

# 2021 Advocacy Action Planning Calendar

Here are some ideas for advocacy throughout the year. Some of these have a suggested month of the year, but many of these things could and should be done throughout the year, whenever it makes sense for your hospital and/or network. Consider creating an advocacy calendar with these activities and tasks mapped out. Advocacy is year-round!

## Legislator Outreach

At both the federal and state levels (and often the local level), **January** is a time for new legislators to start “learning the ropes.” Use this as an opportunity to introduce them to healthcare policy issues through a letter, email, phone call, or ideally hosting a legislative briefing at with your hospital. If policies are in place where hospital visitation is not available, consider virtual options. Where appropriate, start building a relationship with any new staff people. Getting to know staff is crucial for a good working relationship with a legislator.

## Follow the Dollars

At most levels of government, **February** marks the start (or continuation) of the budget process. As many advocates are looking for resources, this is a good time to be sure you know what’s going on. In North Carolina, the budget process is a long one, usually wrapping up in **June or July**. Getting engaged when the state budget forecast comes out is a good way to begin to follow the process and get involved. At the Federal level, check out the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities at [www.cbpp.org](http://www.cbpp.org). At the state level, budget subcommittees begin meeting in February to learn about their respective issue areas and learn about what is going on. They will then receive budget requests, and then each chamber will build a budget; these are usually released in **May**. After each chamber does the committee process, they hash out their differences in a conference committee; after this the bill heads to the Governor.

## **Hone Your Message with the Message Formula**

To be agreed with and make an impact, you'll need a message that resonates with your audience. This action item should be used whenever there is a policy issue being discussed that you are interested in. Build that kind of message using the message formula below

- Hello, my name is [ ] and I'm from [ ] (establishes relevancy)
- I am here to talk to you about [policy / relationship ask]
- Knowing of your interest in [what policy issues is the person you're talking to interested in?] we think you'll be interested as well
- This is important to the people I represent because [personal story]
- That's why we really hope you'll [ask] I'd like to follow-up by [follow-up ideas]
- Can I get contact information for all the appropriate people in your office?

## **Media Messaging**

Radio? TV? Social Media? Newspapers? Each venue can help you get the word out, but each calls for different things. Radio wants sound bites, television wants pictures, newspapers want stories and social media all of the above. Find your "hook" both in terms of hot topics and reporters' needs and you'll be on your way to free publicity in no time. Consider following the NC Healthcare Association and sharing messages from their Facebook & Twitter feeds. Think about the legislative climate and how to make the biggest impact on members. Make sure these media messages are timely with what is currently happening at the legislature.

## **Get to Know the Staff**

In many cases, getting to know staff people can move your issue forward even faster than getting to know the policymaker. Try and do this any time you can, particularly before legislative session begins so when you have to make an ask, they already know who you are. It is never too late to start building relationships with staff.

## **Make a Relationship Building Ask**

You don't always have to ask a legislator to cosponsor (or stop) a controversial bill. Sometimes you can simply ask him or her to make a statement, talk to your group or participate in a hospital event. What kind of action might you ask them to take that would get them actively engaged, without being too complicated? Legislators often give quotes for press releases and will attend local events when invited.

## **Social Media Outreach**

Social media can be an incredibly useful tool for effective advocacy. Like your legislators on Facebook (you don't have to actually "like" them). Follow your legislators on Twitter. Find mutual connections on Linked-In. All these steps will give you new insights in to their interests and actions. Interact with your legislators and get them engaged with things going on in your hospital and community.

## **Site Visits**

With the presence of COVID-19, site visits for legislators may not be possible. Think of creative ways to show them your facility; is there a video you can show? Have them meet with the tour guide for the information? Virtual tour? When you are able, showing a legislator or their staff something "on the ground" helps them understand how what you're asking for connects to the real live people they represent. If session has adjourned, August is a prime time for visits. Visit the NCHA website for a step-by-step guide to hosting an effective hospital visit.

## **Election Strategies (Summer/Fall)**

Getting like-minded citizens out to vote helps get people who understand your views into office, which in turn makes it far more likely that policymakers will agree with your views. Consider running a voter registration drive and/or become engaged in get out the vote efforts at your hospital – you'll be making a difference on your policy issues and for democracy as a whole! Many election resources can be found on the NCHA website.

## **Town Halls (Fall)**

Legislators often set up meetings in their districts to hear the views of their constituents. This is particularly true during an election year. Find out when these meetings will take place and make plans to attend. With COVID-19, these events are more accessible than ever as they are virtual and easy to attend from wherever you are. Make sure to connect with your legislators on social media to keep up with that they are doing. If attending in person, sometime if you stop by a little before or after you may be able to talk to the policymaker directly. Consider hosting a town hall if it is right for your hospital.

## **Cast Your Vote & Host Legislative Briefings**

Be sure to vote in **November** and encourage the employees at your hospital to vote. Ask your CEO to send a message to all hospital employees with links to finding their polling place, printing a sample ballot and learning the important dates for the election. Following the election, begin outreach to newly (or re-) elected legislators by inviting them into your hospital, if you are allowing visitors, for a legislative briefing to meet key members of your staff and learn more about the issues that impact access to healthcare in their community.

## **Host Legislative Briefings & Build Partnerships**

Continue your efforts to educate lawmakers – both returning and new – about the policy issues that impact healthcare and your hospital. Also, consider other stakeholders in your community – the businesses your hospital partners with and serves, the community leaders who personally visit your hospital, other healthcare providers and nonprofit organizations. Are their opportunities to partner together in a meaningful way to address your issues in the coming year? Coming together collectively will strengthen your position and impact at the legislature.

## **Need Assistance?**

For grassroots and advocacy assistance, contact:

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