



City Councils  
Advocate Toolkit



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## Introduction: Advocating to City Councils

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This toolkit will help you reach out to your city council to educate them on the importance of arts, culture and arts education in Arizona.

Elected officials from all levels of government repeatedly stress how important it is that they and their staffs receive information about the need to pass legislation, funding and more. During this economic crisis we must work harder than ever to secure funding for arts and arts education in Arizona. Your city council needs to hear from you.

Speaking with elected officials to educate them on a particular issue or to impact their views on policy decisions that affect the lives of the people they represent is a right and responsibility of people in a democracy. We all have the power to affect change in our government.

This toolkit is focused on city councils in Arizona. We hope that the information within will help you use your voice and advocate for the arts, culture and arts education in Arizona.

## 5 Steps to Effective Advocacy

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1. Educate yourself
2. Educate your elected officials/Meet your elected officials
3. Attend council meetings regularly
4. Actively participate as a constituent and meet with elected officials
5. Repeat



## Managing your Relationship with City Councils

### City Councils 101

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#### *What is a City Council*

A city council is the main governing body of any city. There are several popular variations of city councils depending on the size and history of the city. There are commonalities in all forms of the city council government structure.

#### *Mayor*

The Mayor is elected by voting age constituents in his/her city. In a strong Mayor form of the city council governance structure, the Mayor is the executive branch of city government. He/She will often appoint a chief administrative officer, often called a city manager that answers directly to the Mayor and assists in managing the day to day needs of the city.

#### *Councilmen/Councilwomen and Commissioners*

Councilmen/women or Commissioners are elected from districts in the city. It is the role of these elected officials to represent their districts a the city level.

In a strong Mayor form of the city council governance structure the Councilmen/women or Commissioners act as the legislative branch of city government.

In a weak Mayor form of the city council governance structure the Council/Commissioners and Mayor together are both the executive and legislative branches of the city government.

#### *Council-manager form of City Government*

In this form of city governance, also used for county governance, the governing body may be called council, commission, aldermen, or freeholders. In this form of city governance the title of Mayor is ceremonial and can be selected from the members of the council or elected as a member-at-large with no executive functions. The council serves as the legislative body in this form of city governance.

The council hires a city manager to attend to the administrative duties, to implement policy of the council, and to act as the executive (a kin to Chief Executive Office in corporate structure).



## Get to know your City Council Members and Mayor

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Why should you get to know and meet with your City Council? An in person meeting with City Council members is just the first step in building a relationship. If the people, who represent you, know and respect you, they are more likely to be open to your ideas and opinions.

### **Do your research**

Many cities have websites which make it easy for you to research and learn more about your City Council members. Before asking for a meeting or engaging members in conversation you should know who you are talking to, what they stand for, and how they have voted.

### **One-on-One Meeting**

The more local the branch of government the more accessible elected officials are to constituents. After you've done your research and know who you're talking to, call and ask for an in person meeting. Offer to take the City Council member to coffee or for a meal (or bring it to them). During this meeting remember to:

- Be polite
- Introduce yourself
- Ask questions to get to know the City Council member better
- Introduce your area of interest or who/what you represent

### **Organize a small team of people to go visit an elected official**

After the one-on-one meeting, try to bring a small group of two to four people with you on your visit. When assembling a "team" of constituents, try for diverse representation; people from all walks of life. Diverse groups bring added perspectives, skills and presence that a homogeneous group cannot. Some possible team members to include in your visit:

- Parents
- Educators
- Administrators and arts professionals
- Business leaders
- Community members
- Artists

### **Setting Up a Meeting with Your City Council members**

There are a number of effective means for scheduling meetings with City Council members. We recommend the following sequence:

Send a letter, an email or fax requesting a meeting with preferably one month's notice. If there is no response, follow up with a phone call.



### ***Sample Letter/Email/Fax***

Date

Attn: (Name of Scheduler, if known)

The Honorable/Dr./Mr./Mrs. (Name)

[Use local address]

FAX

Ms./Mr. (Name of scheduler):

I am writing to request an appointment for several constituents and I to speak with Mayor/Councilmen [Name] to discuss the arts in Phoenix and the need to preserve public support of the arts in Arizona.

We are requesting a meeting in [month]; my preference would be for [day of the week], [month, day and year], but we can certainly be flexible for the Mayor/Councilmen's schedule.

Those in attendance at the meeting, depending on when it is scheduled for, will be:

- Name, title and address for each attendee
- Name, title and address for each attendee

Please let me know when the Mayor/Councilmen might be available. I will follow up with you in a few days if I have not heard back.

Thank you,

(Your name)

(Your address)

(Your Telephone Number)

(E-mail address)

If you do not hear from them, follow up by phone. You may need to be persistent in following-up until an actual meeting is confirmed. They are usually not trying to avoid you—they are simply overwhelmed with requests for meetings in an already packed schedule, so keep trying. If you speak to a scheduler, be sure to get her or his name in case you need to call back. Be persistent—it will pay off.

### **Preparing for Your Meeting**

Practice makes perfect. Gather your team in advance, if at all possible, so that you can share information and agree upon strategies for your meeting. Agree on the focus of your meeting with your elected official, how you will introduce yourselves and the basic talking points you intend to cover. Holding a practice session is an excellent idea and will help you feel more confident and prepared for the actual meeting. Because appointments with elected officials are often brief (usually fifteen to twenty minutes), taking the time to prepare carefully will help you use that time wisely to focus on your most important issues.

You may also want to divide up roles for the meeting. It is helpful to have one person designated as the leader, who can guide the introductions, move things along, and be sure that the right questions get asked at the end of the meeting. It is also very useful to have someone take notes of your meeting so you'll remember what has been said.

### **Dress for Success**

Government at the state and local level is a formal institution, so plan to dress professionally for your meeting. Elected officials and their staffs usually will be wearing suits and ties for men, and suits, dress



slacks or skirts, with a blouse or dress sweater for women. You are likely to be taken more seriously if you dress in a similar fashion.

### **Do you Research and Be an Expert in Your Issue**

Research the person you are meeting with. Make an effort to know your elected official's position on the arts, culture and arts education.

Knowing basic facts about your elected officials and their positions can help you establish a connection with them and increase your understanding of what might motivate them to support our cause.

### **Important points to consider for your meeting**

Most elected officials need to be convinced of two things for them to support the arts and arts education.

- First, they must understand why the arts and arts education are vital to your city.
- Second, they must be convinced that supporting the arts and arts education will be a political win for them come re-election.

The following talking points can aid you in beginning your discussion with your elected officials.

### **Arts in Arizona**

- The arts are an economic driver in Arizona. With almost 50,000 employees state wide, the arts industry is vital to Arizona's future.
- The arts support jobs and provide important tax revenue.
- The arts create a sense of place. A rich and vibrant arts community attracts business in the form of companies and employees.

### **Arts Education**

- Arts Education in K-12 schools teaches our youth to be innovative, not just creative.
- The 21<sup>st</sup> century economy will be competitive and driven by innovation. Our world faces difficult questions and trials, like the current economic turn down, and it will take innovative ideas and follow through on those ideas to create a stable and democratic future.
- Innovation is and has been the thing that gives America a competitive edge. We live in the greatest country in the world. We have more opportunity to become successful and pursue "life, liberty and happiness" than people of any other time. Our nation's greatness is built on a foundation of innovation and competitive spirit. Our youth must be given the opportunity to learn how to think in innovative ways, or our country faces losing that competitive edge that innovation creates. Already foreign graduate students outnumber American born graduate students in this country.
- The Arts are an essential part of culture and civilization; we must continue to teach in the Arts in K-12 schools.
- Civilization began with the written word and with painting in primitive forms. If we are to continue to grow as a civilization, we must support Arts Education in K-12 schools.

*In addition to these statewide talking points, try to bring 2-3 talking points specific to your city. It may also be helpful to bring research, surveys or anything that will support your position.*



## **The Day of Your Meeting**

- When you arrive, each team member should introduce themselves. Say your name and that you are a constituent, a parent, and educator or anything else that might be important to the city council. Note if you have a connection with your council.
- Always be brief and stay on point—your meeting time will be limited, usually twenty to thirty minutes. This is when your team’s preparation pays off. Having your general talking points written up will help you present your information clearly and directly.
- When speaking with your council member the most important thing is talk about personal experiences with the arts, culture and arts education. Personal accounts are the most likely to affect your elected official.
- Stay focused so that you will be understood and make your point well since a short, articulate statement will be far more effective than an elaborate story.
- Listen carefully to what your council member has to say; clearly and succinctly answer any questions she or he asks.
- Speak slowly and clearly, without using jargon, slang, acronyms, abbreviations or terms that other people may not understand.

### ***Sample Introductions:***

Good afternoon, Councilmen Smith. My name is Robert Jones, and I am a lifelong resident of our city, as you are. I am a small business owner in Tucson. I very much appreciate this opportunity to talk with you about arts, culture and arts education in Arizona.

- Speak positively about arts, culture and arts education and how both benefit your city. Make your own position clear and let it speak for itself.
- If you do not know something, do not make it up. Explain that you do not know the answer and offer to follow up with the information. If you do offer this, make sure you really do follow-up.
- A simple leave behind that covers the important facts is important. AzCA may be able to help you find research for a leave behind.

Remember that most appointments are brief. Leave gracefully when your time is up and be careful not to overstay your welcome. If you are invited to stay longer, by all means do so if you have the time.

### **After the Meeting**

Each visitor should send a thank you note immediately—this is a quick and easy way to further your relationship with your council member. If you also met with someone on the staff, write them a separate thank you note as well. Be sure to follow up as soon as possible with any promised additional information.

### ***Sample Thank You Letter***

Date  
The Honorable/Dr./Mr./Mrs. [First and Last name]  
[Your City] City Council  
City, State and Zip

Dear Mayor/Councilmen (Last name):



Thank you for taking the time to meet with us on [date] to discuss the arts, culture and arts education in [insert name of city here]. We appreciate your time and attention to this issue that is of vital importance to our city.

As we discussed in the meeting,

- The arts are an important sector of the Arizona and [Your City] economy
- Arts Education is vital to the future success of our students.

[If applicable] Thank you for your support of the arts, culture and arts education.  
If you have any further questions, please feel free to be in touch with me.

Thank you,  
(Your name)  
(Your address)  
(Your Telephone Number)  
(E-mail address)

***Report the Results of Your Visit***

***The information you gather in your meeting is critical to our efforts to build state wide support for the arts and arts education.  
Please contact AzCA/AA at 602-253-6535 after your meeting.***



## City Council Etiquette

### Attending City Council Meetings

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#### *Attend in Person, Often*

In order to be a highly effective advocate at the City Council level, you must regularly attend the City Council meetings. While it is impractical for most of us, as individuals, to attend every City Council meeting, it is far more reasonable for a small group of people to attend City Council meetings on a rotating basis.

Create a City Council meeting calendar and create a rotating schedule for each member of your cohort to attend one meeting in an appropriate time span.

For example: The Phoenix City Council meets twice a month. There are 8 members of the Downtown Phoenix arts cohort. Each member will attend one meeting every four months. Make the calendar public, share it with your cohort, and make sure that you establish an accountability structure to ensure that your cohort has one representative at every meeting.

#### *When Should More Than One Representative Attend?*

There are times when you will want to activate your cohorts membership and network to attend City Council meetings. You may want to do this when:

- A budget decision is up for discussion that affects arts, culture or arts education
- A policy is being discussed that affects arts, culture or arts education
- There is a crisis that affects arts, culture and arts education

### Speaking at a City Council Meeting

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#### *Know the Chambers Procedures*

Every meeting or convening has its own protocol and procedures. Be absolutely sure that you and your cohort understand the protocol and procedures for your City Council.

- Know how to sign up to speak
- Know how to address your City Council
- Speak concisely and politely
- Answer any questions
- Thank the Council for their time and attention

#### *Example of how to address your City Council:*

In strong Mayor city councils, it is important that any questions or addresses be directed through the Mayor and then to the Council member you intend to speak. “Mr. Mayor, Councilmen Smith, I have a great concern about arts in the city of Phoenix...”