

# ADVOCATING FOR FUNDING? FOLLOW THE FUNDING ADVOCACY ROADMAP

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“I thought this was going to be a marketing job, but it turned out to be a political and advocacy job!” exclaimed a friend when recently promoted to CEO of a Destination Organization.

As the role of DMOs has broadened, so too has the need for its leadership to master advocacy. Funding is often one of the most important advocacy priorities: stable funding, new legislative authorization for funds, a new Tourism Improvement District, capital funding, or, more recently, continued relief funding.

At Civitas, we are frequently asked by clients to assist with their advocacy efforts. To help organizations think strategically about their advocacy, we developed the Funding Advocacy Roadmap. Although one size does not fit all, these basic concepts will lead you in the right direction. This advocacy primer includes 3 Principles and 4 Action Items that will guide your efforts to a successful result.

## Three Principles

**1. Talk to Them When You Don't Need to be Talking to Them** – More often than not, organizations reach out to electeds and other decision makers when they need action on an issue. Your advocacy efforts will be much more effective if you reach out to your advocacy targets prior to your needing help on a specific issue. Spend time getting to know them and, importantly, make sure they get to know you and your organization.

**2. Influence is a Two-Way Street** – Your influence over others is directly related to the influence they have over you. Building relationships with your advocacy targets could be the single most important principle to internalize. Support your allies – they will remember your help.

**3. The 4 P's** – At Civitas, we live by the 4 Ps whenever we are asked about the most effective approach to advocacy: A Personal Presentation by a Persuasive Peer!



# Four Action Items

**1. Research** - Do your homework and do it early. Based on your wider organizational goals and objectives, what does success look like for a given issue, and what data points are central to measuring performance against this success criteria? Knowing a great deal about your advocacy targets is a critical component of successful advocacy research. A fundamental task is to fully understand who your stakeholders are and how they like to be communicated to. What are their past priorities? How do your requests relate to their pain points? What are your unique selling points and competitive advantages compared to others that you are competing with? Be sure you research and understand competing parties and competing proposals.

**2. Message Development** – Communicate with your listeners in terms they can understand. The message should not be in terms that are important to you – it should be in terms that are important to the listener. Listeners desire different information - some want fine detail, others broad concepts. For some, a visual will help. Can you personalize a message by recalling something your listener has stated in the past, “I know that you felt...”

Remember the basic persuasive concept that if you can articulate your listeners’ position and objections more persuasively than they can, they will be more receptive to your message. Identify third-party sources to add credibility to you and your message. Can others demonstrate that you are a recognized organization with a proven track record?

Consider applying for and qualifying as a Destinations International DMAP destination – only 200 DMOs worldwide have received this honor. Consult Destination International’s LEXICON for word choices when developing your message. Support your arguments with data – some say, “Meaningful data wins arguments.” Finally, support your data with emotional first-hand stories.

**3. Identification of the Messenger** – Who is the right person to convey the message? Based on the 4Ps, can you develop a supporter and convert that person to be your advocate? Investigate whether you can collaborate with other influencers. Identify people whom the listener trusts to deliver the message. If your listener is an elected, research campaign reports to understand who their supporters are. If your request can be supported by a grassroots effort, identify members of the community and constituents who can turn out to meetings or hearings. Are there industry members that can tell their story **and personalize** the message?

**4. Execution of the Plan** – Timing is everything. When can you deliver your message at a time that the recipient is ready to hear it? Once you determine the right time to deliver your message, you will need to identify the best channel of communication. As you know from the 4P Principle above, a personal presentation, perhaps multiple presentations, is the best. If an in-person meeting is not an option, look to doing a video call. Less effective would be a phone call, and email is usually dead last. Although some recipients like email communications, much of your message is lost when body language and intonation is omitted from the communication. Employ your “Active Listening” skills to deeply understand what you are hearing. Leave them with your key takeaways and your request for action. If you need their vote, ask for it.



While advocating for funding must involve the development of a unique advocacy strategy, the three principles and four action items will give you a Funding Advocacy Road Map that will elevate your advocacy efforts, whether you are new CEO, a Board member, or a DMO stakeholder.