

LOCAL ADVOCACY TOOLKIT



[Welcome to the OC Local Advocacy Toolkit](#)

[Lesson 1: The Basics](#)

[Lesson 2: Ways to Engage](#)

[Lesson 3: Making Your Case](#)

[Lesson 4: On Social Media](#)

[Lesson 5: In Person](#)

[Resources](#)

Welcome to the OC Local Advocacy Toolkit

Advocacy is essential for the long-term health and vibrancy of Canadian orchestras. Whether you are seeking funding, building community connections, or ensuring your musicians and members are part of important conversations, strategic advocacy activity ensures that decision-makers see your orchestra as relevant, resilient, and impactful.

Decisions made at the municipal level about funding, cultural priorities, zoning, infrastructure, and more, can directly shape your ability to share your music with your community. By developing strong relationships with local decision-makers, you can help ensure that your orchestra's voice is part of the conversation from the start.

Lesson 1: The Basics

7 quick-start strategies to build local relationships and long-term support

Before tackling specific campaigns or approaching decision-makers with requests, it is essential to understand the local landscape, build relationships, and establish long-term credibility. These seven strategies provide a practical starting point for orienting your organization within the municipal system, strengthening your network, and positioning your work in ways that resonate with both staff and elected officials.

Explore the collapsible tips below to dive into each strategy and consider how you can begin applying them in your local context.

1. Know the Players

Before you start, it's useful to understand who sets and who administers arts and culture policy development and funding in your municipality.

Some municipalities have established arms length funding bodies to distribute grants and organize arts-related advocacy and events; others undertake more of this work in-house or in partnership with community organizations.

Municipal staff generally play a significant role in running programs, leading consultations, overseeing progress towards goals articulated in a Municipal Cultural Plan (if your municipality has one), working with advisory committees, integrating arts and culture programming with other city departments and drafting policy and budget options for Council review and approval. They can be good sources of information and insight to you.

Members of Council are typically involved in reviewing and approving policy and voting on budgets, all with an eye to what will serve their constituents best.

If your community has an arms-length arts funding body, you'll probably already be familiar with their funding programs - but it's useful to get to know their staff, boards, strategic plans, and advocacy work, too.

2. Build Real Relationships

Effective advocacy starts with strong relationships.

- Relationships are about two-way communication. They lead to buy-in, goodwill, and reliable allies. They allow room for course correction, and give you time to catch up when needed.
- Campaigns are for one-off situations – capital projects, responses to or requests for major policy shifts, or emergencies. Campaigns work best when they're built on existing relationships.

You'll often make the same case to different people – so create messages and tools you can reuse.

Start by mapping your network. Who on your board or team knows someone on Council? What past connections do you have? Use your team's networks – professional and personal.

Make a point of reaching out to new Councillors. They're often more open to new partnerships.

Get to know key staff. Make sure they know your organization's work and understand your impact.

3. Think Long-Term

Respect boundaries. Relationships aren't about pressure – they're about trust, time, and listening.

Understand the ecosystem around Council. City staff and municipal bureaucrats may not have voting power, but they play an important role in shaping policy and crafting recommendations for Council approval, then overseeing how the policies that have been approved actually play out. They often have deep knowledge and long institutional memory. Earning their trust can help you navigate transitions between Councils and keep momentum over time.

If a Council decision is required, map out a timeline that works backward from the date this decision will take place. What steps need to happen before then?

- How many Council votes do you need to win support?
- Who are your past and present allies on Council?
- Who do you still need to persuade?

4. Leverage Partnerships

Sometimes it makes sense to go it alone. Other times, collective action makes a bigger impact. Consider when to work with others – and who the right partners might be.

Ask yourself:

- Will your request benefit just your organization, or your sector, or the wider community?
- Are you aligned with others who share your goals?
- Can you share the workload with other motivated groups and individuals?

Build relationships with local umbrella organizations and arms-length agencies. Check in with them and align and amplify where it makes sense. You're part of a larger ecosystem. Advocacy works best when it reflects that.

Good allies might include:

- Other arts and culture organizations
- Local business leaders
- Influential community members, such as former elected officials or board members

5. Plan Win-Win Campaigns

Start by defining a clear, focused ask.

- What exactly are you requesting?
- What will it achieve, and how will that benefit the broader community?
- How much funding do you need, and who else supports your request?

Make it easy for Council to say yes. Provide materials they can use – memorable statistics, clear stories, pocket-sized facts, and visuals they can show to constituents.

Give them public moments to shine. Can a Councillor speak at an event, appear in a photo, or participate in a performance?

Think beyond your organization. What else can you support that's in the public interest – even if it's unrelated to you?

6. Understand What Matters to Decision-makers

Every Councillor has their own priorities. Learn what they care about – and connect your message to that.

Look at:

- The municipality's strategic plan, as well as its plans for arts, culture, tourism and economic development
- Pre-budget consultations
- Council agendas and public statements

Find out:

- Why each Councillor ran for office
- What motivates them
- Who their constituents are

Help Councillors build their public profile. Can you offer platforms, partnerships, or visibility that support their goals?

Show your support for their initiatives by sharing their good news stories or reposting their content on social media. Public recognition builds trust.

7. Build Community Together

Frame your work in terms of community impact, not internal needs.

Adapt your language based on what matters most to each Councillor. Depending on their priorities, highlight how your orchestra contributes to:

- Local jobs and economic development
- Quality of life and civic pride
- Education and youth programming
- Social cohesion and accessibility
- Tourism and downtown vibrancy

Remember: it's not about what your orchestra needs – it's about how your orchestra helps the community thrive.