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**Advocacy Through Out the Year!**

**January: Legislator Outreach**

At both the federal and state levels (and often the local level), January is a time for new legislators to start “learning the ropes.” Use this as an opportunity to introduce them to your policy issues through a letter or phone call and, where appropriate, start building a relationship with any new staff people.

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**February: Follow the Dollars**

At most levels of government, February marks the start (or continuation) of the budget process. As many advocates are looking for resources, this is a good time to be sure you know what’s going on. At the Federal level, check out the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities at [www.cbpp.org](http://www.cbpp.org). At the state level, learn about budget processes through the National Conference of State Legislatures ([www.ncsl.org](http://www.ncsl.org)) or on your state legislative website. You can also check out the guru’s clip on “five things citizens should know about the budget process” at <http://youtu.be/lYNfIkrK7EY>

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**March: Hone Your Message with the Message Formula**

To be agreed with, you’ll need a message that resonates with your audience. Build that kind of message using the message formula below:

* Hello, my name is [] and I’m from [] (establishes relevancy)
* I am here to talk to you about [policy / relationship ask]
* Knowing of your interest in [what policy issues is the person you’re talking to interested in?] we think you’ll be interested as well
* This is important to the people I represent because [personal story]
* That’s why we really hope you’ll [ask]
* I’d like to follow-up by [follow-up ideas]
* Can I get contact information for all the appropriate people in your office?

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**April: Media Messaging**

Radio? TV? Internet? Newspapers? Each venue can help you get the word out, but each wants different things. Radio wants sound bites, television wants pictures, newspapers want stories and the internet all of the above. Find your “hook” both in terms of hot topics and reporters’ needs and you’ll be on your way to free publicity in no time.

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**May: Get to Know the Staff**

In Washington, D.C. they all seem 14-years old. In California they’re called “20/20’s” (they’re 20-years old and make $20K per year). In many cases, getting to know staff people can move your issue forward even faster than getting to know the policymaker.

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**June: Make a Relationship Building Ask**

You don’t always have to ask a legislator to cosponsor (or stop) a controversial bill. Sometimes you can simply ask him or her to make a statement, talk to your group or participate in a site visit (see the last e-mail program as well as the August idea, below). What kind of action might you ask them to take that would get them actively engaged, without being too complicated?

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**July: Social Media Outreach**

Social media is here to stay and can be an incredibly useful tool for effective advocacy. “Like” your legislators on Facebook (you don’t have to actually “like” them). Find mutual connections on Linked-In. Follow them on Twitter. All these steps will give you new insights in to their interests and actions.

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**August: Site Visits**

The previous e-mail went in to site visits in more detail. Showing a legislator or staff person something “on the ground” helps them understand how what you’re asking for connects to the real live people they represent. August is a prime time for visits, so get going!

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**September: Election Strategies**

Getting like-minded citizens out to vote helps get people who understand your views in to office, which in turn makes it far more likely that policymakers will agree with your views. Consider running a voter registration drive or become engage in GOTV efforts – you’ll be making a difference on your policy issues and for democracy as a whole!

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**October: Town Halls**

Legislators often set up meetings in their districts to hear the views of their constituents. This is particularly true during an election year. Find out when these meetings will take place and make plans to attend. Who knows? If you stop by a little before or after you may be able to talk to the policymaker directly.

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**November: Vote! Early and Often**

OK, vote just the once – but be sure to vote! If you don’t vote, you don’t get to whine about the outcome.

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**December: Build Coalitions**

Coalitions can make or break your cause and December is a great time to build them because there is usually less legislative activity than at other times. When considering coalitions, ask yourself: who might serve as good coalition partners, either because they support our cause OR because they have good relationships with our target audience? Who should approach them?

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If you follow these steps, you’ll be building relationships with your legislators in no time – and advancing your cause!