

American Association of Museums

ADVOCACY FOR MUSEUMS

Advocacy for Museums Matters

When you make advocacy a habit, you create a win-win situation for your museum and the field. Issues that affect you as an institution affect institutions across the field. Engaging in regular advocacy means you will be in a better position to have a favorable impact on local, state or federal policies that affect your museum. Your efforts lay the groundwork for AAM to articulate the value of all museums every day in Washington, DC.

Take a moment to think about how aggressively, regularly and visibly other causes, such as the environmental, education, or social services communities lobby Congress and the public. We don't want to be missing out on our piece of the pie by not making our voices heard on behalf of museums and the services they provide, do we?

Nearly every legislator in Congress represents at least one museum within their congressional district. Museums are available to citizens and visitors across the country, serving as sources of education, and places of reflection, contemplation, and connection with others. Every elected official should be informed about the public services of the museums they represent. And they need to hear it from you!

What Does It All Mean?

Definitions of the terms grassroots, advocacy and lobbying abound in a variety sources. It can seem overwhelming at first, but rest assured wherever these terms appear they are generally referring to relatively the same concepts and activities.

According to the American Heritage Dictionary, **lobbying** is the act of pleading or arguing in favor of something, such as a cause, idea, or policy, with active support.

It is believed that the term **lobbying** derived from the practice of decision-makers and advocates discussing issues and positions while moving through the halls and lobbies of Congress and other settings. Though the practice of **lobbying** in politics far pre-dates the American experiment, it is rumored that the term was coined during the Presidency of Ulysses S. Grant who was often approached by those seeking favor from him in the **lobby** of the Willard Hotel in Washington, DC.

Grassroots - People or society at a local level rather than at the center of major political activity, also the groundwork or source of something.

Outside lobbying or indirect lobbying, also called **grassroots lobbying**, seeks to affect public policy change and positions by influencing public opinion.

Grassroots lobbying – mobilizing the public or people in a community to lobby elected officials or other decision makers for a particular position or cause.

Advocacy is the process, through lobbying and grassroots mobilization, of bringing about change in the attitudes of politicians and the resulting public policies and laws.

Effective **advocacy** is making your case in terms that resonate with your audience.

American Association of Museums

ADVOCACY FOR MUSEUMS

Why Lobby?

Because...

- It is your right, and, some would argue, your duty, as an American citizen.
- It can bring about policy change that can make people's lives better.
- It is how you make your voice heard and get your piece of the pie.
- You can help speak up for those who cannot speak up for themselves.
- It is evidence of our system at work – it helps fulfill checks and balances.

And Remember...

Politicians and their staffs are just people too. Lobbying is a credible and valuable mechanism for sharing key information with policy makers and getting them intimately involved in supporting the work you do. Your museum is a community center where students come to learn, where families come to share a common educational experience, and where citizens and visitors come to better understand their community and the world around them. As a valuable constituent, it is your right to speak up for your museum!

AAM Cannot Do It Alone

We all know how overwhelming work and daily life can be. Whether it be via e-mail, television, radio or the Internet, we each deal with a daily onslaught of news and information. Legislators are no different. In a world with a 24-hour news cycle and options for constant communication, elected officials and their staffs at every level of government face the same struggle to manage huge amounts of information and make the best public policy decisions possible.

AAM understands the public policy process and issues that affect museums. We know when to intervene, contacting federal policymakers and mobilizing the field. Ultimately elected officials make key policy decisions based on the positions and opinions they have heard from their constituents. The bottom line is that no other lobbying matches the value of your elected officials hearing directly from you.

What You Can Do

- **Keep an open mind about advocacy** – Realize that you may already “lobby” in your daily life and that lobbying for your museum and its programs is an exercise you can do successfully as well.
- **Be a sponge** – Advocacy is happening all around us all of the time. Watch and learn from your colleagues at other museums and in other industries for messages and techniques that you can use with your own elected officials.
- **Have fun with advocacy** - Think of the brain as a muscle that benefits from a variety of exercises. Advocating for your museum can provide a refreshing new outlet for marketing the services your museum offers and connecting with your community.
- **Make Advocacy a Habit** – There are a multitude of ways, included in this handbook, to incorporate lobbying activity into your routine.
- **Stay Informed throughout the year** – Join AAM's Museum Advocacy Team® to receive updates and information about your federal legislators and legislative activity affecting museums throughout the year.