



Government Affairs Committee Tool Kit

Abstract

This toolkit is designed to introduce government affairs and make advocacy easy, accessible, and understandable for all PRPS members. The Government Affairs Committee is dedicated to supporting municipalities across the Commonwealth by advocating for issues that affect Society members and providing the information and tools needed to assist them.

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Introduction

Advocacy:

The **Pennsylvania Recreation and Parks Society (PRPS)** is the state's largest non-governmental advocate for recreation and parks, dedicated to protecting and promoting the profession at all levels.

Through its Government Affairs Committee, PRPS monitors state and federal legislation impacting parks, recreation, conservation, health and wellness, and related issues. The committee also plans advocacy activities and regularly publishes legislative updates and alerts.

Mission:

To protect and promote the profession of recreation at all levels through education and advocacy from the local level to the federal level.

Key Stakeholders/Partners:

- Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR)
- Pennsylvania Parks and Forest Foundation (PPFF)
- Philadelphia Park Alliance
- Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy
- PRPS Members

Committee Structure and Roles

The Government Affairs Committee is a committee comprised of volunteer PRPS members that meet monthly to discuss various legislative items on the state and federal level, and advocacy training and events. The committee structure has a Committee Chairperson who moderates the meeting and produces meeting notes. PRPS works with a Policy Advocate, and the PRPS CEO to discuss and present the various legislative issues and various advocacy efforts.

Committee members:

A Committee Chair, CEO of PRPS, the Public Policy Advocate for PRPS, representatives from each PRPS District, PRPS partners working towards the same legislative goals, and PRPS members.

Duties and responsibilities of Committee members:

- Prepare for regular monthly meetings by reading materials ahead of time.
- Attend and actively participate in at least 80% of all GAC monthly meetings.

- Contribute to the shaping of PRPS legislative priorities and position statements.
- Identify and engage with key stakeholders within their local communities.
- Build relationships with their local community, state, and federal government legislative members to assist in educating and promoting the field of recreation and parks.
- Define action steps with alerts introduced by PRPS regarding various legislation.
- Adhere to all tenets of the PRPS policy on Volunteer Committee Service Responsibilities.

Duties of District Liaisons:

- Encourage District members to engage with their local, state, and federal legislators as needed on current topics.
- Report back to District boards and membership on the current activities of GAC.
- Assist in sharing information for grassroots outreach to legislators.
- Provide tools to train and enable District members to effect positive impact interactions with government and public entities.
- Direct District members to visit the PRPS website for the most up to date information regarding various legislative activities.

Meeting Protocols

The meeting process is straightforward. The Chair, with input from the Policy Advocate and the PRPS CEO, develops the agenda. Meeting information is shared with the committee to ensure proper preparation. The Chair moderates the meeting, guiding the discussion through the agenda items.

Advocacy Strategies

The concept of advocacy often discourages individuals, as many feel they lack the skills to effectively engage with elected officials on specific topics. Common fears include concerns about being asked questions they cannot answer or believing that officials possess greater expertise on the subject matter. These are misconceptions that people often create themselves.

The National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) and the Park Champions Seminar have identified and discussed strategies to overcome these barriers. Advocacy is a skill many practice daily without realizing it. For professionals, particularly in local government settings, advocacy occurs regularly—whether addressing managers about issues or engaging in budget discussions. This same advocacy extends to interactions with elected officials or committees. Advocacy is not a new skill; it is simply about tailoring the message to resonate with the intended audience.

Storytelling:

Why Storytelling?

Why is storytelling important, and how does it benefit you? By crafting a story, you build a meaningful connection with the public you serve and the individuals whose support you seek. Here are some key benefits of storytelling:

- **Create Empathy:**
 - Empathy, as defined by Merriam-Webster, is *"the action of understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experiences of another."* Storytelling fosters this critical connection.
- **Evoke Emotion:**
 - Stories inspire feelings, helping others emotionally connect to your issue or goal.
- **Strengthen Connections:**
 - Sharing your story builds relationships with like-minded individuals who can amplify your message and act as allies.
- **Build Understanding:**
 - Storytelling helps others grasp the importance and rationale behind your issue or project.
- **Encourage Advocacy:**
 - The connections you form through storytelling create advocates who can champion your cause and extend its reach.

Storytelling First Steps:

1. **Identify the Problem:**
 - What is the issue or problem you are addressing in your story?
2. **Identify the Goal:**
 - What is the desired outcome for your issue or problem? Are you aiming to develop a corrective plan, secure funding, or achieve another specific objective?
3. **Identify the Tone:**

- Why is the tone important? The tone sets the emotional direction of your message. Do you want to evoke sympathy and tug at heartstrings, or generate excitement and enthusiasm around your issue or problem?

4. **Identify the Character(s):**

- Who are the characters affected by your issue? How can you effectively highlight them to tell your story? These characters can include you as a park and recreation professional, a resident, or another individual who provides a unique perspective.

Storytelling: Second Step – Produce Your Story

- **Choose the Appropriate Medium:**

Decide the best way to present your story—whether through social media, text, print material, videos, photos, or another format. The right medium is essential to reaching your target audience effectively. Budgetary constraints may influence this choice—consider if you have the funds for a video, media contacts to help tell your story, or whether it aligns with available programming.

Storytelling: Third Step – Identify Effective Platform(s)

- **Select the Right Platform(s):**

Choose the platform(s) that will best reach your target audience. Depending on your issue, there may be multiple platforms that are suitable. Be mindful that once your story is shared, you should be prepared for responses, including phone calls and social media comments, both positive and negative.

Story Telling Platforms:

Social Media Demographics (2024):

- **Facebook:**
Female, ages 30-49
- **Instagram:**
Male 50.7%, Female 49.3%, ages 18-34
- **X (Twitter):**
2:1 split of males and females, predominantly under 35 years old
- **LinkedIn:**
Female 43%, Male 57%, with 60% of users between 25-34 years old

- **Snapchat:**
Female 49%, Male 49.2%, Majority of users aged 18-24; users over 35 are unlikely to use
- **TikTok:**
Female 54%, Male 46%, with 65-70% of users aged 18-34

Website:

- Website analytics provide valuable demographic insights about general information seekers of your organization.

Letter to the Editor:

- While this is still a platform to share your story, its effectiveness will depend on the area, readership, and whether the publication is print or digital.

Program Guides/Newsletter/Annual Report:

- Many organizations still produce printed or digital versions of these platforms. They are most effective for sharing stories at a local level and must align with the mission and goals of the organization. Controversial topics are typically excluded unless they directly support the organization's mission.

Local Ads:

- The effectiveness of local ads will depend on the location, publication, circulation, and readership. Ad salespeople can provide demographic information for their print and digital productions. Keep in mind that ads carry a cost, so assess whether they will help achieve your storytelling and organizational goals.

Storytelling Step Four: Share/Amplify Your Story

Now that your story is prepared, it's time to share and amplify it. This process begins with engaging your constituents and supporters, encouraging them to take action. This step is essential in advancing your issue toward resolution.

As with legislative issues, letters to elected officials and emails are widely used to express support or opposition to specific topics. In this case, however, the majority of the communication should be in support of your goal. For local issues, constituents can reach out to their local elected officials and explain how the issue will benefit them, their families, or their neighborhoods.

At the state or federal level, similar outreach is crucial. Encouraging constituents to share their opinions will help lawmakers assess and take appropriate action, either in support or opposition, based on the impact on their community.

Coalition Building:

While sharing your story, it's essential to build a coalition of like-minded supporters. These individuals and organizations can provide the necessary support to resolve the issue. Here are a few key steps for effective coalition building:

1. **Develop a Power Map:**

A power map helps identify the key figures in your community or state who can influence the outcome of your issue. It enables you to form a coalition that will support your goals.

According to the National Education Association, there are 10 steps to creating a power map:

1. **Clarify the issue and goals:** Clearly define the issue and your desired outcome.
2. **Identify key decision-makers:** Determine who has the power to help achieve your goals.
3. **Research connections:** Consider your personal and professional connections that could influence the outcome.
4. **Brainstorm with committees:** Work with various committees in your organization to identify stakeholders—individuals or organizations affected by the issue.
5. **Map connections:** Think broadly about all possible links, including political, family, religious, and neighborhood ties. Anyone who can exert influence should be considered.
6. **Create a grid:** Draw a grid with "with us" on the left and "against us" on the right, with decision-makers at the top and no influence at the bottom.
7. **Assess influence:** Place each individual or organization based on their stance (supportive or opposing) and influence (high or low).
8. **Draw connections:** Map out relationships between individuals or organizations who share common interests.
9. **Prioritize your list:** Circle the individuals or organizations with the most influence and support.
10. **Plan next steps:** Based on your power map, determine your next steps, such as building support from influential allies or addressing opposition.

Using these strategies, you can build a coalition that will help you move forward with your goals and strengthen the effectiveness of your advocacy efforts.

Policy Analysis and Research

PRPS is in a unique position in that we contract and work closely with a Legislative Liaison who helps analyze and research various legislative topics and introduced bills.

Communication and Outreach

PRPS supplies various tool kits to assist with communications and outreach.

- [Park and Recreation Month Tool Kit](#)
- [Park and Recreation Professionals Day Tool Kit](#)
- [Government Affairs Tool Kit](#)
- [Find Your Legislators](#)

Legislative Process in Pennsylvania

Introduction of a Bill:

- A bill can be introduced in either the House of Representatives or the Senate. In Pennsylvania, there are 203 members in the House and 50 members in the Senate.
- Bills can be introduced by members of either chamber, the Governor, or occasionally other entities, but most often by legislators themselves.

First Reading:

- After a bill is introduced, it goes through its first reading, which is a formal presentation of the bill's title. No debate happens at this stage.
- The bill is then assigned to a committee that specializes in the subject matter of the bill.

Committee Review:

- The committee examines the bill and can hold hearings, collect evidence, and make amendments. This is a key stage for determining whether a bill moves forward or gets stalled.
- If the committee approves the bill, it's reported out to the full House or Senate for consideration. If not, the bill may be "tabled" or killed at this stage.

Second Reading:

- On the second reading, the full chamber debates the bill, including any amendments proposed by committee members or legislators.

- After debate, the bill is subject to a vote. If it passes, it moves to the third reading.

Third Reading:

- The bill is read again in full, often with the final version, including any amendments made in earlier readings.
- The final vote occurs at this stage. If it passes in the first chamber (House or Senate), it moves to the other chamber for consideration.

Consideration by the Other Chamber:

- The second chamber (if the bill started in the House, it goes to the Senate, and vice versa) follows the same process: first reading, committee review, second reading, and third reading.
- The other chamber may pass the bill as is, amend it, or reject it.

Conference Committee (if needed):

- If the second chamber makes amendments to the bill, and the first chamber doesn't agree with those changes, a conference committee is formed.
- This committee, composed of members from both chambers, works out a compromise version of the bill.
- The revised bill is sent back to both chambers for a vote.

Governor's Approval:

- Once both chambers have agreed on the final version of the bill, it is sent to the **Governor** for approval.
- The Governor has several options:
 - Sign the bill into law.
 - Veto the bill (which can be overridden by a two-thirds vote in both chambers).
 - Allow the bill to become law without signing it (this is called a "pocket veto," though the bill still becomes law after 10 days unless the legislature adjourns during that period).

Becoming Law:

- If the Governor signs the bill or it passes through an override of the veto, it becomes law.

Ethics and Compliance

Ethics and compliance in government affairs for a non-profit organization are crucial to maintaining integrity, building trust, and ensuring legal standing. Here's a breakdown of the key principles and practices non-profits should follow:

Adherence to Legal and Regulatory Requirements

- **Lobbying Laws:** Non-profits involved in advocacy or lobbying must comply with federal, state, and local regulations. For example, the U.S. Lobbying Disclosure Act requires organizations to register and report their lobbying activities.
- **501(c)(3) Status:** Organizations under this tax-exempt status must limit their political activities and the extent of their lobbying efforts. Overstepping these limits can endanger their tax-exempt status.
- **Campaign Finance Laws:** Non-profits must be cautious not to support political candidates or parties, either directly or indirectly, in violation of campaign finance laws.
- **Transparency and Reporting**
- **Disclosure of Activities:** Non-profits should openly report their government affairs and lobbying activities, filing necessary forms such as the IRS Form 990, which outlines lobbying expenditures.
- **Accountability:** Transparency with donors, members, and the public about government engagement activities fosters trust and credibility. Clear communication about goals, methods, and outcomes is essential.

Conflict of Interest Management

- **Ethics Policies:** Adopting and following strong ethics policies helps prevent conflicts of interest, particularly when interacting with government officials or influencing legislation. Staff and board members must disclose any relationships or financial interests that could lead to conflicts.
- **Gifts and Influence:** Non-profits must maintain strict guidelines regarding gifts to government officials, ensuring there is no undue influence or appearance of bribery. Please reference PRPS bylaws.

Advocacy with Integrity

- **Truthful Communication:** All communication with government entities must be accurate, truthful, and not misleading. Misrepresentation can harm the organization's reputation and legal standing.
- **Avoiding Partisanship:** Non-profits should avoid endorsing or opposing specific political candidates, ensuring that advocacy remains non-partisan while supporting issues of public interest.
- **Internal Compliance and Training**

- **Compliance Programs:** Non-profits must have systems in place to ensure that staff and members understand and adhere to ethical guidelines and government affairs regulations.
- **Training and Education:** Ongoing training on ethics, lobbying regulations, and compliance is essential to keep staff and volunteers informed of their responsibilities and legal requirements.

Whistleblower Protections

- **Encouraging Accountability:** A strong whistleblower protection policy ensures that staff and members can report unethical or illegal activities without fear of retaliation.
- **Monitoring and Auditing**
- **Regular Monitoring:** Regular meetings should be held to review activities, address current issues, and ensure compliance with ethical and legal standards. These meetings also provide a chance to assess and monitor ongoing government affairs efforts.
- Non-profits involved in government affairs must balance their advocacy efforts with a firm commitment to ethical conduct and legal compliance. By doing so, they can effectively pursue their missions while maintaining public trust and legal standing.

Resources and References

PRPS has accumulated several resource and reference materials from various speakers and organizations such as the National Recreation Park Association (NRPA) and the American Society of Association Executives (ASAE).

This resource can be accessed via the following link:

[PRPS Advocacy Resource Link](#)

Training and Development

PRPS is committed to developing and offering various training opportunities throughout the year including those offered at the conference, as well as in person and webinars.

In addition, PRPS will pass along information regarding NRPA's advocacy training opportunities.