



Advocacy 101: Navigating Public Policy for Dance Workers

What is advocacy?

Advocacy is defined as any action that speaks in favor of, recommends, argues for a cause, supports or defends, or pleads on behalf of others. Advocates express public support for or recommendation of a particular cause or policy to promote equality, social justice, and human rights. Advocates do the work of listening and translating real-life issues and stories into salient requests for responsive actions within the community through mutual aid efforts, and on the governmental level by influencing new actions or changes to public policy, legislation, budget allocations, or regulations.

Ideally, advocates have experience and knowledge both understanding the issue at hand and navigating the legislative process. Individuals, organizations, and coalitions can all advocate on many different levels, from self advocacy to legislative advocacy on the local, state, and federal levels.

Why get involved?

Public policy has direct impacts on the lives and livelihoods of all people. Public policy shapes how resources are allocated and where they are distributed, which in turn shapes social, economic, and political power and equity. Legislators at local, state, and federal levels are elected to represent the needs and interests of their constituents, including you and your community. Arts and culture workers, and nonprofit organizations have specific sets of concerns and interests that must be raised in order to be addressed.

What is lobbying?

Lobbying is defined as any attempt to influence specific legislation. There are two forms of lobbying: direct and grassroots. Direct lobbying engages with legislators who have the power to influence, enact, or block specific legislation. Grassroots lobbying, by contrast, is indirect: it engages with community, stakeholders, and coalitions to rally broad support through campaigns to influence legislation.

Where do I start?

- 1. Find your cause:** There are many ways that public policy directly impacts dance workers: from jobs to taxes, healthcare, housing, and more. In identifying your cause, you might consider issues that you have first hand experience with in your life or community. Issue-based activism is important for raising public awareness around real-life problems, and policy-based advocacy is the next step in turning activism into action through legislation.
- 2. Find and contact your representatives:** [Identify your federal, state, and local representatives](#) and familiarize yourself with their policy platform, committee positions, and bill endorsements. Call, email, or tweet your reps to advocate for a specific cause or piece of legislation. Share your message with others to spread the word. You can create, copy, or customize letter templates and call scripts so your advocacy connects with others.
- 3. Find your partners:** Join or build partnerships and coalitions. Dance workers can amplify their voices by engaging with artists across disciplines, nonprofit organizations, and freelance workers across industries. Advocacy coalitions often distribute public sign-on letters, run email or phone campaigns, and organize activities like marches, protests, or demonstrations. For NYC dance workers, [New Yorkers for Culture and Arts](#) is a forum through which to enter into coalition work.
- 4. Find your moment:** Timing is important for advocacy. [Find out when your local, state, and federal hearings and elections are](#), including primaries and special elections at the [local level](#). Plan advocacy activities around these moments of increased public awareness, particularly if there are candidates or measures on the ballot that connect with your central issues. The leadup to election seasons are also great times to rally awareness in your community base.
- 5. Activate your platform:** You can take action by submitting oral and/or written testimony to public hearings of the local, state, and federal legislatures. Find the schedule of public committee hearings of the [City Council](#) and [Stage Legislature](#) relevant to your cause and use your voice to bring attention directly to legislators. [Identify allies within the legislature](#) to build relationships.
- 6. Make your case:** To make your case to legislators, there are two important elements to consider when presenting your advocacy issue: data and storytelling. Quantitative data, expressed through numbers and statistics, and qualitative data, expressed through words and ideas, can present powerful indicators and hard evidence about the issue you're raising. You can also use storytelling to let legislators know about the specific, real-life implications of your issue area, as well as the potential positive impacts of the support you're requesting.

Advocacy 101 workshop resources

Session slides

Find Your Representatives

- [Find your representatives](#)
- [NY City Council members and districts](#)
- [City Council committees](#)
- [State Assembly members and districts](#)
- [State Assembly committees](#)
- [State Senate members and committees](#)
- [Interactive database of State and local legislators](#)
- [U.S. House of Representatives committees](#)
- [U.S. Senate committees](#)

Advocacy Coalitions (some examples)

- [New Yorkers for Culture & Arts](#)
- [Campaign for New York Health](#)
- [A Place at the Table Campaign](#)

Election Calendars

- [New York State Board of Elections 2022 Political Calendar](#)
- [NYC Votes Election Dates and Deadlines](#)

Legislative Calendars & Tracking

- [U.S. Congress floor calendar](#)
- [State Legislative session calendar](#) and [upcoming public hearings](#)
- [City Council hearing calendar](#)
- [Find and track City Council legislation](#)

Where can I find more advocacy resources?

- [Dance/NYC Advocacy initiatives, news & events](#)
- [Dance/NYC Advocacy Resources](#)
- [Americans for the Arts' Arts Action Fund](#)
- [Be An Arts Hero Lobby Guide](#)
- [Nonprofit New York Hearing Testimony Template](#)
- [National Dance Education Organization Advocacy Tools](#)