



This resource is intended to aid music educators and music education supporters as they seek to improve the overall condition of a music program. Outlined below is a local advocacy plan for pursuing new resources and opportunities which can improve a music educator's ability to provide students with high quality music education experiences.

STEP 1: Strategic Planning

The first step in designing an Advocacy Action Plan is to identify a vision for the music program. The vision, which captures what future success looks like, will serve as a guide to ensure every goal set and action taken supports the program's broader educational mission and the goals that the school's Principal has voiced.

A vision can also serve to communicate the music program's values to the school, community, and supporting organizations. To that end, state the vision in language that mirrors that of the school and community. Here are some considerations that might help formulate a vision:

- Does the school or district already have a vision or mission statement? If so, how can the music program support the bigger picture?
- What will students gain from being a part of the music program?
- Who does the music program serve?

STEP 2: Take an Inventory of the Program

Once a vision has been identified, the next step is to evaluate the resources, tangible and otherwise, available in the music program to achieve it. An honest assessment of the program's current state will help in determining goals that will move the program closer to the vision.

The NAfME [Opportunity-to-Learn Standards](#) (OTLs) identify resources needed to ensure that teachers, schools, and districts can provide students a meaningful chance to achieve at the levels outlined in the 2014 Music Standards.

- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the music program?
- Are students being set up for success in the program? How so, or why not?
- Will students carry with them lessons learned from inside the program once they have moved on?

STEP 3: Goal Setting

At this point, there should be a sense of where the program is and where it needs to go. Setting goals is the next step to closing that gap. Goals should be SMART – specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and timely. The best goals are student-centered and focused on areas such as curriculum, assessment, standards, or building and strengthening relationships. In short, goals should reflect what students will accomplish in the music classroom. Receiving funding dollars, for instance, is not a goal by itself - it is a tactic that to be utilized in pursuit of goals.

- What goals can be set to move the program closer to its stated vision?

STEP 4: Get the Facts on the Budget

Of course, reaching new goals takes resources. Understanding the school and district's budget processes is imperative to credibly seeking financial support for the program. Budget deliberations will include school administrators, school boards, school employees, and community members.

For more information on the school budget process, reference the [NAfME Civic Action Field Guide](#). For details regarding federal funding, visit the [Title IV-A Toolkit](#) and the NAfME [Everything ESSA](#) webpage.

- What areas were prioritized in the school or district's budget in the previous year? In a public school system, the budget is a public document that should be easily accessible to taxpayers and school employees.
- What were the instruction, curriculum and staffing budgets in the year(s) prior?
- What are the levels of Title I, Title II, Title IV, IDEA and Perkins CTE funding for the district? Does any of this money currently go to music or arts education?

STEP 5: Identify Stakeholders and Form a Coalition

Before embarking on a new advocacy initiative, it is important to develop a coalition of supporters to increase the chances of success, so you are not going it alone.

Consider how potential coalition members could help achieve the initiative's goals. For example, people might be able to attend school board meetings, assist in recruiting volunteers, or provide physical supplies. The core group can brainstorm for possible partners, particularly those with whom they have professional or personal ties. Identify individuals to participate and then determine who is the best person on the team to approach each key decisionmaker with specific "asks" in mind.

Throughout the coalition building process, continue reaching out to people at various events, ranging from parent nights to school events to personal endeavors. Strong relationships provide a firm foundation for future advocacy work. Everyone can find a role to play. The NAFME [Grassroots Advocacy Inventory](#) offers a quick diagnostic of the factors that can establish the conditions most favorable for advocacy. The resource can also help identify individuals or groups who might support the coalition.

STEP 6: Formulate a Strategy

This is the point at which actionable steps are planned on the path to meeting your goals. It may be helpful to restate a goal first, then identify procedural steps, coalition members to involve, and potential timelines.

The NAFME [Advocacy and the Music Educator](#) position statement offers insight into tactics necessary to be a successful music advocate. The NAFME [Everything ESSA](#) page and the Arts Education Partnership [ArtScan](#) offer details for ongoing state level ESSA work and identify how best to incorporate federal dollars into an advocacy plan.

STEP 7: Plan a Communications Strategy

Inherent in all effective advocacy is the art of persuasion. Decision makers may not automatically consider music education a priority, especially if they themselves have never had access to a high-quality music education experience.

The list of benefits derived from a high-quality music education is long. This [blog post](#) from Music In Our Schools Month 2019 discusses why music education deserves robust support and includes research to back up the claims.

While research is important, the history of music education advocacy shows that the most effective method is storytelling. The stories music educators tell are deeply compelling and resonate with virtually anyone. Think of all the times students have been transformed because of music. Tell those stories, then use research to support the message.

STEP 8: Execute!

Finally, it's time to put the Advocacy Action Plan in to action. From this point forward, execute procedural steps, follow prescribed timelines, and document progress. Even if the plan changes along the way, it's most effective to stay organized at every step.

STEP 9: Reflect

Periodically, after each semester or conclusion of a budget cycle, take the time to consider what worked, what didn't, and what still needs to be done. In many instances, every advocacy goal may not be reached after the first attempt, and that's fine. Achieving advocacy goals can be a multi-year proposition, regardless of the issue topic or to whom your advocacy is directed. Taking time to evaluate progress will help keep advocacy on track toward the vision for the program.

STEP 10: Institutionalize

Advocacy is a proverbial marathon, not a sprint. Music educators must institutionalize their advocacy efforts for as long as they remain active in the profession. Great advocates are made of patience, grit, and collaboration!

At the beginning of this process, some of the most important work will come through a critical element of music training—listening. Whether listening to the needs of the other music advocates in the coalition, or by understanding the needs of other departments, advocates who truly hear the views of peers will be the most effective champions for the cause. Developing trust with colleagues, parents, and policymakers is likely to prove fruitful over the course of a career and beyond. Such efforts can positively impact the students in a local program and in classrooms across the country.