

WE

WANT

CHANGE.

It's your **move.**

"This world demands the qualities of youth; not a time of life but a state of mind, a temper of the will, a quality of the imagination, a predominance of courage over timidity, of the appetite for adventure over the love of ease. . . it is young people who must take the lead."

-Robert F. Kennedy, 1968

YOUTH IN ACTION ADVOCACY GUIDE!

What is important to you?

The environment, education, child welfare, LGBT rights?

Whatever your passion may be, you must be able to communicate effectively with decision makers to bring change. Social change doesn't happen overnight, it is the spawn of actions from generations of individuals just like you--**and now it's your move.**

This guide offers a few tricks of the trade to help make advocating for your causes a little easier. Take this guide back to your home community and continue to advocate for change at the local level.

It can be a daunting task, but any small step in the right direction is still progress. Remember your end goal and stick to it.

Let your voice be heard...because the future is counting on **YOU.**

HOW TO PREPARE FOR YOUR **LEGISLATIVE VISIT.**

STEP 1!

- A) **Make your appointment** with the legislative offices you wish to visit well in advance of the event. Schedule them for the afternoon of Friday, March 27, 2015. To identify your legislators, go to <http://www.fyi.legis.state.tx.us/> or call TNOYS for further assistance. Be aware that you may meet with legislative staff, rather than your actual legislators, because of their very busy schedules.
- B) **Consider selecting a spokesperson.** This is someone from your group who will lead the discussion and answer questions during the meeting with your legislators or legislative staff.
- C) **Plan to present the results of the attached activities.** Bring your proposal statements and any handouts you might have.
- D) Keep your presentations **brief!**
- E) **Demonstrate how your issue has affected you.** Use facts and a personal story. Use the presentations tips in this packet to help!
- F) **Encourage questions.** It is important to know about your issue and be ready to talk about it with facts and not arguments.
- G) **Always be polite and respectful**, even if you don't agree with the person you are talking to.
- H) Leave time to **write a thank you note** to the legislators and staff in each of the offices you visit at the end of the day. TNOYS will make materials for thank you notes available to you during the closing session at YIA- Capitol Day.

What is **Lobbying**?

Sometimes people think negative things about the words “lobby” and “lobbyist,” but the word lobby simply means **“to influence.”** It is perfectly acceptable and encouraged for you to lobby the decision makers in your community. If you care about a certain issue and you want your voice heard, you should lobby, or influence, someone who has control over that issue and can do something about it. For example, if your school is old and falling apart, you could lobby your city council to increase funding and build a new school! You may lobby your state representative to change a state law on driving with cell phones! You could even lobby your member of Congress or your Senator to lower the voting age to 16!

How Do I Lobby?

Lobbying happens in different forms! You can lobby with a simple phone call or e-mail to your city council members, or have an in-person meeting with your legislator like the opportunity you have at YIA- Capitol Day!

Types of lobbying that you or anyone can participate in:

- **Make a phone call**
- **Send an e-mail**
- **Write a letter**
- **Organize a rally**
- **Give a speech**
- **Deliver testimony at a hearing**

Can I Lobby?

Absolutely! As a youth, your voice and your needs deserve to be heard just as much as anyone else. With a little guidance, anyone can become a strong advocate for their issues.

Your voice can be heard.

This guide was created by the Texas Network of Youth Services for Youth in Action.

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Legislative Meeting.

Start with a firm handshake.

Your first impression is extremely important. Try to arrive 5-10 minutes early. Introduce yourself and let the front desk know you have an appointment. A firm handshake and eye contact shows your confidence.

Who are you?

Begin by telling them who you are. Do you live in their district? Have you heard them give a speech? Establish a connection.

Why are you here?

Tell them your issues in a short-but-sweet way. Bring handouts if necessary and try to appeal to their emotions. Public officials and their staff often deal with very serious individuals, so make your meeting memorable with facts, stories and first hand experiences. For example, what did it feel like when your sports program funding was cut?

What can they do about it?

Give them a list of possible solutions to your issue and try and be as specific as possible (more funding, vote a certain way on this policy item, sponsor a certain bill, etc.).

Any questions?

Allow time for questions. If you don't know the answer, tell them you will get back with them. Don't make stuff up! Taking notes is very important. Thank them for their time at the end of the meeting.

MORE ADVOCACY TIPS!

Be polite and creative. For example, if you are lobbying for baseball funding, try leaving a signed baseball with your contact information on it. By using a baseball as opposed to a business card, the person will easily remember that you were the group lobbying for baseball funding.

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Meeting Script.

When making the initial call, use the model below to help shape your conversation!

Hello, My name is _____ and I am calling to voice my concern about _____

Can you please connect me with _____ or the individual who handles this issue? Thank You.

State your concern.

Hello (if necessary, reintroduce yourself), I am calling to voice my concern about _____

Why is this issue important to them?

This issues are extremely important to your district because _____

What should they do about it?

We propose you _____

Answer any questions.

Do you have any questions or concerns? _____

Tip: Smiling while talking on the phone projects a positive attitude to the listener!

MORE ADVOCACY TIPS!

- Don't forget to thank the person for their time.
- If you don't know the answer to the question, be honest and tell them, "I will get back to you with that information." Be sure to get back in touch with their answers.
- Collect their information and send a thank you e-mail.
- Be polite!

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Creating your **Presentation.**

The goals of these activities are to: (1) identify & discuss issues or challenges that are of concern to youth in your group, (2) narrow and select 3 issues and develop recommendations for solutions, (3) come to consensus about which issues and recommendations your group will address during Youth in Action and (4) present your group's changes or ideas in a creative way!

Activity 1!

Maybe you already know what problems you want to solve. Or you're stuck trying to find ways to make your community a safer place for young people. If you're stuck, **try brainstorming!**

- Tips:**
- Don't do it alone! Do it in a group or class!
 - Write it down! You could use a flipchart!
 - All ideas are welcome!

Rank your Issues. Pick 10 issues/ areas of concern. List them like the example below. Then rank each of the issues on a scale of 1 to 5, based on the level of concern you have about these issues within your community. Make your choices based on your own and your friends' personal experiences.

Activity 2!

	Highly Concerned	Somewhat Concerned	Minor Concern	Not A Concern	Not Sure
1. _____	1	2	3	4	5
2. _____	1	2	3	4	5
3. _____	1	2	3	4	5
4. _____	1	2	3	4	5
5. _____	1	2	3	4	5

Now pick your top 3 choices from above!

Creating your Presentation.

Activity 3!

Proposal Statements! Now is time to further examine your 3 top issues and identify at least 3 recommendations for addressing them. It's one thing to identify the problem; but your voice carries much more weight if you have identified a solution.

A. Break into small groups and appoint a youth leader. Discuss the 3 issues that your group prioritized as most important. Instruct the groups to answer this question: **“What could be done to solve each of these challenges?”** They might think of actions that could be taken by young people, agencies, schools, families, neighborhoods, or even changes to laws.

B. In your small groups carefully reexamine each of the priority issues and all of the potential solutions that your group brainstormed.

C. Now for each of the issues, select 3 recommendations to be addressed during Youth in Action. Think about the **clearest, most realistic or practical** recommendations to actually solve the problems.

D. The group should develop their recommendations into proposal statements using the format below.

Proposal Title: _____

In order to: (intent of proposal) _____,

We propose that: (practical activity) _____

through _____.

1. What youth can do: _____.

2. What communities can do: _____.

3. What agencies can do: _____.

E. Each group then presents their 3 proposal statements and 3 recommendations to the larger group. If someone doesn't agree with one of the statements, they may suggest changes for the whole group to discuss. **Discussion is good**, but keep in mind that each group has to present their ideas. Keep things moving.

F. Small groups can practice **“role-playing”** the scenarios. For instance one person can be the group's spokesperson while another will play the part of a legislator. Other group members can provide supportive feedback about the presentation and identify areas to work on.

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Be CREATIVE.

...Now come up with a way to present your proposal and recommendation(s) during Youth In Action—Capitol Day.

Examples of ways to present your proposal include:

- > Perform a skit
- > Create a piece of artwork
- > Give a speech
- > Write a poem or song
- > Make a YouTube-style video

Guidelines:

- 1.) Your presentation must be **3 minutes or less**.
- 2.) Your presentation should be about the issues **YOU** care about.
- 3.) Use your creativity and **have fun!**

Hints/Resources:

Think about the types of presentations you find interesting. What makes you want to listen to someone else explain their ideas? The same types of presentations might be a good way for you to communicate your message.

You may want to combine several communication methods into your presentation. For example, you could perform a skit that includes a short song or use some of your artwork as props.

Don't Forget!

Your group will not only get the chance to present to your local legislator, but also in front of your peers also advocating for change during the morning of YIA- Capitol Day, 03.27.15!

You can also write a **Press Release.**

What is a press release?

A press release is a tool used to let the **media** (newspaper, local news TV show, radio, etc.) know what news is going on in your area. You should issue a press release when you have something you want covered by the press. Perhaps your group helped get funding for a program, or maybe your group organized a park clean-up. Whatever you do to make change, be sure to alert the media so that the community will know about all of your **accomplishments!**

Who should I send it to?

Contact your local newspaper, radio stations or TV stations and ask them where to send press releases. You can then e-mail, fax or mail your releases to the media. Remember to designate a person in your group to be your **“media contact.”** This person is in charge of answering any questions from the media or the public.

How do I write a press release?

You want to be sure to give the media enough time to respond to the release.

- Type the **date** of your press release at the top along with the name and phone number of your **media contact**.
Type **“FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE”** at the top in all CAPs.
- Title your press release with an **interesting title** that will capture the attention of reporters.
 - Type the **city name** at the beginning of the body of the release. The body should include all of the details of the event stated in **a brief way**.
What happened? Who organized it?
How many people attended? Why is it important?
- Add a **quote** to the end. For EX, Joshua Smith, one of the organizers of the event, commented, “We helped so many people at our event by....., etc.”
 - Keep your release to **one page double-spaced**.

The Power of a Thank You.

The importance of “thank you”.

Saying “thank you” in the professional world is just as important as shaking hands when saying hello. It also is a crucial part of advocating. Not only does it serve as a polite gesture, but it also reminds the person you are writing to about your issue.

For example, if you meet with your city council member in person about funding for a skate park or a music theater, sending a thank you note not only shows that you are a polite person, but it will also help remind the city council member to get to work on your issues. Don't forget this important step!

E-mail, hand-written, typed?

If you meet with someone in person, you should definitely take the time to send a hand-written thank you on stationary or a card. If you speak with someone on the phone to lobby them, an e-mail thank you is more appropriate. If a city council member actually finds funding or votes a certain way, a more formal typed letter or hand-written thank you note is best.

We will have thank you card materials during the closing session of YIA!

What should it say?

Phone Conversation

Dear _____,

Thank you for taking the time to speak to me on the phone today about _____.

I hope you will do all that you can to help fight for youth issues. If you have any questions, please call me at _____.

Best,

Your Name

In-Person Meeting

Dear _____,

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me to discuss _____.

I enjoyed our conversation and look forward to working with you to achieve _____.

Please let me know if you need anything from me.

Sincerely,

Your Name

Formal Thank You

Dear _____,

Thank you for all of your hard work in _____.

The youth in our community are extremely grateful for all that you have done. We appreciate your leadership and we commend you for your diligence and dedication to our issues.

We look forward to working with you again in the future.

Sincerely Yours,

Your Name

Stories of **Positive Change.**

Take a look at the following stories! They help reveal that young people can make a real difference with their peers, parents, the press, the private sector, and policy-makers all over the nation.

ALCOHOL & DRUGS

Seventh graders in Dallas, Texas documented the number of liquor stores in their neighborhood, especially near schools. They traveled to the state legislature to present their findings. Senator West, a strong supporter, declared "The children motivated me. I'm going to do all I can to help get the bill passed." The state law was changed to allow the local zoning board to reduce the number of liquor stores.

Students in Omaha, Nebraska conducted a student survey at their school and the results led them to set up a before-school and after-school substance abuse help group. This group networks with agencies throughout the city and refers students in need to the proper professionals and community agencies.

DISCRIMINATION & RACISM

Compelling testimony by young people based on their personal experiences of discrimination convinced wary Massachusetts legislators to pass a landmark Gay and Lesbian Student Rights Law. Students, with the support of the Lieutenant Governor, spoke at hearings, met with individual lawmakers, organized a massive letter-writing campaign, and held rallies and candlelight vigils that raised public support for a law aimed to "provide all students with a safe and supportive public education."

More than 10,000 students in Los Angeles walked out of classes in 1994 to demonstrate against a California referendum barring undocumented immigrants from attending schools and receiving other public services. Leonardo Hernandez, 16, who was among the Montabello High School demonstrators said, "Maybe if they see us, people will realize that this is what will happen if the proposition passes because we will all be in the streets instead of school."

EDUCATION & SCHOOLS

Art classes were disappearing in Portland, Oregon. One student was so upset that she wrote to rock star Jackson Browne and asked him to hold a benefit concert. To her surprise, she got a call at home from Browne himself who agreed. The concert raised \$100,000 for arts education and the students, in cooperation with the school board, decided how the money would be spent.

To combat anti-gay prejudice, several students succeeded at creating a Gay-Straight Alliance Club at their high school in North Carolina. Persistence and networking made the difference. Despite their fear of violence and the principal's resistance, the students let it be known that they might file a grievance against the school for violating the Equal Access Act. The group received support from the local Gay Lesbian Straight Education Network chapter.

EMOTIONAL HEALTH & STRESS

Allie Young of Pinellas County in Florida recognized the need for more education and visibility about eating disorders because of her own battle with the disease. She formed Helping Hands, a support group at her school for teenagers coping with anorexia nervosa. Her advocacy efforts included a campaign to raise awareness of the need for every county in the state to provide comprehensive services and treatment geared for those suffering from this life-threatening disease, especially those unable to pay for expensive hospitalization.

Seventeen-year-old runaway, Janna Koschene of Colorado, presented a vivid account of sleeping in cars and overnight shelters at hearings conducted by a congressional committee. She gave detailed recommendations based on her own positive experiences at a daytime drop-in center in Denver. At a time when budgets were being cut, Congress voted a modest increase for federal funds earmarked for crisis shelters and other community-based youth centers.

RECREATION & YOUTH SERVICES

In Hopkins, Missouri (population 600), a high school sophomore wanted to turn an abandoned theater into a teen center. After recruiting some friends, they made a presentation to Community 2000 and wrote a short article in their weekly newspaper. Bingo! As a result of this publicity, the students received an anonymous donation of \$40,000 to fulfill their need.

TEEN SEXUALITY

A high school class in Ohio took on the problem of teen pregnancy and interviewed dozens of people in the community from doctors and correctional officers to a teen mother. They approached their school board for funds and published a booklet, to educate others which was done so well that the local medical center and area schools distributed it.

Two hundred students traveled to the state legislature in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania to protest a welfare reform proposal requiring parental consent for abortions for minors. At the rally, the Teen Health and Welfare Coalition presented a petition with more than 1,000 signatures saying that "teenagers should be consulted before legislation is passed that affects our lives."

VOTING

The Cambridge City Council in Massachusetts passed legislation lowering the voting age to 17 by a vote of 8-1 in March 2002. The year before, a proposal by the student-led Campaign for a Democratic Future that would have given 16-year-olds the right to vote in municipal elections was defeated. One opponent on the City Council was persuaded because "This group stayed with it" and another councilor changed her mind: "Your energy, persistence, and commitment are truly inspiring." This suffrage battle continues now at the state legislature because Massachusetts, like many other states, must approve a home rule petition.

Create. Inspire. Change.

Advocacy Resources.

Need more help?

Representation.

Not sure who represents you? Try visiting some of these sites below to find out who represents you at the state and national level.

www.house.gov/writerep/
www.votesmart.org

If you're looking for your local officials, type in your city's name followed by "city council" in any web browser. You can then locate your mayor and city council member.

Find out what's going on in your nation!

www.youthempowerment.com/resources.htm

www.rockthevote.com

www.dfps.state.tx.us www.hhsc.state.tx.us

www.readyby21.org

Contact us!

Feel free to send us an email or give us a call! We are here to answer any questions you may have!
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opportunities for youth!**

