

How To Advocate: Resources & Advice for BCASLPA Members

- 1) Introduction
- 2) What To Ask When You're Preparing to Advocate
- 3) When To Involve BCASLPA In An Advocacy Project
- 4) What To Expect from BCASLPA's Advocacy Support
- 5) How To Write a Letter to a Government Official
- 6) How To Run an Advocacy Campaign
- 7) Frequently Asked Questions

1. Introduction

Thank you for reading BCASLPA's Advocacy Handbook!

With one in ten people in British Columbia experiencing some form of communication disorder, our work as Speech-Language Pathologists, Audiologists and Support Workers continues to be an essential part of the fabric of our communities.

As BCASLPA's Advocacy Committee, we want to ensure that knowledge of our work – and its appropriate funding – is heard clearly by politicians, leaders and the public throughout the year.

This handbook is designed to provide you with an overview of how to think about, run, and promote an advocacy campaign about a particular issue relating to the professions. We encourage you to use it in tandem with working with the Advocacy Committee, where appropriate to further your cause.

Awareness of the importance of healthy communication continues to develop across the province – in large thanks to the work of our members in their professional and volunteer capacities. Continuing to advocate for our professions, and for the public, can continue this progress throughout British Columbia.

If you have any questions, please let us know!

Wishing you all the best in your advocacy outreach,
The Advocacy Committee



2: What To Ask When You're Preparing to Advocate

The first step to any advocacy campaign involves asking the right questions – questions that will enable you to gain a clear and cohesive understanding of the issue you are concerned about, the stakeholders involved, and how to proceed.

This clear understanding will help when preparing materials for councilors or MPs, speaking with the public, or connecting with media about the issue you are passionate about. It also helps you to “step outside” your own unique expertise and knowledge so the subject is as easy to engage with for others as possible.

Questions to consider – and research – include:

- **How do I describe the problem in the simplest way possible?**

For example, “There are not enough Speech-Language Pathologists in the region of X to deal with current levels of demand. Waiting lists in each school district exceed 45 students per SLP.”

- **Who does the problem affect?**

In the above example, it's clear that the problem affects students in X region, their parents/guardians, but also teachers and SLPs, and possibly even other children.

- **Why do I care about the problem?**

Understanding your connection to the problem helps you to identify how you can help but also where any bias may come from. For example, you may care about the above problem because you are an SLP, or a parent. If so, you care because you see children not receiving the care and support that they require to fully develop.

- **Why should the public and politicians, who are not directly affected, care about the problem?**

What are the effects of this issue for the public, both in the short and long term? For example, in this case, how does a lack of SLP support for children who need it affect communities? Are they less likely to be able to fully contribute? Does a lack of communication support lead to increased crime rates? Painting a picture of the overall affects of a problem will help to gain support.

- **What can be done to solve the problem?**

This is an essential part of the preparation process. In addition to clearly stating the problem, it is essential to also state a potential solution. That is: what are you asking for? Be as specific as you can about the steps you are asking politicians or the public to take.

- **How can I describe my relationship to the problem, and my expertise to comment on it?**

Simply put: why should people care about what you have to say about this subject? The answer could be that you are a concerned citizen or parent who has seen first-hand the damage a problem has done. Or, it could be that you are an expert in a chosen field with years' of experience that demonstrate why such a problem must be solved. Be clear about your involvement in the subject and why you should be listened to

- **What can people do help if they agree with you?**

Again, this is a key question to answer before you begin advocating. If someone agrees with you, what would you suggest they do to support your cause? The answer may differ depending on the person. For example, if you are speaking with an MP you may wish for them to change legislation. If you are speaking with an SLP, you may wish for them to join an advocacy group. If you are speaking with a parent, you may wish for them to write a letter. Think of each group who may be able to help your cause, and a concise way they can get involved.

- **Have you accessed already-available resources through BCASLPA?**

Before embarking on an advocacy campaign, look at the BCASLPA website to find out whether there are resources or campaigns already underway which could support you.



3: When To Involve BCASLPA In An Advocacy Project

We would love to hear about any and all advocacy you are doing on behalf of Speech-Language Pathologists, Audiologists, and those we help – either in your community or on a provincial or national scale.

The simple answer to when to involve BCASLPA in your advocacy is – as soon as possible! If we know about your plans at the beginning of the process we can either provide support, resources, or get involved at a key stage in the campaign.

If your project is well underway, please also let us know. We always appreciate being kept informed of the fantastic work our members do, and can help when we can, even with a campaign that has already begun. Similarly, if you let us know about your work we can often include your vision and mission as part of a larger campaign we are working on, or connect you with other members undertaking similar projects.

You can email us [[hyperlink to come](#)] to tell us about your work. In the email, please include:

- Your name and profession;
- Where you reside in BC;
- What you are advocating for and the key reason for it (i.e. why there is a need);
- What stage you are at in the campaign – what you have already done;
- What support you would like from BCASLPA – now or in the future.

Based on your email, we can assess in what ways BCASLPA can assist with your work. Please see the next section for further information about that assistance.



4: What To Expect from BCASLPA's Advocacy Support

BCASLPA's Advocacy Committee was launched to provide education about communication, speech-language pathology and audiology to the public in British Columbia; and to provide support to our members based on their developing needs in a changing political and financial climate.

How we can provide support to your specific project depends on your overall goal, the resources we have available, and our committee commitments in a given year.

Here are some of the ways we can help:

- **Provide feedback about your campaign:** We can provide support and advice in letter writing, campaign planning and the next stages for your advocacy work.
- **Send a letter on behalf of your cause or campaign:** When advocacy issues match our criteria (see below), we can advocate as BCASLPA on your behalf. That is, letters to key decision makers can be sent by the BCASLPA president on behalf of the campaign.
- **Contact the media about your campaign:** Again, when appropriate, BCASLPA can support your campaign by including it as part of our outreach to media. We work with a communications professional with close media contacts throughout the province, helping to promote key issues as they affect our profession and the public.
- **Connect you with other members:** By telling us about a campaign, we can include details of your advocacy work on BCASLPA's blog or a future issue of Vibrations, or connect you with other members who are embarking on similar projects.
- **Provide useful resources:** We have a range of resources available to help you, including sets of recently compiled statistics, slides and posters which speak to key issues facing each profession, and tools for connecting with members of the public. You can access them at BCASLPA.ca>Professional>Advocacy Resources.

5. Criteria For BCASLPA Adopting a Campaign

We will work to provide support to advocacy campaigns however we can. On occasion, BCASLPA can adopt an advocacy campaign and – working with members and our advocacy committee – create an official campaign sanctioned by BCASLPA.

BCASLPA will make decisions about which campaigns to officially support on a case-by-case basis. Criteria includes:

- Non-partisan and inclusive;
- Matches BCASLPA's mandate for members and the public;
- Affects a significant number of BCASLPA's members;
- Can be adequately supported given BCASLPA's advocacy committee resources and time at any given time.



6: How To Write A Letter To A Government Official

- Step 1:** Find out who your local representative is. In British Columbia you can use an [MLA finder](#), [MP finder](#), or visit your local city council website to find your local councilor.
- Step 2:** Use the correct form of addressing the person you speak to.
When addressing a letter to MLAs, use “Mr./Mrs./Ms. [First Name Last Name], Member of the Legislative Assembly,” and, in the letter itself “Dear Mr./Mrs./Ms. [Last Name].”
When addressing a letter to MPs, use “The Honourable [Name], MP for [Constituency]” and “Dear Minister” or “Dear Mr./Mrs./Ms. [Last Name].”
For further information about how to address government officials, visit [PeaceMakers.ca](#) for a full list.
- Step 3:** Include a subject line at the beginning of the email clearly stating the issue you are writing about. For example, “Wait Times For Children With Learning Disorders Increasing”
- Step 4:** Write an introductory sentence that succinctly explains why you are writing and what the problem is. For example, “I am writing to ask for your assistance in reducing the wait times in [region] for children with severe learning disorders to receive professional help. Currently, there are 65 children on a wait list in one school alone.”
- Step 5:** Clearly state what you want done about the problem. For example, “I request you increase ring-fenced funding to [region] school district for children who face severe learning disabilities.”
- Step 6:** Identify yourself as a constituent and explain why your voice should be heard. For example, “As a constituent of your riding, and a registered Speech-Language Pathologist with more than 30 years’ experience, I am deeply concerned by the increase in wait times and its impact on our children’s lives.”
- Step 7:** Expand on your introduction by focusing on two or three main points that support your view. Use a different paragraph for each point. These points could include:
- Further statistics and examples of the problem;
 - Research or information indicating the long-term societal results of the problem;
 - Discussing the beneficial effects of solving the problem.
- Concentrating on two to three main points is more effective than writing a long letter with lots of different ideas. Keep the points targeted and relevant, and the letter will be more likely to be read.
- Step 8:** Request what you want the letter recipient to do after reading the letter. For example, write a response back to you, organize a meeting with you, or take concrete action on the issue by doing something else in particular.
- Step 9:** Sign off the letter by thanking them sincerely for reading the letter.
- Step 10:** Be sure to include your contact information so the person can get in touch with you directly upon receiving the letter.



7: How To Run an Advocacy Campaign

1) Define your campaign – what is the problem and what is the solution?

This is an essential step in creating a practical, cohesive campaign. There may be a range of contributing factors to a problem: what is the main one you want to help solve with your campaign? Wherever possible use simple language that the public could understand. Be clear about what you are asking for. It's essential that you not only define the problem your campaign addresses but the solution you are requesting, too.

2) Gain support in your profession and community.

This can be done in a number of ways. First, connect with other professionals who may share your concerns and wish to become involved in a campaign. Are there other demographics you can also gain support from, such as parents, clients, or community providers? Soliciting early feedback and support in a campaign can help you to build a team to work on promotion and outreach.

3) Contact us.

As we mention in earlier sections, please get in touch with us to tell us about your campaign. We will help how we can and can suggest key resources for you to access.

4) Decide your outreach approach including: letter writing, posters, online promotion, and in-person meetings.

There are a number of ways you can encourage support for your issue, and spread the word:

Media Relations: Often one of the most effective ways to gain public support for your campaign, this involves contacting the local media about your campaign. Be sure to explain – in simple language – what the issue is, why it's relevant to that outlet's readers, and what you could speak about if they decide to interview you. Making the story accessible and easy to understand is key – as is explaining why this is relevant to the general public. Media coverage of a story is never guaranteed, but it can help to inform political contacts of the seriousness of the issue and garner public support.

Posters & Flyers: If your issue relates to a particular geographic location or community, would posters and flyers help you to get the word out? Designing and printing posters to be placed on community notice boards or offices around your area can help to increase grassroots awareness of your campaign. Similarly, compelling flyers outlining the issue and how people can help can provide tangible information to people you connect with about the campaign.

Letter Writing: This is another key part of an advocacy campaign. In many cases, contacting your local MLA, MP or representative will be an important way to gain support. We discuss letter writing in section 6 of this guide.

Online Promotion: Are there key demographics who you think would be interested in your campaign, and whose support you rely on? Targeting them via Facebook, Twitter or online forums can help to ensure they know about your work. For example, if you are campaigning in a particular community, is there a local Facebook page where people post news or ideas about the community that you could write on? Is there a Twitter hashtag relating to the demographics you are speaking to which you can use? Is there a parents' forum for the town or city where you live which you could post to about an issue that affects them? Creating a creative strategy to engage people online can be one of the most direct ways to share your message.



In-Person Meetings and Groups: If your campaign requires support from the public, consider hosting open events where you can share your message and answer any questions they may have. For example, you may wish to host an event at a local library, or public space, to discuss an issue and encourage feedback from others before progressing further with a campaign.

5) Create a practical timeline.

This is an essential step in the process! First, consider how long your campaign may take – and any timeline requirements. For example, if your campaign opposes recent budget cuts that will be enacted within the next six weeks, your campaign timeline must be short and immediate. However, if you are campaigning for increased federal funding for a particular demographic of patients, this may take more than one year so your timeline will reflect that. Write out each stage of the campaign you would like to launch – from initial meetings to promotional materials to media relations – and include deadlines and the names of people responsible for each campaign.

6) Execute the campaign with feedback loops throughout the process.

Using your action and plan and timeline, begin to enact your strategy. Wherever possible, meet with your group or core team to discuss major milestones, achievements and setbacks. For example, review the success of a media interview or – during public meetings – discover how people found out about your campaign to find out more about the effectiveness of various outreach tools as you continue the process.

7) Assess, follow up and continue to plan.

Once you have completed your timeline, assess the impact of the work you have done based on your original objectives. If your issue is ongoing, discuss how best to continue to advocate for your cause in the long-term – either continuing some of the strategies you have employed or looking to new methods to gain support. Be sure to report successes – and progress – to BCASLPA: we can let members know about the work you are doing, and in some cases even let media know about key success stories.



8: Frequently Asked Questions

- **Should I send a letter to my local MP via email or snail mail?**

Both! We recommend sending a printed letter to your representative because it often carries more weight than an email. However, sending both is often the best option.

- **Will BCASLPA provide financial support to my advocacy campaign?**

If BCASLPA decides to take on a campaign as an official BCASLPA advocacy campaign, we would look into providing financial support for the issue. Otherwise, BCASLPA will provide support in other ways, as mentioned in section 4.

- **I contacted media about my campaign, but no one responded. Why?**

There are a range of reasons for why media may not be interested in a story, including their levels of busyness and content, how the story fits with their other content, and the way in which the story was presented to them. When contacting media it helps to think about why the story is relevant and interesting to the general public. If someone did not know anything about your issue, why should they be interested? This is the first question media will ask themselves; ensuring you answer it within your initial email or phone call is important. Keep your communication easy to understand and simple wherever possible.