



Advocacy

Tips for Developing Effective Advocacy Alerts



A well-developed advocacy alert can help your organization sound the alarm on impending legislative or regulatory action and activate your members to quickly bring pressure to bear on key decision-makers. The ability to drive effective member communications that are timely, appropriately messaged, accurately targeted, and at a high volume can go a long way in helping your organization impact the decision-making and voting choices of elected officials on important public policy matters. Advocacy alerts are a call to action that encourages members to make their voices heard at decisive points in the policy-making process.

PREP WORK

Advocacy alerts and the actions they encourage typically occur on a short timeframe. Therefore, it is important for organizations to establish and maintain multiple channels of communication with their members that can be rapidly utilized.

- ✓ **DO** collect accurate contact information from your members, particularly email addresses and phone numbers for those without email. **DON'T** forget to keep these updated!
- ✓ For your members without email addresses, **DO** consider setting up and using a “phone tree” to get the word out on what is going on and the need to act. As you may know, a phone tree is “a pre-arranged system for contacting a large number of people quickly in which each person called then telephones a number of other designated people.”
- ✓ **DO** establish and use Social Media platforms, like Facebook, to communicate with your members.

Get as many people to “Like” your Facebook page as possible and then use that communication channel to inform and activate your members around key policy issues.

TIMING, TARGETING & CONTENTS

- ✓ **DO** properly time your advocacy alert so the action you seek to compel from your members (likely contacting their elected official) coincides with a key step along the policy-making process.
- ✓ **DO** determine who you want your members to specifically target and mention them in your advocacy alert. Who do you want your members to influence? From a Direct Action Organizing perspective, who has the power to give you what you want at this step in the process?
 - ✓ Remember, elected officials value communications from their constituents well-above communications from non-constituents.

✓ **DO** briefly explain the current situation and what message you want your members to convey.

✓ For example: “Members of the state House of Representatives will soon be voting on H.B. 1201 to cut annual cost-of-living adjustments for retired educators like you. Tell your representative that you rely on your annual COLA to help you pay for the things you need, like food, medication and home heating and to VOTE NO on H.B 1201!

✓ If you’re engaging your members around a particular piece of legislation, **DO** be sure to include the bill number in your alert.

✓ **DO** develop and use one or two key talking points as the basis of your advocacy alert to educate your members about what is at stake and to frame the issue at hand.

✓ In other words, **DO** clearly state what is at stake and how this will impact your members. What is the choice currently before the elected official over a piece of legislation? To keep a promise or to break one? To protect earned benefits? To protect vulnerable retirees on fixed incomes?

✓ **DO** include a call to action! As mentioned above, advocacy alerts are a call to action that encourages members to make their voices heard at decisive points in the policy-making process. Make sure to ask them to engage!*

✓ Also, **DO** be sure to include only one call to action request at a time!

✓ **DO** include the phone number of your targeted legislators, committee or the legislative switchboard as a whole, depending on who you are targeting. **DO** try to make it as easy as possible for your members to take action. Give them all the information they need to reach out.

✓ **DO** keep it brief. Although there is no word limit for advocacy alerts, **DO** try to keep them as short as possible while still conveying your key messages and explaining the need for action.

✓ **DO** include links to additional information. Although the advocacy alert itself should be brief, you could include links to additional information or fact sheets pertinent to the issue at hand.

*ESCALATING YOUR ASK

✓ When building an advocacy campaign and engaging your members around an issue, **DO** consider the need to effectively step up, or escalate, what you are asking your members to do along the way.

✓ At the beginning of an advocacy campaign, you should first educate your activists on the issue before asking them to take action. Knowledge on the issue will certainly enhance their effectiveness when communicating with those outside of your organization.

✓ The first “ask” of your members could then be something relatively easy, like signing a petition, complete a survey/questionnaire, or clicking on a web-based action alert that sends an email to their elected official.

✓ You can then build up to more difficult asks, such as making phone calls to elected officials or sending a [letter to the editor](#), to name a few.

AFTER SENDING

✓ **DO** follow up. Be sure to utilize your communications channels to thank everyone who engaged on your advocacy issue and let your folks know how things went. Congratulate them if you won this battle and/or keep them engaged if the fight continues!

EXAMPLES

✓ Examples of some recent AARP advocacy alerts for your review are [here](#) and [here](#).

✓ Examples of some pension-related advocacy alerts are [here](#) and [here](#).

✓ NRTA’s Facebook page is located [here](#). AARP Advocates Facebook page is [here](#).