



ADVOCACY  
LEADERSHIP NETWORK

Guide to Building  
an Arts Education  
Advocacy Day

# THE ADVOCACY LEADERSHIP NETWORK GUIDE TO BUILDING AN ARTS EDUCATION ADVOCACY DAY

One of the most effective and inclusive strategies that arts education advocates have embraced in recent years are annual advocacy day events, usually held in the state capitol and orchestrated with visits to the offices of legislators. This strategy was prompted in part by the 2015 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, otherwise known as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which empowered state and districts to make far reaching decisions regarding what subject should be taught in their schools and who should teach them. The grassroots ownership of education has, in turn, inspired a growing number of teachers, students, parents and others to advocate on its behalf—including for theatre and other arts. Sometimes that advocacy is at the building level with principals, district wide with a superintendent, or at the state level with legislators. These events provide a powerful opportunity for supporters to speak up on why arts education is important. Organizing such an event, whether it's two days, one day or a half day, is a lot like directing a production—daunting at first, but doable with thoughtful planning and organization.

The EdTA Advocacy Leadership Network (ALN), a coalition of state chapter representatives that was founded in response to ESSA, has created this guide to help states and their chapters begin organizing their own advocacy events. It's not the last word on what you need to do to mount a successful event, but these step-by-step tips should get you started. And check out the links included to examples of advocacy days held in some member states at the end of this document.



*Colorado Thespians on the steps of the Capitol Building*

## 12 MONTHS IN ADVANCE

### **CONFIRM THE NEED**

Before you begin planning an advocacy day, find out if there is already an existing event and, if so, who sponsors it. Your best source for this information will probably be your state arts alliance or council organization. If they're not the responsible organization, they should at least know who is. Contacting the state arts alliance or council can also help you to establish a partnership that can help you organize and perhaps fund your day, or explain to you how you can begin to participate in the existing event.

### **CONVENE A MEETING**

Once you determine a need for an advocacy day, you're ready to hold your first meeting and start building from the grassroots level. One of the first things you should decide is whether the day will be exclusively about theatre education or will it include all arts areas, and who will form the organizational committee. Put a call out to your state Thespians network and, if you're going to plan an all-arts event, ask your school or other district arts teachers to contact their own networks or member association leadership to determine who would be interested in attending an organizational meeting. When you set the meeting date, don't forget to reach out to the state arts alliance as well.

#### **AT YOUR MEETING:**



**Create the committee to oversee the event.** Try to be as inclusive as possible. In other words, include representation from all levels of arts (or theatre) education throughout the state from urban, rural and suburban districts. Come to consensus on event leadership and responsibilities for various aspects of the event.



**Decide whether you will plan a two-day, one-day, or half-day event.** The first task of the committee is to collectively decide whether your event will be a half-day, one-day, or two-day event. All three models can be successful, but each requires a different level of planning and execution. If you are doing a two day event, for

example, it's likely you're going to plan a pre-advocacy day summit that will involve advocacy training for attendees. This guide suggests a planning period that begins a year in advance—a timeline that you would be wise to follow if you're doing a two-day event. If you decide to start more modestly, with a one-day or half day event, you can easily adapt the guide and your timeline, perhaps planning six months in advance for one-day advocacy session, and four months out for a half day event.



**Write a mission statement.** The importance of a succinct statement of the event's purpose and goals cannot be overstated. The mission statement will serve as the core message of your arts education advocacy day for all participants.



**Collaborate on a general attendee list.** If you decide to make it a theatre only event, include invitations to the state Thespians, arts alliance, colleges and university theatre programs, any other theatre education teacher or student focused organizations. If you are planning an all-arts event, ask the leadership of the other arts education associations to mobilize their members and, again, reach out the state arts alliance or council to assist you in making contact with individuals and organizations that might want to attend



**Assemble a targeted invite list of public officials, business people and identified supporters of arts education.**

Include department of education and other representatives from state and district government—legislators, superintendents, and principals; parent-based school organizations; business owners, professional arts organizations, and groups and individuals who have demonstrated past support for school arts programs, etc. Regarding legislators, make a point to invite both proponents and non-supporters of arts education. It's great to have public officials who are cheerleaders, and sometimes it's possible to turn around a legislator who appreciates the invite, especially if it includes the opportunity to speak to students. You may also want to consider inviting lobbyists and legislative aides. Sometimes these individuals were former Thespians and love taking time to talk with students.



**Establish where the advocacy day should take place in your state capitol city.** Possible options will be the capitol building itself, or perhaps a nearby theatre or public park. Having the event, or at least part of it, in the capitol building—inside or outside—makes a statement and an impression, so do your best to make that happen. If you can't, you may need to get more creative. One way or another don't stray far from the city center and proximity to the capitol building itself.



**Decide on a date (or dates) for the event.** Your arts advocacy day needs to be scheduled in accordance with your capitol's legislative session. Delegate someone on your committee to call the state capitol administration office to see what the best possible dates would be. The office should help you stay away from dates that legislators will be out of the building, such as spring break and Easter. March would be ideal as it's simultaneously Theatre in Our Schools Month, Music in Our Schools Month, Dance in Our School Month, and Youth Art Month.



**Create a list of logistics questions for your call to the state capitol administrative office, including:**

- What time will you be able to get into the building to set up?
- What areas will be available to you?
- What are the rules on signage, decorum, etc.?
- Are you able to use any of the building's equipment, such as tables, chairs, speakers, microphones, podium, etc? If unavailable, are you able to bring these items to the event?
- Will there be reserved parking and load-in space at the capitol? If not, load-in will be a challenge to overcome.



**Agree on what will take place at the event.** Every advocacy day event should include scheduled appointments with legislators, so certainly include that in your initial plan. A great way to showcase and advocate for the arts is to hold student performances and invite your legislators to attend, assuming you have the space, students, and necessary AV—if any—to make it happen. For non-performance presentations, try to arrange for space where technical theatre and visual arts students can display their work.



**Decide if training will be conducted to prepare students and others for their meetings with legislators.** If you're only doing a half-day event, that may not be possible, at least not onsite. In that case, you might have to offer some basic guidance to participating schools so they can do their own training ahead of the day.



**Agree on what the legislative “ask” will be for the day.** The ask should be in alignment with your mission statement and clearly establish what support advocates are seeking from their representatives. “Please support theatre education” is not an ask—it’s an emotional request that does not clarify what you specifically want. Start this

important discussion with your committee members by creating an “ask sheet” that begins with the fundamental question: Why are we here today? and continues with deeper dive questions that address such things as:

- Passage of a pending bill that can positively or negatively impact access to arts education
- Drafting of a bill that will increase arts education funding state wide if it becomes law.
- Reversal of a law or regulation that is detrimental to arts educators.
- Support for a state policy change that could put arts education on equal footing with other subject areas (such as recognition of the arts as an essential part of a well-rounded education for every student).



**Delegate responsibility for creating and managing the event’s registration forms.** This important job should be assigned to someone with digital database and forms skills and, ideally, event planning. It’s up to them to decide on what form to adapt and use (which should include, at minimum, school name, emergency contacts, etc.) Aside from creating the forms, this individual (or team) should be able to establish whether or not the event registration is to be done online or on paper.



**Assign someone to write an informational page description of the event that includes the place, day and time and details on how to register.** This short, succinct page should be a call-to-arms that addresses both adults and students and align with the event’s mission statement.



**Agree on registration costs, based on at least two factors:** whether or not there will be an overnight hotel stay for some or all of the attendees and the number of planned meals. If you are doing a one or two-day event, you might also consider if there will be a multi-tier registration cost for those who would only attend for one afternoon or morning. Additionally, you should discuss the possibility of a securing a commitment from an underwriting organization that can help cover at least some costs and therefore reduce the registration costs.

## 9 MONTHS IN ADVANCE

At this point, you should confirm the schedule for the day, especially if you’re doing a two-day event. If you’re planning performances, it’s important to stagger them. For example, in an exclusively theatre advocacy day, maybe the first performance is a musical theatre duet, the next is a monologue, then a poetry out loud presentation, etc. If you are incorporating all fine arts, you may start with a choir performance, followed by a monologue, a jazz band performance, etc. Bear in mind that some states limit the kinds of performances that can be held at certain times (Missouri, for example, limits musical performances in the capitol building to the lunch hour to avoid disturbing the chambers). Your contact at the state capitol administration office should be able to confirm what you can and can’t do in the building.

### OTHER DETAILS:



**Proofread the registration forms.**



**Confirm and sign contracts for use of space.**



**Sign contract with hotel for block of rooms and meals, if applicable.**



**Set deadline for registrations.**

## 6 MONTHS IN ADVANCE

Begin promoting the event to middle and secondary schools across the state, as well as college programs, with an informational page that includes a description of the event, day and time, and registration process (paper and/or online). Key communication opportunities include your state Thespian conference, teacher professional development workshops, state chapter website and social media. If you are including all fine arts, ask your collaborators in the other arts associations to do the same kind of promotion.

### OTHER DETAILS:



**Review all forms and regulations that need to be completed and adhered to for the event.** For example, if your attendees want to carry signs, will you need a permit from the city, or do you need a permit to organize on the front steps of the Capitol?



**Distribute the informational page and registration forms at all the above events.** If you're also allowing online registration, provide the link. Include leaders in your community who also advocate for the arts as well. They are a great resource.



*California Youth in Theatre Advocacy delegates sing "There's No Business Like Show Business" on the capitol steps.*

## 3 MONTHS IN ADVANCE

Start reaching out to all registrants regarding the process of making appointments with legislators during the advocacy day (or days). It would be best if they made their own appointments in order to begin establishing a relationship with their legislator and staff. Advise your attendees to visit the state's house and senate web pages, where they will find contact information for their legislators. Every office should have a staff person that sets appointments (or an online process for doing so). If it seems absolutely necessary for someone on the planning committee to make some of these appointments, commence that work now. While it's possible to make appointments on short notice, now is the time to figure out the availability of each legislator. As part of the appointment process, encourage your registrants to inquire about whether or not the legislator or an aide would be willing to visit their school on what to expect in a meeting and to perhaps go through a role-playing exercise with students.

### OTHER DETAILS:



**Send our reminders for registration for the event.**



**Send reminders to the legislators about the event and be sure to invite them to all events,** even if they can only attend for a few minutes to watch some of the performances. Watching students perform can be a great conversation starter when you meet with them.



**Alert the media about the upcoming event.**

## 1 MONTH IN ADVANCE

At this point, you should be reviewing all of the planning you have done in the previous eleven months. There are a couple of important details to finalize, whether you are doing a two-day, one-day or half-day event: Decide who will be running your registration table when schools arrive. Like all such events, the registration table is information central. It's also a great place to have arts association and other leaders on hand to answer questions and a good opportunity to share brochures and data on how the arts benefit your state. The other key decision you need to make is who will be taking pictures that day. Of course, attendees from every school will likely be taking pictures on their cell phones, but it's important for you to assign someone with decent photography skills to document all aspects of the day. Photos can tell a powerful story about



the event, help promote your next arts advocacy day, and showcase the great work that your students are doing on behalf of arts education.

### IF YOU ARE PLANNING A SUMMIT THE NIGHT BEFORE AN ADVOCACY DAY:



**Confirm the number of tables, chairs, and audio visual equipment that are included in your contract.** If it does not include the AV, determine where it will come from.



**Review committee member attendance and assigned responsibilities,** such as food management and the timeline of speakers and/or performances.



**Finalize meals with your caterer or restaurant.**



**Review the hotel room block and registrant list.**



**Establish a list of legislators who are coming and their role at the event** (are they just attending or will they speak?). Bear in mind that when the legislators are in session, it may be hard for them to break away from a committee hearing or a work session at a specific time. Be understanding if they are unable to attend. You always want to keep your arts education allies.



**Create participant packets** that include the entire two-day schedule, an FAQ page of national and state arts education facts and figures, the agreed upon core advocacy ask, a list of legislators and their office address, brochures, and name tags.



**Assemble leave-behind folders** that registrants will give to their legislators or representative staff member. These folders can include much of the same materials distributed to registrants in the packets—facts and figures supporting arts education, brochures and most importantly, the core ask of your advocacy day.



**Determine who will manage and be seated at your registration table.** This is a great place for one of your fine arts leaders to sit and greet all of the attendees and guest speaker(s) to the event.



*Missouri Thespians at the 2018 Fine Arts Day, sponsored by the Missouri Arts Alliance.*

### IF YOU ARE PLANNING A ONE- OR HALF-DAY ARTS ADVOCACY DAY, YOU WILL NEED TO COMPLETE SOME OF THE SAME TASKS (with the exception of the hotel and summit convening space):



**Review your registration process and who will manage the table.**



**Confirm the equipment you will need for the day** (chairs, risers, microphones, speakers) and where it will come from.



**Prepare packets that include the schedule of the day, etc.**

### OTHER DETAILS FOR ALL ADVOCACY DAY MODELS:



**Send out a last call for registrations.**



**Create a social media presence** with a hashtag for attendees to post their pictures and updates as they go through the day. Use Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram, etc. to spread the word about the day!



**Agree on an emcee who will serve as host for the event;** it's important that this person also be the advocacy day's designated spokesperson who will be available for interviews with the media.



**Send a complete press release to media outlets.**



Remind registrants that, along with the leave-behind packet, it's always useful to include a business card, if they have one.



Compose a "thank you" list of all the individuals and organizations that helped make the day happen.

## ADVOCACY DAY

You should, of course, arrive early to set up registration and anything needed for the day(s) events in the meeting space, and make a point to review the food arrangements. Bear in mind that some registrants may not be able to attend all convening events as they may have appointments with legislators that conflict with some events.

### OTHER DETAILS:



Assign a point person to serve as production manager to address any performance issues that might arise.



Follow the schedule set by your committee for performances and any awards that may be handed out that day. This is a great opportunity to recognize any arts teachers who have been awarded special citations from their perspective arts education organizations.



Recognize any legislator that attends the event(s). It is a win-win for both the advocacy day and the legislator.



Stay on time! If you ask a legislator to watch a school in their district perform, they need to be performing at the time you designate for them.



Establish a cleanup plan that restores any space that you use. Facility personnel in government buildings are under pressure to keep the public areas pristine, so help them do that. The more you are seen as a good guest, the more likely you will gain their cooperation in future years.



Don't forget to follow through on your thank you notes to all the individuals and organizations who helped make your event a success!



*Attendees gathered in the state capitol building at the 2018 Kansas Thespians Theatre in Our Schools Day.*

## FUNDING YOUR ADVOCACY DAY

Funding your arts advocacy day event should not be stressful or one-sided. The biggest event expense are the handouts (programs, facts, figures, leave behind folders, etc.). Ask other participating organizations to share the day's expenses. In return, displaying a banner/sign with their logo or make an announcement during the day thanking them for their support will help ensure their support in the future.

Well ahead of the event, do some research to determine if there is a grant that might underwrite some or all of the costs of the event. A good place to start is private foundations that have a history of funding arts and culture in your state. They might find the idea of supporting an event that include students particularly appealing, especially if you decide to host a training summit the night before legislator visits. Your state arts alliance or council could also point you towards some possible financial support.

The use of the capitol building should be free of cost for your state event. If you are unsure on how to reserve the building for your event, contact your state legislator for assistance.

## STATE ADVOCACY DAYS LINKS

### California

[California Youth in Theatre To-Do List](#)

### Colorado

<https://www.artsforcolorado.org/arts-advocacy-day>

### Georgia

<http://gaartsnetwork.org/news-events/georgia-arts-day>

### Iowa

<https://iowaalliance4artsed.org/2018/01/2018-arts-advocacy-day-a-success>

### Kansas

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1LQL7P9ZWBpc1sK5nIKXvoCaH4MC3tqOB/view?usp=sharing>

### Missouri

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1t3BWMWu-U08rXxZ9mjKG\\_tsWzy\\_p0tEg/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1t3BWMWu-U08rXxZ9mjKG_tsWzy_p0tEg/view?usp=sharing)



## Special thanks to the ALN Arts Advocacy Day Committee

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*Left to right, bottom row: Jennifer Morgan-Beuchat, Kansas; Tami LoSasso, Colorado; Lindsay Shields, New York; Zachary Schneider, Wyoming; Teri Turner, Missouri; and Alison Johnson, California. Left to right, back row: Sharon Chadwick, Nevada; Helen Duranleau-Brennan, Iowa; Zachery Bates, New Jersey; Anthony Cimino-Johnson, Virginia; Erick Weeks, Mississippi; Christopher Veneris, North Carolina; and Scott Wilson, Ohio.*