

Local Advocacy Action Plan

This resource is designed to support music educators and advocates as they work to strengthen their music programs. Outlined below is a local advocacy plan for pursuing new resources and opportunities that can enhance a music educator’s ability to provide students with high-quality music education experiences.

STEP 1: Strategic Planning

The first step in developing an Advocacy Action Plan is to identify a vision for the music classroom. The vision—defining what future success looks like—will serve as a guide to ensure that every goal set and action taken supports the broader music education mission and aligns with the goals expressed by the school’s principal.

A clear vision also communicates the value of music study to the school, community, and supporting organizations. To that end, express the vision in language that reflects the tone and priorities of your school and community. Consider the following questions when formulating your vision:

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

STEP 2: Take an Inventory of the Program

Once a vision has been established, the next step is to evaluate the resources—both tangible and intangible—available within the vertical music curriculum to support it. An honest assessment of the current state of the music education environment helps determine which goals will move the program closer to its vision.



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

- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the current music learning environment?
- Are students being set up for success through the curriculum design? How so, or why not?
- Will students carry the lessons learned in the music classroom once they have moved on?

STEP 3: Goal Setting

At this stage, you should have a sense of where your program currently stands and where it needs to go. Setting goals is the next step in closing that gap. Goals should be SMART—specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and timely.

The most effective goals are student-centered and focused on areas such as curriculum, assessment, standards, or relationship building. In short, goals should reflect what students will achieve in the music classroom. Securing funding, for example, is not a goal by itself, it is a means to advance student learning and program development.

- What goals can be set to move the music classroom and curriculum closer to its stated vision?

STEP 4: Get the Fact on the Budget

Reaching new goals requires resources. Understanding your school and district’s budget processes is essential when credibly seeking financial support for music programs. Budget deliberations typically involve administrators, school boards, staff, and community members.

For more details on the school budget process, consult the [NAfME Civic Action Field Guide](#). For information on various types of federal funding, review the [Title I](#), [Title II](#), and [Title IV-A](#) toolkits. Consider the following:

- What areas were prioritized in the school or district's budget in the previous year? (Public school budgets are public documents and should be easily accessible to taxpayers and school employees.)
- What were the instruction, curriculum and staffing budgets in previous years?
- 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 support music or arts education?

STEP 5: Identify Collaborators and Form a Coalition

Before launching a new advocacy initiative, it is important to build a coalition of supporters to increase your chances of success—you don’t have to do it alone. Coalitions bring together individuals or organizations with shared goals, allowing them to amplify their advocacy efforts, pool resources, and develop coordinated strategies that have a greater impact.

To create a successful and sustainable coalition, carefully consider key structural and operational elements. This includes clearly defining the coalition’s purpose, determining membership criteria, and establishing effective governance or decision-making structures. You may also wish to decide whether branding elements such as a name or logo are necessary to strengthen recognition and unity.

Consider how potential coalition members can contribute to meeting the initiative’s goals. For example, people might be able to attend school board meetings, assist with volunteer recruitment, or provide physical supplies. The core group can brainstorm possible partners—especially those with



existing personal or professional connections—and identify who is best suited to approach key decision-makers with specific “asks.”

Examining examples of successful state or national coalitions can provide valuable insight into effective models and best practices, helping you identify approaches that fit your local context.

Throughout the coalition building process, continue fostering relationships at parent nights, school events, and community gatherings. Strong connections create a foundation for long-term advocacy, and everyone can find a role to play. The NAFME [Grassroots Advocacy Inventory](#) can help diagnose local advocacy conditions and identify individuals or groups likely to support your efforts.

STEP 6: Formulate a Strategy

Now it’s time to outline actionable steps toward achieving your goals for music students. It may help to restate a goal, then identify key procedural steps, coalition members to involve, and potential timelines.

The NAFME [Advocacy and the Music Educator](#) position statement provides guidance on effective advocacy tactics, and the Arts Education Partnership’s [ArtScan](#) tool offers information on state-level policies related to K–12 arts education that may help inform your strategy.



STEP 7: Plan a Communications Strategy

Effective advocacy relies on the art of persuasion. Decision-makers may not automatically consider music education as a priority, especially if they never had access to a high-quality music education experience themselves.

While research on music education's benefits is valuable, experience shows that the most powerful advocacy tool is storytelling. The stories music educators tell—of students transformed through music—can resonate deeply with almost anyone. Share those stories, then use data and research to reinforce them.

STEP 8: Execute

Now it's time to put the Advocacy Action Plan into motion. Follow your outlined steps, adhere to timelines, and document progress along the way. Even if adjustments are needed, maintaining organization and momentum at every step is key to success.

STEP 9: Reflect

At the end of each semester or budget cycle, take time to reflect on what worked, what didn't, and what still needs to be done. Not every advocacy goal will be achieved on the first attempt—and that's okay. Achieving advocacy goals is often a multi-year process. Taking the time to regularly



evaluate progress keeps your efforts aligned with your vision and helps sustain long-term advancement.

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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 defined by patience, persistence, and collaboration.

Some of the most important advocacy work begins with a fundamental skill of music training—listening. Listening to colleagues, coalition members, and other departments fosters trust and understanding, which are essential for long-term success. Building these relationships with peers, parents, and policymakers can positively impact students locally and strengthen music education in classrooms across the country.

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