



Organizing a State Advocacy Day

Although much has been accomplished at the federal level for music education, advocacy at the state and local level is crucial, as state and local policies and funding decisions often influence an educator's classroom more directly. Along with partnering with NAfME for the annual National Hill Day, state music education associations (MEA) host their own "drive-in" days to be engaged as state and local advocates. These drive-in events allow MEAs to cultivate relationships and become trusted resources for legislators and education policymakers, as well as provide great public relations exposure for the organization.

Developing your Advocacy Day

When organizing your state's advocacy day, you should be asking yourself several questions to help develop your agenda:

1. What is your Advocacy Ask?

- Are you introducing yourselves to the legislature and building relationships for music education? While not a specific ask, relationship building is key and can be central to a State Advocacy Day.
- Is there a pressing issue concerning music education in your state to be your central ask?
- Is there an opportunity concerning music education that can be your central ask?

2. Who is your key audience?

- The audience should be identified as who can help you with the ask - state legislators, federal legislators, your state's Department of Education, or your state's Board of Education.

3. Who will be your advocates for the day?

- Should it be an open call to all members of the Association or strictly state leaders?
 - i. Are there particular legislative or state board members that you need to reach?
As such, including members from their districts can be key to your work.
- Should other organizations be involved, including those from the greater education community or arts content areas?
- Should students be involved; whether it would be participating in meetings or to hold performances in public spaces? What about NAfME collegiates?

4. When should your advocacy day occur?

- If you intend to have your advocacy day conducted at the state Capitol, be sure to hold your event when the state legislature is in session.
 - i. Note, some state legislatures (ex. Virginia) are not in-session for a full year; be sure to research your state's legislative calendar and budgetary cycle.
- What time of the year would have the most active participation from your membership?

- i. If numbers matter, and you are looking for a large turnout, timing to fit the best participation from your members is helpful.
- Many MEAs time their State Music Education Day to fall during Music in our Schools Month – March.

Making it Your Own

When organizing your state’s advocacy day, it is important to know that it should be unique. There is not one formula in creating a successful event. For example, the California Music Educators Association (CMEA) conducts their advocacy day with other members of the greater arts community, as part of their Stand Up 4 Music Coalition, while the Pennsylvania Music Educators Association (PMEA) organizes live music performances at their Capitol Rotunda during each day of Music in our Schools Month and concludes with their advocacy day on the final day. Your Association knows your state best and the event should be tailored to meet your individual goals and agenda.

You are encouraged to learn from your colleagues in states already doing state level advocacy days. The NAFME Policy Shop can put you in touch with those states, or you can use Amplify to ask questions via the State Executives and/or State Presidents community. You can also have your Advocacy Leadership Force member (ALF) reach out to their ALF colleagues for input and advice. We also suggest, if you are new to this, that you attend a few advocacy events already occurring at your state capitol. How are they run? How do they handle the logistics? While this doesn’t dictate what your event looks like, it helps you understand the “norms” within your state.

Making it Newsworthy

Getting the word out about music education can build a sense of community pride. Positive stories, especially those that publicize how important music is to students, parents, and the community can help your message at-large affect administrators, school board members, and legislators, as they make key public policy decisions. This is also important in building your relationships and credibility with local media, journalists, and newspapers in order to bring the public eye to your great work.

Here are some key points to keep in mind in public relations:

Media Outlets—Use both internal and external outlets to garner support within the music community and to highlight your tremendous accomplishments, such as:

- State MEA Website;
- Membership Email list;
- Press Releases;
- Direct Contact with TV/Radio, local/national newspapers, and blogs;
- Online community bulletins, like Patch and Medium

Social Media—Use this as a powerful tool in conveying your message to not only members of the music community, but also individuals outside your typical audiences. Additionally, social media can be leveraged in grassroots advocacy campaigns, which can put legislators in the spotlight and attempt to hold them accountable through public communication (“on the record”). Trending hashtags can also

provide statistical numbers that can be compelling information for press releases and media outlets following your event.

We recommend using the following:

- Facebook
- Twitter
- Instagram
- LinkedIn

Special Guests—Never underestimate the power of an invitation. If your advocacy event is particularly excellent, it is always appropriate to invite local and state officials (especially those who have pledged to support music education, public education, or the arts). Feel free to include that you hope to have press attend as well. Some guests would prefer that you notify the press that they'll be there and some won't; the best way to know is checking with their scheduler or administrator.

Statewide Music Education Advocacy: more than just a day

While a “drive-in” day brings music education advocates to legislatures and policymakers, the real work is in maintaining and building the relationships begun on the drive-in day. Build in the time and resources to support the on-going work behind the scenes and with legislators. And remember that state level policymakers can include your Chief School Officer (Superintendent or Education Department head), your State Board of Education, your Governor, as well as your State Legislature. Consider inviting these policymakers to attend other State MEA events, such as All-State or your in-service conference, to allow you to continue your music education advocacy.

Examples of State Advocacy Days:

- [Utah, New York, and Michigan in 2016](#)
- [Iowa, Wisconsin, Oregon, Minnesota, Nebraska, Tennessee, Kansas, Michigan, Indiana, Massachusetts, and Pennsylvania in 2017](#)

Need additional help or assistance?

Please contact [Ronny Lau](#), [Tooshar Swain](#), or [Lynn Tuttle](#) for additional strategic ideas and suggestions.

To research your current state arts education policy, visit [ArtScan](#).

For a list of ALF members, please go [here](#).