



10 Tips for Community Engagement and Advocacy

In *Lift Every Voice and Lead*, grasstops told us they wanted action items and suggestions to help them better advocate for students. The following 10 suggestions and tips can be helpful in advocacy and community engagement endeavors.

Suggestions	Examples	Things to Consider
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Understand important education reform terms, issues and facts. The education landscape is constantly evolving. Staying abreast of the current issues and terms is important for advocacy.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review websites like http://edglossary.org/about/ that explain key education terms. Signing up to receive education content through online newsletters is a great way to stay up to date on issues. The U.S. Department of Education and organizations such as Education Post, Education Trust and Public Private Action provide various useful newsletters. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is impossible to know every detail about numerous education policies; try to obtain a broad scope. If there is a particular education policy area of interest to you, develop your knowledge-base on that issue through research and by talking to individuals working in that particular area. Investigate key issues in your area and larger national issues. Consider a few key issues, such as teacher effectiveness, high-quality assessments, high-quality educational options, teacher diversity and discipline disparities.
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Make it personal. Incorporate your personal narrative and experiences in education during outreach. Personal narratives not only create transparency and authenticity in advocacy initiatives, but also add additional nuances to policy debates.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You may discuss experiences related to your education and/or child's experience, if applicable, during an advocacy event. Consider what worked, what did not work and how it impacted you. Consider speaking at a local school board meeting and discuss how a proposed policy may influence you, the community at large and those close to you. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When holding a community event for parents or students, reflect on your own preparedness for college, influential teachers, guidance counselors or community members. You should also reflect on information you wish you had known in school.
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Assess the local climate and landscape. Previous research consistently shows that African American communities do not want policy done to them, but with them.^{xv} They want to be heard and included in meaningful policy discussions. Creating opportunities to hear from key stakeholders is important for advocacy work.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hold focus groups and forums to hear from members of the community. Partner with another organization that engages parents or other stakeholders on a regular basis. Ask to host roundtable discussions with participants. You don't have to do all the heavy lifting. Identify the key leaders that are making strides in education reform in your local area. Administer brief climate surveys on the pertinent educational issues in the area to relevant stakeholders. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You do not have to be an expert to administer a quality survey for programmatic use. There are websites such as surveymonkey.com that will allow you to construct an e-mail survey for free. You may also consider administering a paper survey for increased response rates. Consider summarizing the data and sending to local decision makers. When hosting a focus group with parents, be mindful of time constraints and plan accordingly. It is important to not only hear from communities, but to utilize that information in a meaningful way to shape advocacy and policy.

10 Tips for Community Engagement and Advocacy *continued*

Suggestions	Examples	Things to Consider
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Launch a social media campaign. Advocating for change in education requires a multifaceted approach. Garnering support through social media is an effective method for mobilizing people to action and spreading awareness about your cause.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A social media campaign may revolve around a particular issue, community event, release of a report or brochure or some other initiative. The exact format may vary. • Host a Twitter chat. A Twitter chat is somewhat like a virtual panel. A moderator will pose questions using (Q1, Q2...) and participants will answer using (A1, A2...). All users will utilize a specific hashtag set forth by the moderator. Usually, the chat will last one hour. See appendix for more information. • Visit: https://nonprofits.fb.com/ for information on setting up a page on Facebook for your initiative. • Community Tool Box is a great resource for tools, tips and examples about social media engagement (see appendix). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social media is a great way to share tools, research and resources with key influencers on how to advocate around an education issue. • Develop a clear objective and timeline for your campaign. • When hosting a Twitter chat, produce a few sample tweets and questions beforehand. • Consider administering a newsletter about key education events and issues if you have the capacity. • Social media is a great way to promote an event. Remember to distribute invitations to potential guests far in advance. Create reminders to send out regular e-mails and updates about your event. • Follow the #UNCFK12 hashtag on Twitter for education content.
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Build partnerships with local schools. Relationships matter. Establishing partnerships with local schools is a great way to learn about school processes, help advocate on students' behalf and offer collaborative opportunities for students and staff.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organize or join a local school visit. • Seek out mentoring and tutoring opportunities with local schools. • Establish a relationship with guidance counselors. You may be able to provide scholarship information and resources on college readiness.^{xvi} • Create a job-shadowing or summer internship program for local students. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider testing schedules when planning or organizing a school visit. • Coordinate with the principal, assistant principal, administrative assistant and/or district office community partnership personnel when planning a school visit. • Consider attending or hosting a school career day. • If applicable, consider offering a professional development workshop for school staff.
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Expand community networks. Networking with individuals who are passionate about making positive changes in education is an excellent way to further your advocacy efforts. There is often strength in numbers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate with other organizations to issue a joint statement on education issues. Several civil rights organizations have issued letters regarding educational equity. • Partner with parent groups, churches, school districts and organizations who have an interest in closing achievement and opportunity gaps. If possible, develop a coalition of individuals working on education reform. • Schedule one-on-one meetings to facilitate dialogue with key stakeholders. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider attending stakeholder events to network about potential collaboration. • Developing an advocacy strategy can be difficult given multiple competing priorities. Partnering with other organizations can be an effective way to distribute tasks. Be sure to assign tasks and develop deadlines early in the planning process.

10 Tips for Community Engagement and Advocacy *continued*

Suggestions	Examples	Things to Consider
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Host a community event. Organizing an event is an excellent way to engage communities around K-12 education reform. Such events provide a space for dialogue about systemic issues and potential solutions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Types of events may include panels, town halls, speaker series, house meetings, video screenings, debates, forums, roundtables, brown bag sessions, luncheons and symposia. Tailor the type of event to your particular audience and budget. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider co-partnering an event with another organization to help with costs and logistical support. A strategic marketing plan is important for maximizing turnout (see appendix). If possible, pass out a document that includes actionable next steps at the end of the event. Keep a list of all attendees to expand your network. Consider creating a short survey to receive feedback on the event.
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Engage with elected officials. A key lever to enact change is through engagement with elected officials who have the authority to influence education legislation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attend a local school board meeting. E-mail, call or tweet elected officials. Organize an e-mail-writing campaign among the community. Request a meeting with an elected official or staff member. Invite an elected official to an organized school visit. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Visit: https://www.usa.gov/agencies to find more information on contacting your elected official. Draft an advocacy letter about a particular education issue and disseminate to your community. When possible, include compelling data or a personal narrative in meetings and/or letters. Describe how certain issues are influencing certain members of the community.
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Write an Op-ed. One way to elicit change and garner support across a broad spectrum is by writing an op-ed or letter to the editor.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Online submissions often get more attention than print submissions. Do your research to find the best fit for your article. Check out Harvard Kennedy School's fact sheet on writing op-eds to gain insight on the steps to writing a great op-ed. (see appendix) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Timing matters. If a particular issue is popular or dominating the news, you may be more likely to have your submission accepted. Have at least one or two people review your op-ed before submission. Consider partnering with another organization or individual to write your article. Be compelling, concise and to the point.
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Share key resources. There are lots of great educational resources available. Make an effort to share with parents, students and other grassroots.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> See appendix for list of resources. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to stay updated on education issues, as resources and data are often changing. Consider creating a virtual database of important resources and tools for advocacy.