

# **Advocacy and the Arts: Strategies for Affecting Change**

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# **WESTAF**

## Introduction

At the request of several of its members, the Western States Arts Federation examined the organizational standards and effectiveness of arts advocacy organizations nationwide. Twenty-six states participated in the research; extensive interviews were conducted with the executive directors of 12 of them. The purpose of this research is to offer models of “best practices” that have succeeded in state advocacy organizations.

Arts advocacy efforts run the spectrum from struggling to very successful. To discover what are the “best practices,” multiple questions were posed:

- What elements are required for an arts advocacy organization to succeed?
- To what extent are substantial budgets and professional lobbyists keys to success, or are other factors more significant?
- How does an arts advocacy organization galvanize its membership into action?

The answers, based on these interviews, were somewhat surprising. Although access to money and lobbyists certainly simplify the job, they are not necessarily the best or only route to success. In fact, according to respondents, success is often predicated on effective grassroots networks of members who answer the call to action.

This study identifies various strategies arts advocacy organizations employ to achieve their goals. The first part of this report examines the internal organization of arts advocacy groups, their membership structures, and their funding mechanisms. The second part of the study considers the tools they employ to inform, educate, and motivate their constituencies, public officials, and the public at large. Throughout the report, successful practices from arts advocacy organizations will be offered as possible models for emulation.

## **PART I: Organization, Membership, Funding**

### Organization

Many state arts advocacy organizations wear two hats, that is, they are both 501(c)3 and 501(c)4 groups, promoting arts and cultural efforts in general while also functioning as advocacy/service organizations for local arts organizations. Most organizations choose this dual role to broaden their appeal, boost membership, and increase their visibility with the general public and lawmakers. While this dual role implies diversity of interests and viewpoints, it can also create competing agendas and dissention within the ranks. Each arts advocacy organization manages these issues differently.

Governing boards and committees in various guises provide the mechanism for internal governance and external presence. In several states, governing boards may be quite large—up to 50-plus members. The size could be unwieldy but many board members are “in name only” and have little desire to participate in decision-making. Having their names on the letterhead, however, could influence lawmakers who received campaign contributions from them. In addition, carefully composed committees may be instrumental in disseminating the organization’s position to the state arts agency and key lawmakers. Some examples of boards and committees:

- The South Carolina Arts Alliance forms a “Super Committee” every September. The committee includes a representative from large, medium, and small arts organizations, who develop the Alliance’s legislative strategy for the coming legislative session. The committee identifies the needs of local arts organizations, and a three-member group then meets with the staff of the South Carolina Arts Commission to explain what people working in the field need and want. “It helps us all stick together and speak with one voice,” says Betty Plumb, executive director of the Alliance.
- Minnesota Citizens for the Arts is governed by a 36-member board, half of whom represent arts organizations in the seven-county Minneapolis/St. Paul area. The board includes one member from each of the state’s 11 regional arts councils, plus seven at-large members, representing large, medium and small arts presenters, producers, museums, and arts educators.
- ArtServe Michigan is the result of a merger of four separate organizations: Concerned Citizens for the Arts in Michigan (a lobbying group), the Michigan Alliance for Arts Education, the Business Volunteers for the Arts, and the Arts Foundation of Michigan. ArtServe has a board of 40 to 55 members that meets four times a year and a smaller Cabinet of Advisers. The cabinet is open to every former board member and has 60 official members, but only 20 to 30 are active. In addition, ArtServe has a ten-member Executive Committee that meets six times a year and makes most

of the policy decisions. Barbara Kratchman, President of ArtServe, states, “Our board doesn’t micro-manage; it’s more into policymaking.”

- Washington State Arts Alliance bylaws divide the state into four regions and each is represented on the Board of Directors. The Alliance also convenes a Legislative Affairs Committee of key members to develop an agenda, identify issues, and devise a strategy before the legislative session begins. “We reach out to make sure we address the concerns of all our members, regardless of size or location,” said Gretchen Johnston, Executive Director of the Alliance.

In theory, the purpose of arts advocacy organizations is to increase public funding for the arts. In practice, however, there are often competing voices, which may result in a discordant conversation rather than an orchestrated call for action. Clearly defining the organization’s role via a mission statement is an important step toward achieving accord. Some arts advocacy organizations have a single mission, for example, to increase funding for the state arts agency. Others find that broadening their advocacy efforts—perhaps to include arts in education or taking on censorship—raises their public profile. Members must speak with one voice regardless of the scope of an organization’s mission.

- The Utah Cultural Alliance broadened its mission from exclusively advocating for the arts to advocating for cultural organizations. The Alliance’s current membership includes museums of all types, botanical gardens, historical societies, libraries and archives, and heritage organizations.
- The Illinois Arts Alliance has expanded its focus from lobbying exclusively for funding to include other efforts such as supporting local arts councils with technical assistance, workshops, conferences, and forums and sponsoring research in neighborhoods, towns, and cities to highlight the economic and cultural importance of the arts in their communities. Alene Valkanas, Executive Director of Arts Alliance, states, “The goal is to raise understanding about the importance of art to a larger public. We do research and local groups then carry the message into the private sector that serves their communities.” The Alliance also sponsors and subsidizes a statewide conference for its members. “People recognized that we were serious about addressing this (large-small/urban-rural) issue,” Valkanas said.
- Oregon’s Northwest Business for Culture and the Arts (NWBCA), formed in 1986, is involved with a major statewide effort to assess the cultural landscape. The state legislature authorized, and funded with \$200,000, a Cultural Planning Task Force, which since March, 2000, has held 12 community forums throughout the state to talk about cultural interests and needs. “It’s the place where issues will emerge and recommendations will

come from,” says Virginia Willard, Executive Director of the NWBCA. The task force findings “will help make sure everyone is on the same page.”

The relationship between an advocacy organization and a state arts agency can have a major impact on advocacy efforts. If the purpose of most advocacy efforts is to increase state funding for the arts, it is imperative that both organizations are seen as “being on the same page.” Tensions arise when the advocacy organization’s membership perceives a lack of openness to their needs and issues from the staff of the state arts agency. One arts advocate characterized some of state arts agency staff as thinking “they are the kings and queens of art,” when in some cases they have little knowledge of the issues in the field. Arts advocates also chafe at the “amateur” lobbying efforts of state arts agency staff. Arts advocacy organizations that have solid working relations with their state arts agencies (and they are in the majority) attribute their success to several factors.

- The state arts agency staff consults and coordinates funding decisions with the advocacy organization’s efforts, based on input from their members. Strategic planning occurs informally between respective executive directors or formally between representative committees.
- Positive personal relations based on mutual respect exist between the executive directors.
- Clearly defined and stated roles for both the state arts agency and the advocacy organization and an understanding that each plays an important part in supporting the arts.

### Membership

Membership in arts advocacy organizations may be quite diverse. Some organizations exclusively serve the arts community while others that have a broader mission embrace a larger cultural community, including historical societies and zoos. A large number function as both arts service organizations and lobbyists for arts in education, which brings in a new network of educators and others interested in education issues. Internal tension among members is inevitable with such a mix of competing interests. In addition, conflicts can arise between members from large and small organizations. Dues for arts organizations are often based on a sliding scale tied to operating budgets, consequently, sometimes there is an impression that “money talks.” Division may also occur along urban-rural lines. Again, larger institutions, which typically are based in cities, tend to be more influential. Most interviewees acknowledge the potential for such problems and try to resolve them internally.

- The Ohio Citizens for the Arts and the South Carolina Arts Alliance have written position statements on member solicitation of line-items in the state arts budget. Executive Director Susan Franano says a clearly stated position opposing member organizations from seeking separate funding

from the legislature when Ohio Citizens for the Arts is lobbying on behalf of the state agency keeps the peace. “We have big, powerful arts organizations in Ohio, and they understand what happens when major organizations get line-item grants. It creates dissent,” states Franano. Betty Plumb, Executive Director for South Carolina Arts Alliance, notes that her state is too small to be fractured by individual organizations trying to get funds independently. According to Plumb, “A written policy keeps down confusion.”

- Sheila Smith, executive director of Minnesota Citizens for the Arts, notes, “It’s important to sort out our internal disputes before approaching the legislature. We make it clear that it is in the major organizations’ interest to exhibit solidarity with regional councils and small organizations. And the regional councils, which represent communities all over the state, cannot afford to make a grassroots push [for funding] without the support of large urban arts institutions.” The Minnesota legislature budgets in a two-year cycle. If there are tensions between large and small, urban and rural arts organizations, Smith says, “we must clarify that the state appropriation [to the state arts board] benefits all of them, regardless of size or location. We lobby the state arts board to make sure that everyone is served fairly.”

Maintaining and expanding membership is important to the health of any arts advocacy organization. Recruiting members is only part of the work; keeping them involved during “good times” is also a struggle. In general, arts advocacy organizations note that it is important to celebrate its accomplishments, reinforcing to members that what it does has value. To that end, advocacy groups must keep members informed, educated, and involved without over-burdening them. The following comments illustrate how some arts advocacy organizations build and sustain member interest.

- The Illinois Arts Alliance will soon embark on a major membership drive. Some 680 cultural organizations statewide receive funding from the state arts council, but only 320 are members of the Alliance. To reach a wider audience, the Alliance has purchased a list of 69,500 names collected from 80 cultural institutions, which will be incorporated into its existing database to identify potential members. “Our member profile will look very different next year,” says Volkanas.
- ArtServe Michigan, which has a substantial budget and paid staff, recently hired a full-time membership/development director to build a larger membership base.
- According to Janet Brown, Executive Director of South Dakotans, “an advocacy organization must also be a service organization. We cannot ask people to do something and not give back. We provide opportunities such as in-state regional conferences for technical training. I do that so

that when the organization needs members to do something, they step up to the plate.”

- Success breeds interest. Two years ago the Washington State Arts Alliance obtained an increase in funding for the state arts commission. Gretchen Johnston states, “We were able to go back to our members and everyone on the mailing list and show them results. It’s a big thing.” Originally formed by a few, mostly larger organizations, the Alliance has in recent years engaged an increasing number and variety of organizations. The budget increase benefited organizations across the spectrum, “showing all organizations, regardless of size or location, that we are working to support them,” says Johnston
- Although the Hawaii Consortium for the Arts is new and small, it worked to stabilize multi-year funding cuts to the state arts commission and cooperated with the agency to repel successfully an attack on the state’s Percent for Art program in the latest legislative session. “Just keeping our members informed about legislative issues was greatly valued by our constituents. It meant a lot to the arts community,” says Heidi Kubo, Executive Director.
- The South Carolina Arts Alliance was instrumental in the state legislature’s formation of an Arts Caucus in 2000, chaired by the majority and minority leaders of both House and Senate; most of the lawmakers have signed on.
- Arizonans for Cultural Development pushed for legislative authorization of Art Share, a statewide arts endowment to which lawmakers committed \$2 million a year for ten years, to be matched by private contributions. “What makes it unique, and a model for others, was convincing the legislators to allow private contributions to any arts organization endowment in the state to count toward the matching requirement,” said Becky Gaspar, Executive Director. “We are seen as nurturing the cultural landscape.”
- The Cultural Advocacy Coalition of Oregon worked together with the Northwest Business for Culture and the Arts (NWBCA) to convince the governor and legislature to fund a Cultural Planning Task Force, which originated from a statewide cultural summit convened by NWBCA.

### Funding

Financing advocacy efforts is a major issue confronting advocacy organizations. Membership dues account for a significant portion of most organization budgets and are generally based on a tier system for individuals (artists and patrons) and on operating-budget size for organizations.

- In Hawaii, organization dues range from \$50/year for budgets of less than \$100,000 to \$200/year for budgets of \$1 million-plus.

- Washington State Arts Alliance assesses dues on a sliding scale based on member budgets, ranging from \$50/year for budgets under \$25,000 up to \$7,500/year for budgets over \$6 million.
- Florida's dues structure ranges from \$100/year for budgets under \$25,000, to \$250/year for budgets up to \$500,000, and \$500/year for budgets over \$500,000.
- Minnesota's dues system is based on a sliding scale. Large organizations pay \$2 per \$1,000 of their budgets, while small and medium groups pay \$1 per \$1,000 of their operating budgets.
- In Ohio, large institutions with budgets over \$1 million pay fees ranging from a low of \$650/year to \$9,000/year; smaller organizations pay from \$25 to \$550/year.
- Arizona recently revised its dues structure. The organization once had a complex structure with eight classes of members, all treated essentially as individuals. Beginning in 1999 Arizonans for Cultural Development instituted an "institution" category for arts organizations, with dues based on operating budget. "It's been a mixed success," said Becky Gaspar, Executive Director. Response has been positive from larger, mainly Maricopa County-based organizations but poor from the rest of the state. It may be because "they don't get much grant money, or maybe they don't think we do our job," she said. In addition, the decision to base dues on budgets was conveyed to members via letter, and "maybe that wasn't the best approach," admits Gaspar.

Collecting dues can present difficulties. Some use an invoice system. Others send return envelopes with suggested donation levels. For small organizations, this second approach can prove inefficient due to lack of staff to monitor incoming dues or track non-renewals.

Some organizations—regardless of size—have found other resources to contribute to their budgets, including investment income, corporate and foundation support, and arts council support, usually to those organizations incorporated as 501(c)3s. Other sources of income include:

- Governor's Arts Awards banquets are major sources of income for some advocacy organizations. For example, Arizonans for Cultural Development receives two-thirds of its annual \$250,000 budget from its co-sponsorship (with the Arizona Arts Commission) of the annual Governor's Arts Awards banquet. The annual Governor's Awards luncheon is a major fundraiser for ArtServe Michigan. Individual corporate sponsors may pay as much as \$15,000 for a table, most of which is earmarked for ArtServe's operating

budget. Ohio Citizens for the Arts received \$106,000 in 2000 from its co-sponsorship of its awards luncheon.

- South Dakotans for the Arts receives two-thirds of its \$350,000 annual budget from federal and state grants to run specific programs such as ArtsCorr, which is a joint project with the state Department of Corrections designed to integrate arts into juvenile correction programs.
- Victoria Bourns of the Utah Cultural Alliance suggests that WESTAF could provide assistance by identifying and compiling a list of funding sources willing to support advocacy, “so we aren’t competing with our members for dollars.”

Adequate financing is material to how well an arts advocacy organization performs. Insufficient financial resources prevent the hiring of professional staff, limit the use of paid lobbyists, and impact the frequency and type of communication activities. Even when professionals can be hired, the workload may be overwhelming for a one-or two-person staff, leading to burnout. It is difficult though possible to run a successful advocacy effort through mainly volunteer efforts. Most organizations, however, use a combination of paid staff, volunteers, and a lobbyist.

- California Arts Advocates has one part-time employee (an executive secretary), a very active board, and a contract lobbyist. “Teamwork between the lobbyist and board members get the job done,” said Michael Alexander, chair of the organization’s Legislative Committee. “A professional lobbyist is essential for us to get the legislature to appropriate more money for the arts commission,” he said.
- States like Ohio, Minnesota, Illinois, and Michigan have relatively large professional staffs to oversee advocacy efforts. They may or may not hire a lobbyist. Michigan, for example, does not hire a lobbyist. According to Kratchman, the board and staff coordinate efforts to mobilize members when action is required.
- Minnesota Citizens for the Arts has a professional staff of one full-time and one part-time employee and a paid lobbyist. Smith states, “Everyone knows him [the lobbyist]. Because he’s inside, he has more say in the outcome” of arts legislation. But lobbying is only one aspect of advocacy. “This is a time-intensive business. We are a targeted, professional organization” working year-round. “It can be very difficult for volunteers to devote the amount of time necessary to succeed.”
- The Hawaii Consortium for the Arts hired Heidi Kubo as its first executive director in 1998; she works part-time. The board considered retaining a lobbyist, but decided against it. “It’s a socio-cultural issue here. We didn’t believe a lobbyist would be well received,” Kubo says. Because the

Consortium does not have a legislative agenda yet, according to Kubo, the Consortium is “mainly doing defensive work.”

- The South Carolina Arts Alliance succeeds in its efforts without a paid lobbyist. The Alliance has several members who are skilled at working with lawmakers. The Alliance also offers workshops on developing advocacy skills.
- The Cultural Advocacy Coalition (CAC) in Oregon is funded entirely from member dues. The Coalition is the advocacy half of Oregon’s cultural-support network. The other advocacy entity, Northwest Business for Culture and the Arts, comprises members from the corporate sector; CAC is made up of arts organizations. Rather than hiring its own staff, CAC contracts with an outside consulting firm to administer and manage its affairs. “The consultant may also function as its lobbyist or can retain an outside lobbyist,” notes Virginia Willard, Executive Director of NWBCA.
- The Utah Cultural Alliance recently hired Victoria Bourns as a “very part-time director” (20 hours a month). The Alliance has no paid lobbyist, but communicates its message through weekly forums that it hosts at the state capital during the legislative session. The Alliance invites its members to inform lawmakers about activities in the cultural community.
- The Washington State Arts Alliance was an all-volunteer advocacy organization until four years ago hired Gretchen Johnston as Executive Director to help increase its membership base. By attracting more members successfully, the Alliance has increased its budget, improved its advocacy efforts, and extended its political influence.

**Profile of Organizations**

<b>State</b>	<b>Budget</b>	<b># of Paid Staff</b>	<b>Lobbyist</b>	<b>Dues: % of Budget</b>
<b>WESTAF</b>				
Alaska	(No org.)			
Arizona	\$250,000	3	No	7%
California	\$30,000	1	Yes	98%
Colorado	\$69,000*	1	No	Small %
Hawaii	\$37,800	1/4	No	20%
Idaho	\$20,000	0	Yes	90%
Montana*	\$13,000	0	Yes	100%

Nevada	\$50,000	1	Yes	98%
New Mexico	(No org.)			
Oregon *	\$50,000	0	Yes	100%
Utah	\$5,000	1 PT (20/hrs/mo)	No	100%
Washington	\$95,000	1	Yes	100%
Wyoming	(No org.)			
<b>Other</b>				
Alabama	(No Org.)			
Florida	\$59,000	1	Yes	75%
Illinois *	\$550,000	5	Yes	20%
Indiana	\$17,000	0	No	100%
Michigan *	\$115,000	9	No	Small %
Minnesota	\$280,000	1 _	Yes	100%
Missouri *	\$75,000	1	Yes	45%
Nebraska				
New Jersey*	\$35,000	1 _	Yes	100%
North Carolina*	\$125,000	2	Yes	43%
Ohio*	\$238,000	2	Yes	62%
South Carolina	\$100,000	1	No	15%
South Dakota	\$350,000	2	No	33%
Texas	Less than \$25,000	0	No	100%
Vermont	(No Org.)			
Virginia	\$50,000	0	Yes	90%

\* Special circumstances

- Colorado – Colorado Arts Consortium is a 501(c)3 and uses a tax exemption that permits 20% of its budget to be used for arts advocacy.
- Montana – Montana’s budget is biennial, not annual.

- Ohio – Ohio Citizens for the Arts is a combined 501(c)3/501(c)4 organization. Its total FY 2000 budget of \$238,000 includes \$93,000 for the 501(c)3 and \$145,000 for the 501(c)4. For FY 1999, the budget was \$191,000, comprising \$59,000 and \$132,000, respectively.
- Oregon – The Cultural Advocacy Coalition, formed in 1998, is a 501(c)4 funded entirely by arts organizations. It shares some board members with Northwest Businesses for Culture and Arts, a 501(c)3 organization of businesses and individuals.
- New Jersey – Art Pride New Jersey also has an advocacy and education component. The total budget is \$135,000 with \$35,000 designated specifically to advocacy. The advocacy organization is small.
- North Carolina – Arts North Carolina has three foci: advocacy, networking, and peer development. It is a 501(c)3 and receives \$25,000 from the arts council in general operating support, none of which goes to advocacy. Of its total budget, \$20,000 is expended for lobbying.
- Michigan – Four organizations merged into ArtServe Michigan, which has a \$1 million budget. The advocacy budget includes \$50,000 derived from the annual Governor’s Awards for Arts & Culture, its major advocacy event. No lobbyist, but one FT staff is based in Lansing and devoted exclusively to lobbying.
- Illinois – The Illinois Arts Alliance has two components: A 501(c)3 devoted to communication, education and research, and a 501(c)4 responsible for legislative advocacy.
- Missouri – The Missouri Citizens for the Arts is two incorporated organizations, a 501(c)3 and a 501(c)4. The 501(c)3 is responsible for education and the 501(c)4 covers advocacy.

## PART II

### Communication Tools & Techniques

Internal and external communication is an essential component of effective advocacy. The most effective communication tools are those that connect the advocacy message to the legislator directly, through a group (or individuals) that lives (and votes) in the targeted representative's district. This old-fashioned, grassroots advocacy, is still the most effective approach. ArtServe Michigan's Kratchman asserts, "Personal contact is very important in every aspect of advocacy." There is no substitute for face-to-face contact with legislators.

Every arts advocacy organization needs a network of committed members to carry its message to lawmakers and the public. The network is only as effective as the organization's ability to rally it; the message is only successful when it is delivered clearly to the appropriate people.

Arts advocacy organizations rely on a combination of tools and techniques to support their efforts. New telecommunications technologies are helping to facilitate and accelerate the dissemination of information. Still, many advocates cite the need for and value of writing letters. The single most useful tool arts advocates have is a database with the names of member organizations and non-member parties interested in and committed to cultural issues. The organization and use of databases are often based on local conditions. For example:

- The Illinois Arts Alliance database is sorted by legislative district, which allows it to reach appropriate members when it needs to prod certain lawmakers. The Alliance alerts the member via e-mail, fax or telephone if the matter is urgent, or by postcard or letter if the issue is ongoing.
- Executive Director Sheila Smith notes that the Minnesota Citizens for the Arts' database, which has 17,000 names and is sorted by legislative district, is its most important communication tool. Smith began building the database five years ago by collecting names of individuals and groups interested in the arts. Sources include public information from the state arts commission and the 11 regional arts councils' grant recipients; lists from current and former board members representing specific arts disciplines; staff lists; and names solicited during its various presentations and public events. The database allows Smith to find quickly the appropriate person and/or group and inform them, usually by fax and e-mail, that it is time to act by contacting their legislator.
- The Washington State Arts Alliance's database has 900 names of individuals and organizations compiled from member lists and other cultural sources, cross-linked by legislative district and by the amount of

grant support each receives from the NEA, state arts commission, and cities/counties. Not everyone in the database is a member of the Alliance, but Johnston treats them as if they are members. “When I have an issue or action report, or just information, I bombard all 900 on the list.”

- Heidi Kubo of the Hawaii Consortium for the Arts relies on a database containing the names of 1,200 arts/cultural organizations. Developing the database was a priority project during her first year. In addition, she has an e-mail network of 400 key members.
- The Florida Cultural Alliance relies on a database that contains the names of members as well as a county-based network of local arts agencies to mobilize support for specific issues. The network comprises key partners statewide, each with its own network at the county level. “It’s incredibly important [to our advocacy efforts],” says Sherron Long, Executive Director. Long uses a fax-broadcast network to send out briefings and alerts to members during the legislative session, and contacts key members for specific action as required. Long asserts that “consistency of message and technology make [effective advocacy] possible.”
- Ohio Citizens for the Arts has approximately 800 members; its database, however, contains the names of 2,500 individuals and organizations. Ohio Citizens for the Arts began computerizing the list in 1995 from data collected from members and public sources. “The database is material to our efforts,” said Franano. “Without it, I’m dead. We use it all day, every day. Successful action depends on the quality of the information in the database to identify the right people and get them moving.”
- Betty Plumb of the South Carolina Arts Alliance has built up a database of 2,000 names of individuals and groups active in the arts over the past 10 years. The Alliance compiled the list from cards it distributes and collects at workshops, conferences, and events it sponsors or attends. The database is organized by county; the state arts commission supplies data on which local arts agencies have received grants, and the database then ties that information to the lawmaker representing that county. When funding issues arise, Plumb encourages the appropriate individual/organization to contact his/her/its elected official. “We couldn’t function without it,” Plumb said. Success is “based on the fact that these local arts advocates know their legislator.”

Databases will become more important when term limits for state lawmakers commence. Term limits will dramatically alter the makeup of many statehouses. Arts advocates may lose (or gain) key legislators who support the arts as a result.

- To maintain its political position in the face of change, Ohio Citizens for the Arts has identified 30 key political races and politicians on which it will

focus this year. Ohio Citizens for the Arts is encouraging its members in the pivotal legislative districts to meet their candidates and educate them on the importance of the arts. Franano believes that this approach will ensure that the organization will “have a face when 2001 rolls around.”

- Term limits will affect 40% of Florida’s 160 lawmakers in 2000. As a result, the Florida Cultural Alliance is increasing its education efforts and using its database to match key members in legislative districts affected by term limits to candidates.

Nonprofits pioneered a lobbying strategy that relied on grassroots outpourings of letters, phone calls, and e-mails to elected officials to counteract the power of well-heeled trade organizations. The latter, aware of the effectiveness of such strategies, have latched on to those same tools and now employ specialty public relations firms with grassroots capabilities to enhance their lobbying efforts.

New telecommunications technologies such as the Internet provide new avenues of communication. The Internet’s power resides in its ability to reach everyone who is connected simultaneously. In addition, advocacy groups can strategically target key players with specific messages through e-mail. While the Internet is a useful communication tool, it is imperfect. For instance, not everyone is connected to the Internet or has access to e-mail. Also, unless an organization advertises its Web site, few will visit. There are important lessons to be learned about the utility of the Internet. For instance:

- “We’ve learned that Web sites and Internet strategies are only as good as the overall strategy into which they are integrated,” said Jonah Seiger, co-founder of Mindshare Internet Campaigns, which develops Internet-based political outreach strategies for nonprofits and corporations. In other words, the Internet is simply another way to convey messages; the Internet is not the message itself. Seiger states, “It’s not about the technology. The political process happens in the real world. You have to make your on-line strategy useful for off-line action.” A Web site is useful when it contains compelling and useful information. “Use it to tell supporters what’s happening and what they can do. Good writing is a core skill to an effective Web strategy.” According to Seiger, the Internet “is valueless unless everyone you want to reach can be reached or knows you’re there. That means putting the Web address in newsletters, on stationery, business cards, or any other material disseminated to members and the public.”
- After taking a Web design course through Open Studio program, Gretchen Johnston, with the help of two volunteers, launched a site for the Washington State Arts Alliance in December 1999. The site currently contains information on legislators (district, contact information, etc.). In developing the Web site, Johnston plans to include her “Advocacy Tool

Kit,” the Alliance’s membership list, and links to members’ Web sites. Johnston uses the site to inform members about local and national issues. She also e-mails members in the database, directing them to visit the site to learn about actions they can take to affect change. According to Johnston, the Web site has reduced mailing expenses significantly. “I see it more as a member-referral and advocacy tool. It’s not a drop-in site for the general public.”

All of these communication tools are for a single purpose: to influence lawmakers by educating them about the social and economic impact of the arts. The most important place to begin is at the local level. Elected officials generally are sensitive to their communities’ needs and desires, therefore, the most effective arts advocacy begins at home. Interpersonal contact may happen in a lawmaker’s home office or at the statehouse. Many arts advocacy groups organize ArtsDay during the legislative session to bring advocates and lawmakers together. Arts in education efforts are often bolstered by displaying children’s art in highly visible public places, such as lawmakers’ offices. Inviting elected officials to present grant awards to constituents in their districts is another way to involve them and enlist their support.

Preparing members to become advocates is key to the effort. Before they can advocate, however, members must understand the issues. Many arts advocacy organizations produce Legislative Handbooks, sponsor advocacy-training workshops, and publish newsletters to inform and educate their supporters. The objective is to ensure that all issues and goals are understood clearly. The process of implementing an agenda can commence once advocates are educated. Legislators and districts are identified; phone, fax, e-mail, and office addresses are distributed; sample letters or phone-scripts are distributed via newsletters and handbooks; and sample press releases and tips on managing the local media are offered.

- The most effective means of communication is a personal letter. There’s a psychology involved: Personal time is committed to composing, addressing and mailing a letter. To the legislator, a letter suggests that the writer really cares about the issue.
- When Sheila Smith of Minnesota Citizens for the Arts alerts members to send e-mail to lawmakers, which is used only as a last-resort, members are advised to state their position in the subject line. According to Smith, “most legislators don’t read e-mails. They may get 200-400 messages a day during the session. At best they scan the address and subject line and probably never even open the message.”
- Face-to-face contact is the best, says Barbara Kratchman of ArtServe Michigan. “We work hard to develop good relations with our funders. Personal contact is very important to every aspect of advocacy. That’s the answer,” she says.

## Conclusion

Effective arts advocacy organizations address local politics. A lobbyist is only one component of an effective strategy. Lawmakers notice when action emerges at the grassroots level, from within the neighborhoods and voting communities. An advocacy campaign may be elaborate or simple, led by a professional staff and lobbyist or entirely propelled by volunteers. In the end, however, neither size and ample resources guarantee success. Instead, successful advocacy relies on:

- A clear, well-defined strategy, coordinating the needs of the local arts community with the goals of the state arts agency and vice versa.
- Communication of the issues and strategies to members through a variety of means in a unified voice.
- Identification of key players—both members and lawmakers—and targeting them for action.
- Educating legislators on the social and economic advantages of having the arts and culture in their communities; involving them on the local level in the arts.
- Educating advocates on how to communicate a message clearly to the local community and their elected representatives.

To achieve these goals, arts advocacy organizations must begin by identifying their constituencies and reaching out to them. They must cultivate a supportive atmosphere, one based on listening to member needs and coordinating these interests with the goals and resources of the state arts agency in order to forge a united front. Speaking in a unified voice dramatically improves the chance of being heard.