

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 3: Making Your Case

4 approaches to resonate with the people you're trying to reach

The strongest arguments are shaped not just by what you're asking for, but by who you're asking. The content and tone of your message should shift depending on the decision-maker and the context.

Before presenting your case, ask:

- What will resonate with them?
- How can we connect our work to their stated priorities?
- How does our organization help them reach their goals?

Prepare to make your case using a mix of perspectives and arguments. Some people are moved by data; others respond better to anecdotes, an inspiring expression of values, or community outcomes. Try different angles early on – if they want more of one kind of argument, they'll let you know. You can either change direction on the spot during a meeting (if you feel comfortable doing so) or follow up after the meeting.

Here are four different angles your argument might take:

1. The Economic Argument

- Share how many local jobs the orchestra supports. If helpful, break that down into full-time equivalents (FTEs), and distinguish between artistic and administrative roles.
- Provide your orchestra's annual revenue and expense figures. Highlight how much is spent locally.
- Clarify where your funding comes from: which levels of government, what proportion, and any notable private or community support. If your orchestra helps to bring dollars into the community (for instance, from provincial or federal governments, from external sponsors and donors, or by attracting tourists), convey this.
- Offer broader context if possible – such as the economic impact of the arts in your city, province, or across Canada. (Orchestras Canada can help connect you with data and context.)

- Emphasize how your orchestra contributes to local vitality: attracting musicians, cultural workers, and other professionals who support a strong, diverse economy.

2. The Education Argument

- Talk about your youth programs, including your youth orchestra (if applicable): participation levels, programming, and any work being done around access or diversity.
- Share how you show up in local schools: performances, workshops, mentorships, residencies.
- Mention family-friendly programming, casual or outreach concerts, and accessible pricing options.
- Connect your work to research about the positive impact of music and arts education.

3. The Community Argument

- Let them know how many people benefit from your programming each year, including, where possible, a geographic breakdown of your audience.
- Highlight your participation in civic events, festivals, and community celebrations.
- Show how your orchestra supports or partners with other cultural and social service organizations to strengthen the local ecosystem.
- If you offer education programs, or perform at hospitals or long-term care facilities, let them know! It's always helpful to demonstrate the ways in which your orchestra delivers on its charitable mission to reach more people in your community.

4. The Comparison Argument

- Point out where your municipality is excelling or falling behind, and explain why it is important.

- Compare your city's per capita arts spending with other municipalities.
- Reference how neighbouring or similar-sized communities invest in arts and culture.
- Look at access to spaces, infrastructure, and resources elsewhere.