

LOCAL ADVOCACY TOOLKIT



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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 2: Ways to Engage

6 tactics to build visibility, credibility, and connection with your municipality

Advocacy isn't limited to formal meetings or budget cycles; it is a continuous practice rooted in presence, participation, and authentic connection. These six approaches show how orchestras can integrate municipal engagement into their annual rhythm, invite elected officials into their world, and contribute meaningfully to civic life.

Click through the collapsible tactics below to identify actionable steps you can begin implementing throughout the year.

1. Get to Know Council

Attend a Council meeting. See how they operate – formally and informally.

- What's the tone in the room?
- Do Councillors collaborate or clash?
- What issues dominate discussion?
- Are they comparing themselves to neighbouring municipalities?

Understanding the dynamic helps you better tailor your approach.

Join your local culture or tourism coalition. These networks often have existing relationships and shared goals and can amplify your voice.

In smaller towns, engage in "grocery aisle politics". Informal conversations often drive formal decisions. Relationships matter as much as motions.

2. Make Advocacy Part of Your Annual Rhythm

Add a yearly presentation to Council to your regular calendar. This is your chance to:

- Share successes and milestones
- Communicate goals for the year ahead

- Present impact indicators that matter – to you and to Council

Meet with municipal staff at least once a year. Focus on the outcomes of any municipal investment, especially if you've received funding. Face-to-face check-ins build trust and transparency. If you receive funding from other levels of government, let them know - and, if appropriate, emphasize the connection between municipal support and your ability to make a strong case to other levels of government!

Respond to public consultations. Your input as a cultural stakeholder matters – whether it's about the budget, city planning, or community well-being.

Add municipal leaders and staff to your media release list, to increase their awareness of your activities.

3. Invite Council Into Your World

Invite Councillors to your season launch and key events throughout the year. When you do:

- Choose dates that are realistic – consider (and avoid) peak Council calendar times
- When you invite councillors to attend, point out who else will be attending (which schools, partner organizations, corporate sponsors, other VIPs, etc.)
- Develop a hosting plan. Consider assigning board members to engage with councillors - sitting with them, introducing them to key people, taking them backstage, etc.

Host events that tie in to Councillor visibility and community engagement.

- Consider photo ops, selfie ops, and event elements that perform well on social media
- Will young people be present at the event (always an effective draw)? Add pizza.

Offer elected officials speaking opportunities at public functions – and chances to meet with donors, funders, and your board.

4. Create Shared Moments in Public Spaces

Look for opportunities to perform at or near City Hall. It's a high-visibility location and sends a clear message about your role in civic life.

Invite elected officials (municipal, provincial, and federal) to speak at special events or ceremonies. Let them connect their priorities to your work.

Set up 1-on-1 meetings with Councillors, MPPs, and MPs. These personal connections deepen trust and understanding.

Facilitate artist-councillor conversations – informal, participatory dialogues about the kind of city or community you’re collectively building.

5. Collaborate on Broader Cultural Goals

If your municipality has a cultural plan, familiarize yourself with it. If you have a local arts council, work with them to convene partners to study, shape or renew the cultural plan. Your orchestra can be a leading voice in advocating for long-term investment in arts and culture.

Coordinate with other organizations for a municipally-recognized, music-themed week or month. A collective push draws more attention – and more participation.

6. Stay Social and Visible

Use your social media platforms to build goodwill.

- Share or repost content from your municipality’s social channels
- Celebrate Council milestones, public works, or community initiatives
- Tag Councillors when relevant – amplify their connection to the arts

Advocacy isn’t always about the ask. Sometimes, it’s about showing up – and showing that you’re paying attention.