a bill becomes a law.
  - First, a bill must be ideated, sponsored and drafted by a member of the legislature.
  - When the bill is introduced into the legislative house, members may co-sponsor and the bill will move through committees. Committee actions will clarify and revise the bill.
  - The bill will be reviewed by the Assembly Ways and Means Committee/Senate Finance Committee & the Rules Committees before the leader can bring it to the floor for a vote.
  - If bills with the EXACT same wording pass both houses, it moves to the Governor.
  - The Governor can veto OR sign the bill into law.
  - A very small percentage of bills that are introduced into the houses actually pass that house – even fewer pass both houses and become law.

Advocacy in Action:

- Know your issue.
  - Why is the issue important to you?
  - Who are the people that it affects? What are their stories?
  - What are the current relevant pieces of legislation and their status?
  - What supports the bill and why? Who opposes the bill and why?

- Know who you are talking to.
  - Are you a constituent of the legislator? If so, let them know!
  - What is the legislator's party?
  - What committees does s/he sit on?
  - How has the legislator voted on this bill or issue in the past?

- Know what you are asking.
  - Are you asking the legislator to introduce a bill, support or oppose legislation, become a co-sponsor, vote a particular way?
  - Are you educating the legislator on an issue that is important to his/her constituents and has legislative or budgetary implications?

- Know your communication strategy.
  - Letters:
    - Personal letters are best; form letters will not garner a personal response.
 Calls:
  - Calls are effective if you are prepared to have a more in depth conversation about the issue.

 Meetings:
  - Meetings convey passion about the issue.
  - District meetings are usually most effective if you are a constituent.
  - Large “Lobby Days” in Albany can be effective in showing broad-based support but individual meetings may get “lost in the shuffle.”
  - Meeting with legislative staff rather than the legislator directly is a common occurrence. Staff members may have subject-matter expertise and are able to easily convey important messages to the legislator.
  - Bring life to the issue by sharing personal stories about it affects constituents.
  - Bring clear and concise materials with you to leave with the legislator.
  - Be clear about your “ask.”
  - After the meeting, send hand-written thank you notes, provide answers to any lingering questions, and follow-up periodically on the issue/ask.

 More than just Legislation - Other Forms of Advocacy.

 Education and Awareness
  - General Advocacy Education
  - Organizing public forums
  - Public Awareness Campaigns
  - Organizing Public Forums
  - Stakeholder and Policymaker Education
  - Voter Education and Outreach

 Community Capacity Building
  - Community Organizing - Grassroots Mobilization
  - Attending Meetings
  - Convening Stakeholders - Coalition/Network Building
  - Leadership/Champion Development
  - Organizing Capacity Building Events

 Communication
  - Communication and Messaging
  - Using the Media
  - Community Mobilization - Organizing Calls to Action
  - Providing Testimony
  - Writing and Sending Sign-On and Support Letters
  - Writing Op-Ed pieces
  - Creating Public Education Resources

 Policy Analysis/Research
  - Model Legislation
  - Demonstration/Pilot Projects
  - Policy Research
  - Writing Policy Analysis/Position Papers