

TASK FORCE ON STATE AND LOCAL ADVOCACY

TOOLKIT



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Legislative Advocacy Tool Kit

A. Task Force Charge

In September 2007, APWA President Larry Frevert established a “Special Task Force to the Government Affairs Committee (GAC) – State and Local Advocacy”. In doing so, he recognized that local Chapters can and must do a better job at advocating at the state and local level. He said, “By nature, public works personnel seem to shy away from showing political support or opinions.” He went on to say, “Who better to partner with our elected and appointed policy makers than our public works professionals who know first-hand the condition of our infrastructure and the funding needed to sustain it...”

President Frevert requested that the Task Force develop a report that identifies potential resources for chapters and possible tools that can be made available to reach this goal. In addition, he wanted to identify ways to encourage members to become advocates for public works.

B. Task Force Priorities

A face-to-face kick-off meeting was held on Monday, September 10, 2007 at Congress, which was attended by Task Force members, President Frevert and APWA staff members. An overview of Chapter advocacy and background was presented by staff. Members discussed current activities in their Chapters and identified some early considerations to be evaluated by the Task Force, including:

- Need for partnering;
- Time constraints;
- Greater information sharing;
- Maintaining focus on a limited number of issues at a time; and
- Coordination with multi state/provincial Chapters a challenge;

Members agreed that more information from Chapters was needed.

C. Task Force Approach

1. *Definition of Advocacy*

The Task Force thought it would be helpful to more fully define “advocacy” for the purpose of this assignment. The literal definition is presented below.

Ad-vo-ca-cy: The act or process of advocating or supporting a cause or proposal.

In addition, the Task Force wanted to define “public works advocacy” to assist in its efforts to accomplish the goals of the task force. In doing so, it was agreed that advocacy can be applied to public works in three specific areas. They include:

- Legislative/Regulatory Advocacy;
- Promotional Advocacy; and
- Financial Advocacy

Legislative/Regulatory Advocacy relates to activities such as submitting legislation directly that supports public works activities or to submit written or oral testimony regarding a specific piece of legislation. It can also include grass-roots efforts such as direct lobbying of legislators regarding a particular piece of legislation or a proposed rule that would affect public works operations.

Promotional Advocacy relates to any activity that serves to elevate public works in a region, state, province or municipality. Activities such as Public Works Week celebrations, awards and press releases that bring attention to public works are examples of promotional advocacy.

Financial Advocacy includes activities that serve to support public works annual budget requests or other special funding initiatives (i.e., bond issues, etc.), which support the public works mission.

This Task Force's focus is on the first level of advocacy – that is, legislative/regulatory advocacy. It is recommended that APWA undertake similar efforts in the future to identify tools and resources to accomplish the second two levels, promotional and financial advocacy, as important to completing the advocacy cycle.

D. Task Force Recommendations for Chapters Interested in Legislative Advocacy

1. How to Increase Advocacy at Chapter and Provincial Levels

a. *Establish a Government Affairs Committee (GAC)*

Chapters should consider establishing a Chapter GAC to manage their advocacy efforts. Multi-state Chapters will have to develop a larger GAC to interact with potential coalition members from each state.

The GAC should only include individuals who want to play an active role in advocacy. They need to be committed to the cause of advocacy.

Chapters should consider its senior or retired members for this effort. Given that time is required to function in this role, these individuals may be able to dedicate more time versus a full-time municipal employee. Also, these people are your most seasoned professionals who most likely have the respect of your membership and area legislators.

Consultants could also share in this effort by providing technical support and resources not readily available at the public-sector level. In many cases, large consulting firms have lobbyists working for them on the same issues you need to address.

b. *Build Coalitions*

This may be the most important element in a Chapter's efforts to increase its advocacy efforts. There are many organizations that are already active in this arena and Chapters should rely on their expertise to expand their roles as public works advocates.

During the course of our work, the Task Force, through surveys and one-on-one discussions, determined that there are several organizations that present the best opportunity for coalition development. They include and relate to the local affiliates of these organizations, not their national counterparts:

(1) Primary Coalition Targets

- National League of Cities/State Municipal Leagues
- National Association of Counties/State County Associations
- Federation of Canadian Municipalities/Municipal Associations
- The Associated General Contractors of America/Chapters
- American Society of Civil Engineers/Regions
- American Water Works Association/Sections
- Water Environment Federation/Member Associations
- American Council of Engineering Companies/Member Organizations

(2) Secondary Coalition Targets

- Other local public works associations
 - ✓ You may find that other public works related organizations are active in legislative advocacy within your chapter's coverage areas. They can also be an important tool and resource
- State agencies involved in public works initiatives
 - ✓ DOT's
 - ✓ Regulatory Agencies

(3) How to Build Effective Coalitions

- Make an appointment to meet with these groups. Indicate your interest in becoming active in the advocacy arena.
- Identify people within your Chapter who may already have relationships with potential partners.

- Volunteer to serve on a committee to help advance advocacy, particularly a legislative committee, if they have one. Work to establish one if one doesn't exist, particularly with the state municipal leagues.
- Invite your coalition members to chapter events.
- Invite regulators and agency members to Chapter events as guest speakers or program participants.
- Establish public works as a resource that is engaged in legislative issues.

(4) Learn from your coalition partners by:

- Attending meetings with them.
- Reading their position papers.
- Reading their testimony, and
- Watching them testify.

c. *Track and respond to legislation and issues that impact public works*

- Use the resources of your coalition partners.
- Identify the need to initiate action.
- Be selective in choosing what legislative initiative to undertake. You do not have unlimited resources. Set your priorities.
- Develop a response plan/method.
- Broadcast Chapter-wide alerts for "call to action" (e-mail works best).
- Use APWA's Washington staff as your resource. This is what they do.
- Visit State House and Senate web sites. Become familiar with their contents and how they work.
- Develop and present testimony at public hearings.
- Meet with legislators/committees.
- Write letters and e-mails.
- Provide updates to members.
- Develop strategies to address specific legislative initiatives.
- Provide feedback monthly to your Chapter members, or more often as warranted, through email, web site or a newsletter.

2. Chapter Resources

a. **Helpful Links**

The following resources are provided to help Chapters become more effective in their delivery of testimony, writing press releases and, in general, becoming more effective advocates.

Source: American Public Works Association

Tool: How to Write a Press Release

Link: <http://www.apwa.net/Documents/safetea-lu/Press%20Release%20template.pdf>

Source: American Public Works Association
Tool: Advocacy Guidebook
Link: <http://www.apwa.net/Documents/Advocacy/07AdvHandbookProof6.pdf>

Source: American Public Works Association
Tool: Advocacy Resources
Link: <http://www.apwa.net/Advocacy/resources.asp>

Source: American Public Works Association
Tool: Legislative Action Center
Link: <http://www.apwa.net/Advocacy/getInvolved.asp>

Source: California League of Cities
Link: www.cacities.org
Tool: Arch Lustberg Video
Title: Delivering Effective Testimony
Cost: \$49 City Official; \$99 Non-city Official
Contact: Ginarose Perino; gperino@cacities.org

b. Chapters That Can Help

During the course of our survey of Chapters, the following indicated that they had been *highly engaged* in advocacy efforts. We are sure that they would be more than willing to share their successes with you. They included: Central Pennsylvania and Georgia.

Those that indicated they were *somewhat engaged* included: Alabama, Arkansas, Alberta, Arizona, Central Coast (CA), Chicago Metro, Delaware, Florida, Kansas, Kansas City Metro, Maine, Michigan, Monterey Bay, New England, New Jersey, Newfoundland, North Carolina, Ontario, Oregon, Rocky Mountain, Sacramento, South Bay Area, and Utah.

c. National Resources

National staff is always available to assist Chapters in these efforts and has the most resources in this regard. Contacts include:

Government Affairs

Jim Fahey, Director of Government and Public Affairs
Julia Anastasio, Director of Sustainability
Laura Berkey, Government Affairs Manager
Maggie Oldham, Government Affairs Associate
Laura Bynum, Communications/Media Relations Manager

Final Thoughts

If a Chapter wants to get engaged in the advocacy process, it is important to understand that there is a fairly long learning curve that must be overcome to be effective. You will quickly learn that working in the political arena provides you with a Civics lesson like you never had in school. You need to understand the legislative process, including and how bills get from one place to another and how they are affected along the way. Your coalition partners, many of whom have full time lobbyists on their staffs, can be a valuable resource in this regard. They can tell you what is necessary to be successful and how to be an effective advocate.