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Advocacy Guide: Making the case for the Arts

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1. Introduction

The Arts Council is the main advocate for the arts in Northern Ireland. It presents Government and other influential opinion formers with a strong case for supporting the arts, backed up by reliable research and evidence. It actively encourages public support by promoting the achievements of our artists and arts organisations in the media.

What the Arts Council achieves through its advocacy and communications channels is, however, only one of the elements necessary for successful advocacy.

As an artist, arts organisation or cultural agency, your work provides the most compelling case for the arts. In that sense, everything you do is advocacy. Your unique voice, insight and passion make you the best possible ambassadors for the arts. Engaging a politician or opinion former in an individual story or experience can make a strong and lasting impression.

Periodically the arts sector in Northern Ireland will join forces to lobby and campaign together on a single issue, with a set of agreed advocacy messages. Campaigning to influence the level of arts spending through the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) is one such example. At such times, the Arts Council provides the sector with a range of relevant advocacy messages.

Advocacy should, however, be a year-round activity. Cultivating strong relationships with key influencers, including the media, raises the profile of the arts and will pay longer-term dividends when you most need to have your voice heard.

This guide is intended to help you to advocate effectively on behalf of your work or organisation and on behalf of the arts in general.

2. Essential advocacy advice

- Be optimistic in your approach and aim to adapt your arguments to government policy rather than criticise it.
- Modify and target your messages to individuals who you want to influence.
- Combine your advocacy with other arts organisations to add weight to your message.

3. Making the case

Working with MLAs / MPs and other political stakeholders

All MLAs / MPs have influence that they can use in government. If you don't already have a strong relationship with your local MLAs / MPs consider cultivating their support as soon as possible. Bear in mind that MLAs / MPs receive many appeals for support and have a limited amount of time, so aim to be concise.

It is important to know MLAs / MPs' interests. You can research their memberships of relevant committees at Stormont or at local government and find out if they have asked relevant questions.

It will strengthen your case if you can link your work to the stated priorities of Government. The Programme for Government priorities are:

- Priority 1: Growing a Sustainable Economy and Investing in the Future
- Priority 2: Creating Opportunities, Tackling Disadvantage and Improving Health and Well-being
- Priority 3: Protecting our People, the Environment and Creating Safer Communities
- Priority 4: Building a Strong and Shared Community
- Priority 5: Delivering High Quality and Efficient Public Services

You can strengthen your case by demonstrating how your activities complement and advance key themes within the PfG, such as:

- Contributing to the economy and job creation
- promoting social inclusion and equality
- augmenting conventional medical interventions in healthcare environments
- supporting education by delivering improved academic performance
- protecting and enhancing the quality of the environment

You can tailor your messages so that they are relevant to your organisation by considering such factors as:

- the number of people you employ
- the number of people attending your performances, exhibitions or workshops
- the secondary spend your organisation generates
- your connection to the creative industries
- your work with communities and young people
- your links to tourism, health, regeneration, education and other agendas

In presenting your case to an MLA include the following:

- Stick to one issue per letter/email
- Explain clearly why you are writing and outline your concerns or your support
- Ensure you are factual and accurate
- Keep the letter to one side of an A4 page or two pages maximum
- Relate your points to the MLA's constituency
- Ask for a reply and/or an action from your MLA eg to meet with you, raise the issue in NI Assembly, attend an arts event or publicise the issue in local press.

4. How to contact your MLAs / MPs

Visit <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/Your-MLAs/> to find out who your local MLAs are. It is best to contact them via their constituency office and these are accessible on their respective party websites. Each constituency has 6 MLAs and it is advisable to contact them all. You can find a list of MPs at <http://www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/mps/> and you can contact them via the party websites. For an up-to-date list of Northern Ireland's political representatives, [click here](#).

Events with MLAs / MPs

It may be appropriate to invite your local MLAs / MP to an event or to see the work of your organisation. Offer to provide an opportunity to meet some of your staff and some of the people who benefit from what you do. Draw up an itinerary, a map of your location, a bit of background info about what you do, add your contact details and remember to make it clear

if you want the MLA to say a few words. If your invitation is accepted, suggest that you set up a photo call with the local media.

Developing the relationship

- Follow up your contact with the key stakeholder and thank them for visiting your organisation
- Continue to invite them to opening nights, launches, events.
- Provide regular updates on what your organisation is doing, for example through press releases and your social networking channels. Include your key advocacy messages in these updates.
- You may also encourage people who have benefited from your work to write to their MLAs / MP or other key stakeholders expressing support for the work you do

Over the long term this approach can help politicians and key stakeholders to see the value of the arts to their constituents and the local community.

5. Working with the media

Getting a relevant story into the media can help to communicate messages about arts funding to MLAs / MPs local authorities and other stakeholders. A few key points should be considered when working with the media:

- Developing relationships with journalists can help to get your stories in the news. If a journalist knows you, and knows you can deliver good content, it makes their job much easier
- Positioning leaders or artists from your organisation as spokespeople strengthens your message regionally and nationally. A good spokesperson helps to get your story into the news.

Regional radio stations often feature discussion shows on issues that affect local people. Volunteer your spokesperson to take part and highlight why the arts are of value in your community.

- An Arts Council communications officer may be able to provide you with an Arts Council endorsement quote for your news release.
- Working with other arts organisations could strengthen your message and make the story more newsworthy.
- Letters from audience members, friends and volunteers can keep your story in the news and show newspaper editors where readers' interests lie.
- A good photo or filming opportunity helps to get coverage for your story. This might be an opportunity to invite your local MLAs / MP along.

Social networking

- Consider how to use your social networking channels as an active part of making the case for the arts. These can be powerful tools and can help you to engage in a dialogue and generate an immediate response from your followers.
- Think about how you can use Facebook and Twitter to bring to life key messages about why the arts matter. Give examples of how your organisation or work contributes to the economy or society. Using audience responses can help demonstrate the public value of your work.

E-newsletters

Consider how you can use your e-newsletters or e-marketing to make the case for the arts. Make sure that your local MLAs / MP, key local councillors, chairs of arts committees and other influencers you've identified are all on your newsletter mailing lists.

6. Good campaign practice

Key factors to ensure a campaign is a success include:

- Keep it simple: ensure that the campaign message is highly visible and encapsulated in a clear and simple statement
- Keep your message consistent across all channels
- Avoid multiple messages and themes
- Identify your target audience
- Ensure key messages are relevant and tailored to your target audience
- Provide reliable and quantifiable support evidence where possible
- Engage with the media
- Develop a media plan for broadcast, print and online media channels
- Utilise other partners' websites and social networks
- Seek out coalitions, collaborations and partnerships to pool expertise and resources and to multiply your campaign's impact
- Ensure there is common messaging across campaign partners.

7. Grant award logos

Acknowledging that public money funds the arts and serves a public purpose is important. <http://192.168.94.141/funding/logos-branding>

8. Useful facts about the Arts in Northern Ireland

Findings from the General Population Survey:

The Arts Council regularly includes a question module in the General Population Survey, undertaken by the Northern Ireland Statistical Research Agency, to identify patterns of behaviour and attitudes towards the arts. The findings of the 2014 survey build on those of 2004, 2007, 2009 and 2012. Key findings from the 2014 survey are:

- 81% of the public believe the arts enrich the quality of our lives
- 75% of the public agree that there should be public funding for the arts
- The number of adults engaging in the arts has grown to 79%
- 70% of people living in the most deprived areas engage in the arts
- 96% of young people engage in the arts
- 87% of the public appreciate that the arts attract tourists
- 52% of disabled people engage in the arts

Arts Council of Northern Ireland analysis of its funding patterns shows that:

- 79% of Arts Council funding is awarded to the 20% most deprived Super Output Areas.
- Rural engagement now exceeds urban engagement in the arts

9. Communications contacts

Please contact a member of the Communications Team for further advice on advocacy issues. Contact details are available in the About Us section of this website.