



Grassroots Advocacy Handbook

Becoming a Strong Advocate for Senior Living

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WHAT IS GRASSROOTS?

A grassroots movement is one driven by the constituents of a community. **Often grassroots movements are at the local level and are organized to support the common interest of a particular group.** In our case, not-for-profit senior living communities.

The government has a tremendous impact on not-for-profit retirement housing, nursing home communities and the well-being of your profession. Your facility and your residents are directly affected by the legislation passed by our federal and state lawmakers.

Unlike other industries, you have the opportunity to be a voice for your profession, your residents and the services you provide. This is a great advantage! You have the ability to directly influence the future of not-for-profit senior living and nursing home communities in Texas.

THE IMPORTANCE OF GRASSROOTS

Organizing and maintaining effective grassroots advocacy is imperative to your success. State legislators hear from dozens of constituents, all with different needs and concerns on a daily basis. An effective grassroots program gives you the opportunity to stand up to competing interests as they relate to long-term care. **Grassroots is about getting the word out!** As a professional long-term care provider you are already a well respected member of your community. It is possible that you are advocating for your facility without even knowing it. You may be serving a family member of an elected official. You probably have residents, board members, family and staff spreading the word about the services you provide and the impact you have in the community. You may even have a close friend elected into a local office. The list goes on...

LeadingAge Texas is dedicated to protecting not-for-profit retirement housing and nursing home communities that serve the needs of Texas retirees. LeadingAge Texas staff and advocates are actively working to ensure that your interests are well represented in the Texas Legislature. In the capitol, we meet and discuss the issues facing LeadingAge Texas members day in and day out. **Effective grassroots at the local level validates our efforts in Austin and allows you to bridge the gap. It is important that a consistent message is being heard by our legislators at home and in capitol.**

This guide provides you with tips and tools that will help you produce effective grassroots in your community. It will allow you to take initiative in your LeadingAge Texas Network and carry the torch for your fellow members.

ORGANIZING A STRONG GRASSROOTS CAMPAIGN IN YOUR OWN BACKYARD

Organizing a strong grassroots campaign in your own backyard is the key to success. There are members like you who are eager to become involved. LeadingAge Texas is comprised of seven separate networks all working locally to bring the association and its benefits closer to you.

Connect with your fellow providers, residents, staff and board members. Talk to everyone at network events, meetings and town halls. Find out who is passionate about advocating for long-term care.

Exchange email addresses and phone numbers with people who are eager to get involved. Using the internet is the most effective way to communicate with a group of your colleagues. Start an email network or email "tree" that can keep everyone up to date on upcoming network meetings, campaign fundraisers and events, and other happenings in your community.

The LeadingAge Texas office in Austin can also provide you with various materials to help get your advocacy efforts up and running. **There are a number of ways to start advocating! Contact Alyse Migliaro at alyse@leadingagetexas.org or (512) 467-2242 to find out how you can get started in your LeadingAge Texas Network's local grassroots efforts today.**

MEET WITH YOUR LOCAL LEGISLATORS

Not sure who your local representatives are? Visit the Texas Legislature Online at: <http://www.fyi.legis.state.tx.us/> to find out.

The LeadingAge Texas management staff and Public Policy Committee understand that you are already a highly active member of your community. The majority of your day is dedicated to serving the needs of your residents and managing your staff. Although your time is spread fairly thin between your various daily responsibilities there are a number of tasks you may perform that will make you an asset to LeadingAge Texas's grassroots efforts.

- **Building statewide influence begins at the local level.** In order for LeadingAge Texas to be recognized and respected by state decision makers, members must demonstrate their value to their legislators at the local level (their home district).
- Building awareness about not-for-profit retirement and nursing home communities, and your value to the community is a potent weapon. **Creating a strong public identity will make you an influencer in the community.**
- District office meetings with local legislators are a good chance to get to know your representative. **Introduce yourself and share why your facility and the services you provide are important and a valued health care benefit to the legislator's constituency.**
- **Explain the issues affecting you most!**
- **Know your legislator's background:** whether he/she is well versed on long-term care issues, has taken a position on our issues, or is familiar with legislation directly affecting us. Be direct, clear and brief and keep in mind the legislator's time is limited. Study the LeadingAge Texas talking points and policy briefs beforehand, all are available on www.leadingagetexas.org under Advocacy-Advocacy Materials.

CONTACTING YOUR LOCAL LEGISLATORS

Our state legislators are elected into office to represent the interests of their constituents. That's you! Introduce yourself as a LeadingAge Texas member and not-for-profit long-term care provider. Discuss what is most important to you, your residents and your facility. There are a number of ways you can do this.

- EMAIL, MAIL or FAX—Write a personalized letter introducing yourself, what you do and where you reside. Offer yourself as a resource to your legislators on long-term care and aging issues. If sending your letter by mail or fax, feel free to contact Alyse Migliaro at alyse@leadingagetexas.org for the best materials to include. The LeadingAge Texas website is full of information and resources for you to use in writing your letter. **If sending by email, consider including a link to your facility and encourage your legislator to stop by for a visit.**

- **FACE-TO-FACE MEETING**—LeadingAge Texas wants to make face-to-face visits with legislators as simple as possible. **We will schedule the meeting for you or a group of members.** In addition, you may attend a political fundraiser or event in your community to help build a relationship with your legislator. We will provide you with resourceful information to prepare you for your district meeting. Remember, at an event you are not meeting to discuss specific issues or interests.

That's it. Easy! It's no different from meeting a prospective resident for the first time. The important thing to remember is that by meeting with your legislator locally, you have extended the offer and paved the way for future conversation. It is time for our Texas legislators to know who you are and how hard you work for their constituents.

THE DO'S AND DON'TS

Do:

- Arrive a few minutes early for the meeting.
- Come prepared with materials to leave behind including a business card and a summary of the key issues you want to get across during the meeting.
- Thank the legislator or staff member for their time.
- Send a thank you note or letter thanking them for meeting with you
- Limit what you have to say to three main points. Keep it short and concise. Legislators and staff members have dozens of meetings every day, five days a week, so pick out the most critical points.
- Ask them directly to support or oppose legislation if you are talking about bills (They may not be able to give you a definitive answer, but it is always important to ASK that they vote your position on any issue.)
- Share personal stories about how an issue has directly impacted your facility and its residents. This is very effective and is something that a legislator or staff member is likely to remember.
- Be gracious and flexible. It is fairly common for legislators or staff members to be running late. Just go with the flow and understand that they have lots of demands on their schedule.
- Use issues that legislators are interested in – for example, if job creation is a big issue for them, talk about the economic impact of your community, the number of jobs you provide, etc.

Don't:

- Show up without a meeting (their schedules are jammed packed and have many meeting requests to accommodate).
- Show up late. This doesn't send a very good message. If you absolutely can't avoid it, call and let the office know.

- Show up with more than five people to a meeting. Many offices are very small and legislators or staff will be more at ease meeting with a group that fits in their office space.
- Don't be upset if you meet with a staff member and not a legislator. Staff reports all their meetings and what took place with their boss. Often times, staff have a better understanding of specific issues, have just as much knowledge and sometimes even more knowledge on issues than a legislator who must divide their time between hundreds of issues. Cultivating a relationship with staff is also very valuable.
- Do not discuss contributions in meetings with legislators or staff in the capitol or district offices—this will make legislators and staff very uncomfortable. Make sure to stick to legislation and policy matters.

WRITING LETTERS TO YOUR LEGISLATORS

Click on the “Find & Write Your Legislator” link on the Advocacy page of www.leadingagetexas.org to view letter templates that are available for immediate use. Keep in mind; the more personal you make your letter the better! Here are some helpful tips.

- You can find your legislators contact information by accessing their personal website or visiting the Senate and House of Representatives “Members” link at <http://www.capitol.state.tx.us/Home.aspx>
- Use your own words on your own stationery.
- Address letters to your own legislators or members of Congress, or to committee chairs.
- Keep your letter short and clear.
- Identify bills or budget items by title and number.
- Make sure your letter is timely. Write your letter when legislation is pending in committee.
- State reasons for your position. Tell how the issue affects you, your facility, your residents and your community.
- Use the proper form of address.

HOW TO HOST A SUCCESSFUL CANDIDATE FORUM

Prior to the event

- Identify the legislator, elected official or candidate for whom you would like to host a candidate forum.
- Contact Alyse Migliaro at the LeadingAge Texas office at alyse@leadingagetexas.org. She can assist you with all aspects of planning and organizing a local event.

- Identify where you would be willing to host the event. Preferably, the event is hosted at your facility in the legislator's district, but just outside of the area or the general vicinity is often acceptable, as well.
- Set date and time for event – Typically, a weekday evening event is best, such as from 5:30 – 7:00 p.m. or 6:00 – 7:30 p.m.
- Alyse Migliaro will connect with the candidate's staff to identify dates that the candidate is available for the event.
- Invitations. The LeadingAge Texas office can supply you with invitation templates for your event and work with you to send them out.

As the host, you have a variety of responsibilities. First, the host should have the location prepared for the event, including any necessary food and beverages. Appropriate food and beverages include: bite size appetizers, cheese, fruit, finger sandwiches, soda, coffee, tea, etc. Secondly, the host needs to take ownership of the event and assist in publicizing the event, along with getting people to attend.

Third, the host must make personal follow-up calls to contacts to get people to attend. Often this requires multiple contacts for each person. Alyse Migliaro can assist with this but it is the host's responsibility as well. Fourth, the host is responsible for introducing the candidate to guests at the event and introducing him/her before the speaking program at the event.

EVENT TIMELINE

One month or more prior to the event

- Invitations should be sent out to other providers in the area, staff, family, friends, other health care providers, and community leaders. Alyse Migliaro can assist in sending out the invitations directly, or providing you with LeadingAge Texas members who may be interested in the event. The broader the list of invitees, the better.

Two weeks prior to the event

- Reminders should be sent out to your targeted list. Encourage people to spread the word even if they are unable to attend. The more personal the request—calling someone on the phone rather than an email that they can ignore—the better. **PEOPLE NEED REMINDERS ABOUT THE EVENT.**
- The host should secure a copy of the candidates's biography so that he/she can familiarize themselves with the candidate and introduce them at the event. You can request this from Alyse Migliaro or look at their campaign website for a biography.

One week prior to the event

- Make more follow up calls, send reminder emails, and ask people to attend the event. Again, if someone is unable to attend, ask them to invite their network. Reminders should be sent out to people who have already RSVP'd.

- Find out if the candidate has any time constraints that evening i.e., if the event is from 6:00 – 7:30 p.m. but the legislator can only be there from 6:00 – 7:00 p.m., this is important to know. Encourage guests to get there early so that they can meet the candidate. This will also help the host with the timing of the program the day of the event.

Day of the event

- Name tags and pens should be available for guests including the candidate. This will allow the candidate to learn people's names more easily and for guests to mix and mingle who may not know each other.
- Provide a guest sign in sheet for guests to sign as they arrive. It is helpful to have a greeter present to ask people to sign in and hand out nametags.
- The host should make sure that the candidate is introduced to all the guests. About halfway through the event, the host should gather the guests together, briefly introduce the candidate, and ask him/her to discuss their candidacy. It is also a good idea for the guests to introduce themselves, where they work, and how long they have been a constituent. After the candidate has addressed the group, guests should feel free to ask questions. After this, guests can mix and mingle some more, or this would be an opportunity for guests to leave.

General things to keep in mind

- Ideally, you want to have at least 20-30 people at a candidate forum (although this varies depending on the size of the venue and the district). The more voters in attendance the better. Candidates often ask how many people are attending the event and we want this number to sound impressive.
- If you are unable to get 15 people to attend, you may need to consider postponing the event.
- It is a great idea for guests to mention at an event that you would like to schedule a follow up visit with the candidate in the District office to discuss specific issues.
- One of the primary purposes of the events is to establish a relationship with the candidate so follow up visits if or once elected are welcomed and strongly encouraged.

CONTACTING THE MEDIA

This section provides useful tools to help you reach out to the media about aging services and not-for-profit senior living.

Media Outlets

- There are numerous media outlets to consider when reaching out about an issue. Your elected officials, newspapers, magazines, online publications and blogs, electronic and printed newsletters, local news stations and radio are just a few.

Story Types

There are several formats you may use when preparing a story. The most commonly received are press releases, op-eds, media advisories and Letters to the Editor.

- Press Releases – a short article usually no longer than one-page written in a style similar to a news story. The article should provide the reporter with enough information so it is ready for publication. If the press release is regarding an upcoming event, provide enough information so it may be covered including the date, time, location, attendees, and your contact information so you may be reached with questions concerning the event.
- Op-eds – a column usually “written opposite the editorial page”. An op-ed is an article that expresses the opinions of a named writer who is not affiliated with the newspaper. Most media outlets have guidelines for submitting op-eds so be sure to contact each one for specific instructions.
- Media Advisories – a media alert regarding an upcoming event or press conference. A media advisory should be less than a page long inviting the media outlet to attend or conduct an interview at an upcoming event.
- Letters to the Editor – an article submitted in response to a recent publication. It should either add information not included or counter the opinion of the original article. Like op-eds, most media outlets have guidelines for submitting Letters to the Editor so be sure to contact each one for specific instructions.

Tip: Check out recently published press releases, op-eds, and Letters to the Editor to determine what types of stories are most likely to be published by a specific news source.

Creating a Media List

- So you are prepared to share a story at the drop of a hat, create a media list that contains the name of each media outlet, a contact phone number, email and specific person to reach. Once you have comprised a list of local media outlets contact each one to find out who the best person to contact is regarding health care issues or community news.
- Get as much information as you can when contacting each media outlet. Ask about deadlines, what types of stories the reporter is most interested in and how they prefer to be contacted.
- Update your media list regularly and keep notes so you may easily share your story in the future.

Sharing Your Story

When you are ready to share a story about your community, an issue facing your community, or a broader topic facing aging services and not-for-profit senior living there are a few things to keep in mind.

- **Before you share.** Ask yourself, “Why will they want this story?” and be ready to sell it.
- **Identify yourself.** When calling or emailing about a story, you want to be sure your story is clearly communicated to a reporter. State your name, why you are calling and how you may be reached about the story you want to share.

- **Be prepared to speak to someone over the phone.** Most of the time, reporters will follow up to get additional information once they decide to pursue a story. Have talking points and other resources ready to share so you are prepared.
- **Be aware of lead-times and deadlines.** Know when a story must be submitted in order to be published. Most news sources also have specific guidelines when submitting stories so contact each source for instructions.
- **Proofread everything you send.** Make sure to check your communications for any mistakes before you hit send. Proofread and provide valid sources. Otherwise, reporters will soon learn to ignore you.
- **Send thank you notes.** Even if your story is rejected, send a quick note thanking the reporter for his/her time and consideration. Offer yourself as a resource for future stories.

Online Resources

- Texas Newspapers - <http://www.usnpl.com/txnews.php>
- Texas Online Newspapers - <http://www.onlinenewspapers.com/usstate/ustexas.htm>
- Texas TV Stations - <http://www.usnpl.com/tv/txtv.php>
- Texas Radio Stations - <http://www.usnpl.com/radio/txradio.php>