LITERACY ACTION NETWORK

LEGISLATIVE TOOL KIT

Updated for the 2017 Session

www.literacyactionnetwork.org
Adult Basic Education and Learning cannot continue to be viewed in isolation, as a separate educational goal but rather as part of the overall education, training and learning system and policy at national and international level.

To educate children, it is essential to educate adults. This is the importance of educating adults, for their own sake and for the sake of children, for the present and for future generations.

Rosa Maria Torres
Educator, Social Activist & Former Minister of Education and Culture for Ecuador
Literacy Action Network is an organization of professionals serving adults with literacy needs through legislative advocacy and statewide support of quality Adult Basic Education programs. It was created in 1991 with a $20,000 grant from MALC and 20 charter members. Literacy Action Network produces relevant research and tools through member-based committees working on Membership and Marketing, Professional Issues, Volunteer Issues, Summer Institute Planning and Legislative Action.

Literacy Action Network has a strong record in successful legislative advocacy. The Organization, formerly known as Literacy Minnesota, held its first legislative forum in 1992, immediately raising the political profile for ABE programming in Minnesota. In 1993, the first Impact Report was published, providing a critical informational tool for ABE advocates to share with elected officials. In 1994, Literacy Minnesota enhanced the value of its advocacy by hiring its first lobbyist. In 1995, the grassroots advocacy of the organization was further mobilized by the creation of the now famous yellow, legislative postcards. The importance of coalition building was addressed in 1998, when Literacy Minnesota created the Legislative Coalition and increased the level of inter-organizational dialogue through legislative forums. In 2004, Literacy Minnesota produced the second edition of the highly successful ABE Impact Report and in the year 2005, the organization focused on increasing its community presence by expanding its website capabilities. In 2006, Literacy Minnesota successfully lobbied for funding to provide essential literacy services to new Hmong refugees in Saint Paul.

Using the Tool Kit

Literacy Action Network created this tool kit to help individuals and organizations raise awareness of the issue of adult literacy. We encourage you to use this tool kit to build relationships and educate legislators of literacy needs in their communities.

Inside this tool kit you will find activity ideas, description of events held by local literacy organizations, and sample press materials. We hope that you will choose to organize an activity, write a letter, or support those who do by becoming a member of Literacy Action Network. The Tool Kit can be your guide through the process, whatever level of involvement you choose. Please join Literacy Action Network in realizing these important actions by becoming a member. Information on membership can be found on the Literacy Action Network website: www.literacyactionnetwork.org

Thank you for your valued support of Adult Basic Education in Minnesota.

Sincerely,
Literacy Action Network
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The Importance of Advocacy

With education occupying such a focus of our state’s legislative arena, Adult Basic Education (ABE) practitioners and Literacy Action Network members cannot afford to stand by and watch while others make decisions that have a tremendous impact on the well being of all Minnesotans.

Instead, it is important that we use our experience, knowledge, and relationships to shape legislative policy and influence the bills being introduced on our behalf.

Our mission, as advocates for Adult Basic Education programming, is:

- **As Literacy Action Network members**, to educate ourselves and become comfortable contacting legislators to express our views; and
- **As literacy community leaders**, to develop programs and systems to help educate fellow ABE practitioners and learners and enable them to feel comfortable sharing their views.

**Legislative vs. Political Action**

Your Literacy Action Network involvement in legislative action is vital to continued quality Adult Basic Education. It is important to note, however, that Literacy Action Network and its members focus strictly on legislative activities, as opposed to political ones.

**Legislative activity** refers to any action designed to influence the status of impending bills before a legislative body. It includes attempts to mold public opinion and stimulate legislative action by supporting or opposing specific legislative issues or philosophical attitudes.

**Political activity** refers to any action intended to influence the nomination, election or appointment of any person to public office.

"The term literacy refers to an individual’s ability to read, write, and speak in English, compute and solve problems at levels of proficiency necessary to function on the job and in society, to achieve one’s goals, and develop one’s knowledge and potential.”

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The National Literacy Act
Legislative activities include:
• Formulating policy positions on specific bills;
• Presenting testimony before legislative committees;
• Initiating telephone calls, sending faxes, or writing e-mails or letters to urge a particular action on specific or categorical legislation;
• Sponsoring or holding meetings, furnishing speakers, or preparing and distributing pamphlets and other literature to stimulate reaction to legislation;
• Circulating petitions, contacting legislators, or participating in other efforts to impact legislative issues.

Political activities include:
• Raising funds for legislators and candidates;
• Making contributions to candidates’ campaigns;
• Distributing pamphlets regarding a specific candidate;
• Asking your community to vote for a specific candidate.

A Briefing on the Minnesota State Legislature

The state of Minnesota is divided into 67 districts. Each district is represented by 1 senator, making a total of 67 state senators. Each district is divided into half, labeled A and B, and each half is represented by one House member, making a total of 134 state representatives. The 134 members of the Minnesota House of Representatives each represent approximately 32,650 constituents. Members are elected to a two-year term. Members of the Minnesota Senate each represent approximately 63,300 constituents and are elected to a four-year term.
How a Bill Becomes Law

The legislative process, though sometimes confusing, is not mysterious. The first responsibility of anyone working to achieve change at the Capitol is to become informed about the means by which laws are made. The following is a simple outline of how an idea becomes a law.

Idea
A bill is an idea for a new law or an idea to change an old law. Anyone can suggest an idea for a bill -- an individual, consumer group, professional association, government agency, or the governor. Most often, however, ideas come from legislators, the only ones who can begin to move an idea through the process.

Legal Form
The Office of the Revisor of Statutes and staff from other legislative offices work with legislators in putting the idea for a new law into proper legal form. The revisor’s office is responsible for assuring that the proposal’s form complies with the rules of both bodies before the bill can be introduced into the Minnesota House of Representatives and the Minnesota Senate.

Authors
Each bill must have a legislator to sponsor and introduce it in the Legislature. That legislator is the chief author whose name appears on the bill along with the bill’s file number to identify it as it moves through the legislative process. There may be up to 34 co-authors from the House and four from the Senate. Their names also appear on the bill.

Introduction
The chief House author of the bill introduces it in the House; the chief Senate author introduces it in the Senate. Identical bills introduced in each body are called companion bills. The bill introduction is called the first reading. The presiding officer of the House then refers it to an appropriate House committee for discussion; the same thing happens in the Senate.

Committee
The bill is discussed in one or more committees depending upon the subject matter. After discussion, committee members recommend action -- approval or disapproval -- to the full House and full Senate. The House committee then sends a report to the House about its action on the bill; the Senate committee does likewise in the Senate.

Floor
After the full House or Senate accepts the committee report, the bill has its second reading and is placed on the House agenda called the General Register or the Senate agenda called General Orders. A committee can recommend that non-controversial bills bypass the General Register or General Orders and go onto the Consent Calendar, where bills usually pass without debate. After this point, House and Senate procedures differ slightly.
General Register
In the House, the General Register serves as a parking lot where bills await action by the full body. Bills chosen to appear on the Calendar for the Day or the Fiscal Calendar are drawn from the General Register. In the Senate, a different procedure is used. Bills are listed on the General Orders agenda. Senate members, acting as the "committee of the whole," have a chance to debate the issue and offer amendments on the bill. Afterwards, they vote to recommend: passage of the bill, progress (delay action), or further committee action. And sometimes they recommend that a bill not pass. From here, the bill is placed on the Calendar.

Calendar for the Day
In the House, the Calendar for the Day is a list of bills the House Rules and Legislative Administration Committee has designated for the full House to vote on. Members can vote to amend the bill, and after amendments are dispensed with, the bill is given its third reading before the vote of the full body is taken. The House also has a Fiscal Calendar, on which the chair of the House Ways and Means Committee or House Taxes Committee can call up for consideration any tax or finance bill that has had a second reading. The bills are debated, amended, and passed in one day. In the Senate, bills approved by the "committee of the whole" are placed on the Calendar. At this point, the bill has its third reading; after which time the bill cannot be amended unless the entire body agrees to it. Toward the end of the session, the Senate Committee on Rules and Administration designates bills from the General Orders calendar to receive priority consideration. These Special Orders bills are debated, amended, and passed in one day. A bill needs 68 votes to pass the House and 34 votes to pass the Senate. If the House and Senate each pass the same version of the bill, it goes to the governor for a signature.

Special Orders
Toward the end of the session, the rules committee of the House and the Majority Leader of the Senate may designate bills from the General Orders to receive priority consideration in their respective bodies. These Special Orders bills are debated, amended, and passed in one day. The House also has a Rule 1.10 calendar which allows the chairs of the Taxes and Appropriations committees to call up for consideration any tax or appropriations bill that has had a second reading. These Rule 1.10 bills are debated, amended, and passed in one day.

Conference
If the House and Senate versions of the bill are different, they go to a conference committee. In the House, the speaker appoints three or five representatives, and in the Senate, the Subcommittee on Committees of the Committee on Rules and Administration selects the same number of senators to form the committee. The committee meets to work out differences in the two bills and to reach a compromise.
Floor
The conference committee's compromise bill then goes back to the House and the Senate for another vote. If both bodies pass the bill in this form, it is sent to the governor for his or her approval or disapproval. (If one or both bodies reject the report, it goes back to the conference committee for further consideration.)

Governor
Once the governor has the bill, he or she may: sign it, and the bill becomes law; veto it within three days; or allow it to become law by not signing it. During session, the House and Senate can override a governor's veto. This requires a two-thirds vote in the House (90 votes) and Senate (45 votes). The governor also may "line-item veto" parts of a money bill, or "pocket veto" a bill passed during the last three days of the session by not signing it within 14 days after final adjournment.

Laws go into effect on August 1\textsuperscript{st} following a legislative session unless otherwise specified. Exceptions are appropriation bills, which become effect July 1\textsuperscript{st}, the same date the fiscal year begins.

Tracking Your Bills

New technology has made it far easier to keep track of pieces of legislation you are interested in. Through a program called “My Bills”, you can enter the tracking numbers of the bills you are following. Emails with updated information on your bill will be sent to you on a near real-time basis.

Simply visit the Minnesota Legislative webpage at:

\url{http://www.leg.state.mn.us/leg/legis.aspx}

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Platform Development Process

Creating the legislative platform is a collaborative process, allowing for a variety of voices from the community to contribute from their perspective, experience, and expertise. Following are the steps taken by Literacy Action Network to assure the legislative platform meets the needs of the Minnesota literacy community as a whole.

Step One

Solicit platform ideas from the Minnesota Department of Education, Literacy Action Network members and the Literacy Action Network Board.

Step Two

Legislative committee drafts a legislative platform and presents it for input to the Literacy Action Network Board. (As an “information only” piece, it is shared with the Literacy Action Network membership.)

Step Three

Legislative committee makes recommendations to the Board for final approval of the platform.

Other Issues of Interest

Issues that are outside of the platform can be negotiated with the Literacy Action Network lobbyist, Literacy Action Network Legislative Chairs) and the Literacy Action Network President. The Legislative Committee and the Board will be notified as soon as possible about the results of any “negotiations.”

Relationships with other groups (school districts, professional organizations and community-based organizations):

- Literacy Action Network will share the platform draft and final platform with the Minnesota Community Education Association (MCEA).

- The final platform and a letter from the Literacy Action Network President will be sent to the Alliance for Student Achievement, MCEA and other key stakeholders.
The LAN Board has adopted a 2017 legislative platform designed to add financial resources to ABE programs in Minnesota. The platform was developed over several months of thought and feedback from the LAN Membership.

LAN Initiative:

Since 2001, the contact hour rate has remained virtually unchanged - $5.72 in 2001 vs. $5.86 this year. The inflation rate during this time period has been more than 36%. The overall impact has been a significant decrease in funding to support needed ABE services.

The proposed platform addresses this shortfall by increasing resources for all consortia, and by ensuring that Community Based Organizations — which now provide 19% of contact hours statewide, but receive no base funding — receive some funding to supplement the contact hour rate, which is the only formula funding they receive.

There are two planks in the platform:
- Add $2 M per year to the ABE formula for consortia statewide, increasing overall consortium funding to address the shortfall in federal funding, providing funding for such things as enhanced technology infrastructure for students, increased development of distance learning, and enhanced wrap-around support services for learners.
- Add $2 M per year to increase contact hour funding for all state approved CBOs to a level approaching the lowest public school consortia.
LAN is Monitoring:

LAN Response to Secondary Credentialing Proposal:

Any statutory change to redefine state approved high school equivalency tests beyond the GED must include:

a) Adequate funding to facilitate statewide implementation by MDE ABE staff, and locally at the program level.

b) A means to consider for approval any potential secondary credential test(s) that includes input from both ABE professionals at the program level, as well as MDE ABE staff.

LAN Supports:

LAN is in favor of continued funding to help defray the cost of secondary credential testing, as outlined in the Governor’s budget.
Building Strategic Relationships

Many ABE practitioners have seen how E-12 systems increase pressure on ABE budgets when their resources get tight. This stress will continue to rise as their budgets are challenged. Many of us are part of community education departments, which are seeing rising costs with no increase in general funding to support their efforts. Community Education is picking up more of the expenses, such as transportation and space that used to be absorbed into each school district. This added expense, in turn, puts more pressure on their district’s ABE budget.

Since ABE practitioners are the first to see the immediate effects of these budget pressures, we need to let those who set the budgets know the repercussions of their actions, as well as better solutions for equitable education systems.

Building relationships with legislators should not be viewed as a one-way street of communication. ABE practitioners can offer extremely valuable information to legislators, drawing upon their experience, knowledge, and expertise within the field of adult basic education. Most legislators are genuinely interested in how the policies they support affect the lives of the constituents they represent and will appreciate an informed opinion from someone in the frontlines.

Similarly, it is important to listen to the legislators with whom you meet. If you build a positive relationship on a foundation of mutual respect, a legislator is much more likely to be frank with you on her position and perhaps offer constructive criticism as to how you can make your platform more attractive to those with the power to vote it into law.

Furthermore, it is important to know who in congress has the power to act on your particular bill and who does not. Spending time developing relationships with legislators sitting on the committee which hears your bill is extremely valuable. Learning which legislators have championed your cause before can also be helpful. Moreover, working on relationships with members with seniority or leadership positions will also improve your advocacy efforts.

You can easily look up which state and federal senators and representatives represent you on the State website District Finder:

http://www.leg.state.mn.us/leg/districtfinder.asp

You can also call the House Public Services information line at:
651-296-2146, 800-657-3550, or TTY 651-296-9896
There are a variety of ways to get connected with legislators, including writing letters, sending emails, calling her office, scheduling a meeting, or arranging a site visit. Which method to use will depend on a few factors: where the bill you are advocating for is in the legislative process, if the legislator travels to his home district frequently, the preferences of the legislator, and what method will be most comfortable for you to use. Below you will find some helpful hints on a variety of methods of contact, along with some templates to help get you started in your legislative relationship building.

If you can’t meet with your elected officials when they are back in your community, consider writing a letter or sending an email. If you can, send a copy of your letter and a copy of any reply to Literacy Action Network to keep them informed of your legislative activities. Below are a few do’s and don’ts on how to write an effective letter to your legislator:

**DO:**

- **Be brief.** Never write more than one page.
- **Be neat.** Print or type your letter so it is easy to read. Also, use personal or business stationery, or a plain sheet of paper.
- **Be politically aware.** Make sure you understand the legislative process. Use exact bill numbers and popular bill titles. Know where the bill you are interested in is in the legislative process.
- **Be specific.** Identify the issue at the top of the letter and cover only one issue per letter. If you have more than one issue that needs to be addressed, write separate letters for each issue.
- **Be informative.** Make your letter is informative by including statistics and other facts that lend credibility to your views. Be sure to verify dollar figures, percentages and other numbers by contacting Literacy Action Network or the Department of Education staff.
- **Be personal.** Tell your legislator why you think the bill, if it becomes law, will help or hurt you, your children, your business, or your community. Explain what it means to you.
- **Be explicit.** For example, you may wish to begin your letter like this: "I hope you will support (oppose) HF or SF____." Give your reasons for supporting or opposing the measure. Be very specific about what action you need from your legislator on an issue i.e. vote “yes” next Tuesday on HB 1.
- **Be helpful.** Offer to provide any information the legislator may need to make up his mind and to testify if there is a hearing regarding the issue with which you’re concerned.
- **Be polite and reasonable.** Lawmakers can’t please everyone. They may disagree with you. Try to respect their views. Don’t lose your temper, even on paper. Tell your legislator what you think and why, but be polite.
- **Be courteous.** Be sure to say “thank you.” Although a legislator may be opposed to the particular bill for which you are advocating, there may be bills in the future that she could support. If you are courteous, the legislator will remember and want to work with you again.
• **Don’t use someone else’s words.** Use your own words. Legislators say, "I'd rather get one short, simple, handwritten letter than a hundred form letters that organizations urge people to write. The letters come in stacks 300 deep. Even if they're handwritten, they're word for word the same."

• **Don’t threaten legislators.** Legislators say, "Some folks don't know how you stand on an issue, but they'll attack you right off the bat. They'll say, 'Vote for HF______ or else,' and you may already think it's a wonderful idea. Or they'll write, 'Why aren't you supporting this bill, you fool?' and you're the sponsor of the bill. Threats and insults don't work."

• **Don’t address a legislator incorrectly.** Make sure you know if they are a member of the Senate or the House, avoid addressing them as "Congressman."

• **Don’t use jargon.** Use terms they will understand and avoid using abbreviations. Avoid literacy acronyms that the greater public wouldn't readily know.

### Addressing Your Letter:

Representative (their last name)
Minnesota House of Representatives
Room # State Office Building
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
St. Paul, MN 55155-1298

or

Senator (their last name)
Minnesota Senate
Room # Capitol Building
75 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
St. Paul, MN 55155-1606

The salutation should read: Dear Representative; or Dear Senator:

Specific addresses for members of the Minnesota House of Representatives and members of the Minnesota Senate are included in member profiles.

You can find these member profiles online at: [www.leg.state.mn.us](http://www.leg.state.mn.us)
[Your name and address]

[Date]

Dear Senator or Governor [name – use appropriate title],

[Briefly introduce yourself and describe your program.]

I’d like to take a moment to let you know how important ABE is in our community. You may know that nearly 80,000 Minnesota adults participate in English as a Second Language, basic skills, GED, family literacy, and workforce education classes each year. But did you know (insert number served last year) of these adults were served right here in your district last year? And that our classes helped prepare these adults for better jobs, to help their children succeed in school, and to prepare for citizenship and civic participation?

During times of economic stress, ABE is crucial in helping unemployed adults improve basic skills needed for future employment. As recessions deepen, the number of Minnesotans accessing ABE increases. During the last economic downturn in 2002-04, the number of adults served through Minnesota ABE set new records, surpassing 81,000 each year (a 60% increase from four years earlier). Right here in your district, we see many adult learners who need to improve their skills so they can become employed or advance at jobs they already have.

I invite you to visit our program at (insert address). We would love the opportunity to show you around, so you can see first-hand how ABE benefits your constituents.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

[name]
[organization]
Email is most effective if it is not a blanket mailing to all members, but a specific mail message to your representative or senator. When sending an email, remember to include your name, postal address and phone number.

Email is effective with some legislators and less so with others. Feel free to check with the legislator’s office to see if she checks her own email or has an office person check it. When you send an email you get a response thanking you for your information, which is typically an automatic response rather than a personal message.

Sample Email

Dear Senator [Last Name],

My name is [Name]. I am an English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher at [School], which lies within your district. I have been teaching at [School] for 5 years and have directly witnessed adult learners gaining the skills they need to be financially independent and successful community members.

I am writing to thank you for your continued support of Adult Basic Education (ABE) in Minnesota. I remember that you voted in favor of supporting ABE last year on SF [Bill Number]. This increase in the funding formula allowed my program to purchase new workbooks for our learners, the first new books we've received in about 4 years. The new textbooks are far more relevant to the lives of our current students and have helped them to improve rapidly. For example, one of my students, Jorge, started in our program without knowing how to spell his name. He was progressing slowly through his classes until the new textbooks came. It was as if a light went on for him! Because of the clear formatting and more current pictures, Jorge was able to relate to the content we were teaching. The new books gave him the inspiration to learn that our old, tattered texts couldn't. Now Jorge is in our most advanced class and he recently reported he was given a raise at work.

If you would like to hear more about Jorge's story, I know he would be happy to testify in the upcoming hearing of SF [Bill Number] on [date].

I thank you for your past support of ABE. Our program is proud to have legislators who understand the vital role ABE programming plays in sustainable communities. We ask that you vote 'yes' when the bill that supports continued ABE funding, SF [Bill Number], comes up this session. If you would like to hear more about our programming, or if you would like data that points to the success of ABE programming, please call me at 555-5555.

Sincerely,
[Your Name]
Making Phone Calls

Phone calls to your elected officials can be used as tools to increase pressure for a specific action. They become very important when sudden legislative action is needed and letters will not arrive in time. It is also useful to note that a few calls often go a long way. Sometimes, only a dozen phone calls to an elected official on the same topic may be reported as strong constituent support.

Tips to remember when calling:

- **Work with staffers.** You may deal with a staff person who knows little about your issue.
- **Make yourself clear.** Clearly identify the subject, title or bill number to which your call refers.
- **Specify the needed action.** Make clear what side of the issue you are on and what action you would like your official to take.
- **Identify as a constituent.** Constituents always get precedent over any others wanting the elected official’s ear. Make sure callers are within the elected officials district for maximum effectiveness.

Sample Phone Script

**Caller:** Hello, I would like to make an appointment to meet briefly with Senator _______ to share my thoughts about the upcoming bill SF____that she will be voting on next week.

**Staffer:** I’m sorry. Senator _______ is in a committee meeting right now. May I take a message for her?

**Caller:** Yes. My name is _______. I am a constituent in her district and a member of Literacy Action Network, an organization that serves adults with literacy needs. I would like to meet with Senator _______ at some point next week for about 30 minutes. Please ask her to contact me about meeting on SF____. I have a group of people from this district that would like to discuss this bill as soon as possible. Again, my name is _______ and my address is _______(speak slowly to be sure the staffer is taking down the information). I hope she will be able to meet with us soon and I’ll be anxiously waiting to hear from her. May I ask your name? Thank you so much for your time, [staffer’s name].

**Staffer:** You’re welcome and thank you for calling.
A face-to-face meeting with a legislator at their office is a very effective way to share perspectives on a particular piece of legislation. Visits to a legislator ensures that your message is getting through to the person and also gives you the chance to read the legislator’s body language and reactions to your propositions. Moreover, Capitol visits are a wonderful way to engage learners and others from your community in the advocacy process. You can invite one or two constituents to come with you to provide the opportunity for them to tell their own story in their own words. Below are some tips for planning a successful visit to the Capitol.

**Beginning the Meeting**

- **Recognize the staffers.** You will most likely see the legislator’s staffers before your meeting. Make sure to introduce yourself to them. Being friendly to staffers could mean easier access to legislators in the future.
- **Introduce yourself.** Identify yourself as a constituent or leader in the ABE community so that the legislator has context for your interest in a particular bill.
- **Allow time to chat.** Begin the meeting with some informal conversation. Small talk at the beginning of a meeting places everyone at ease. But, after a few minutes, you must send a signal that you have something specific to discuss.
- **Come prepared.** Bring with you a one-page fact sheet that outlines your concerns with the pending legislation and what you would like the legislator to do.
- **Personalize your message.** Show your concern for people and bring both a state and local perspective to the issue. Use personal stories as illustrations.
The Body of the Meeting

• **State your purpose.** Let the legislator know what bill you want to discuss. Let the legislator know your position on the proposed legislation and why you support or oppose it passing into law.

• **Provide information.** Bring clear data that backs up your position. Do not make up fake numbers. Legislators will remember a person who provides ad information and it will hurt your cause. If you do not have the information the legislator wants, let them know you will send it to them after your visit.

• **Introduce constituents.** If you plan to bring learners or other constituents to share their perspective on a given piece of legislation, make sure that they are well-briefed on the topic and have practiced their remarks ahead of time. If possible, provide them with talking points that will help them to prepare statements.

• **Ask for the legislator’s point of view.** Legislators are rarely asked about their personal opinions on a particular bill by a visiting constituent even though this could provide very useful information. If they do support the bill, they might be willing to tell you whom on the committee currently opposes the legislation so that you can spend more time lobbying for their support. If they do not support the bill, they might be willing to tell you what language needs to change in order to make it more appealing to them.

• **Ask for your Legislator’s support.** After everyone has had a chance to speak, ask the legislator if you can count on his support for your bill. This is important so that you can be sure that a legislator is not merely supportive, but is also willing to vote positively on your legislation.

• **Thank legislator for her time and support.** Remember to be polite, thank your legislator for meeting with you. Let her know that you appreciate her time and support on your bill. Provide your contact information and offer your assistance in answering questions and obtaining any needed additional information.

“Literacy is a human right, a tool of personal empowerment and a means for cultural development. Literacy is inseparably tied to all aspects of life and livelihood. Access to quality literacy learning opportunities and the development of literate environments are essential components of strategies for poverty reduction, equality, economic development and environmental protection.” —UNESCO
After the Meeting

- **Follow-up.** After your visit, send a thank you card to the legislator. Renew your offer to serve as an information resource and briefly touch on your key points. Also, if you had promised any extra information to the elected official, be sure to send it as soon as possible.

- **Share information.** If you get a commitment to support or co-sponsor a bill, be sure to report it to the Literacy Action Network legislative committee. They know how this legislator can be most helpful in the specific legislative situation. Also inform the Literacy Action Network Legislative Committee about the meeting and your views on its results.

- **Stay informed.** Continue to check in on your legislator’s positions on issues and of his public statements.

- **Schedule another meeting.** Remember, the lobbyist for the Twins baseball team is at the Capitol everyday to talk with legislators about their bills. It is important to plan for repeated visits to make sure a legislator understands the importance of the issue.

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**DidYou Know?**

The Minnesota Department of Education reports that a growing number of parents lack basic literacy skills, and this is a barrier to the success of their children.

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Another useful tool to convey the importance of ABE programming is inviting a legislator or candidate to your program site. A site visit allows you to paint a picture of your work far better than is possible by simply sharing facts and statistics. However, there are many things to keep in mind when planning a site visit. Site visits should be conducted in the summer or early fall, when congress is not in session and the legislator schedule can allow for the time needed to have a successful visit. Moreover, visits should be strictly non-partisan. Therefore, if you plan to invite a candidate from one political party, you should try to arrange a meeting with a competing political party candidate as well. Below are more tips for hosting successful site visits.
Tips for Conducting a Successful Site Visit

• **Be an early bird.** Hold your event early in the day because another activity is less likely to get in the way of a legislator's attendance in the morning.
• **Be inclusive.** Include learners and staff so the “full picture” is available and the legislator will know there are “real people” behind ABE programs.
• **Appoint a photographer.** Make sure someone is ready to take pictures to use in future newsletters or publications as appropriate.
• **Study up.** Do some prep work with learners and staff about the visit. You want to ensure a good turnout by learners and good, thoughtful questions that show basic knowledge of the situation facing legislators.
• **Double-check.** Follow up the invitation with a call to confirm and be available to answer questions so that your guest can be prepared as well.
• **Know the political season.** Candidate visits can be anytime before the election, but suggest doing so before the end of October in order to get good participation from the candidates. The last two weeks before the election is just too busy for a relaxed visit.
• **Schmooze the Newsies.** Invite local media if it is appropriate. Legislators are often looking for positive coverage of their community involvement.
• **Consider a Forum.** Co-sponsor a forum where all candidates a number of legislators have the chance to participate. It gets your organization’s name “out there,” but you aren’t saddled with all the work. Be sure to have a moderator from outside the education realm so that the forum is fair. (You don’t want to risk the candidates being ganged up on by a bunch of passionate educators!)
• **Follow-Up.** Be sure to send a thankyou after the event to those who attended. A few thoughtful words go a long way in a relationship.

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Did You Know?

You can get up-to-date information on ABE issues within the state legislature at this Literacy Action Network website: [http://www.literacyactionnetwork.org](http://www.literacyactionnetwork.org)
Contact Via the Media

A way to get “ink” about your issue is to write a letter to the editor or even a more in-depth article about your topic for the local newspaper. This is a way that you can let other people on your block know that there are other opinions in the community. Papers love to have you respond to a previous letter because it shows that there is readership. Always be brief, thoughtful, and clear in your letter. Name-calling or other disrespectful behaviors only reflect badly on the author and gives the sense of a “crack-pot.” This does more harm for your issue than good.

Letters to the Editor

Letters to the editor and op-ed articles are a way to communicate with your elected official and the public at the same time. A letter to the editor that mentions the name of an elected official is certain to be read by that official.

Below are some helpful guidelines for crafting your letter to the editor.

Tips for Writing Letters to the Editor

- Most letters that get printed are in response to an editorial or article that appeared in the paper previously. Therefore, begin a letter by making a reference, such as, “I was surprised to read in your paper that…”
- Generally the shorter the letter, the better your chance of getting it printed.
- Newspapers do not have the space to print every letter received. It’s a good idea to have several people write letters on the same topic, increasing the odds that at least one letter will be printed.
- Be sure to give your phone number. Newspapers are cautious about people signing phony names, so they may call to verify that it’s your letter.
- Every time you send a letter to your elected official, look in the newspaper for a tie-in for a letter to the editor on the same topic.
- If you praise your elected official in your letter to the editor, send a copy to your elected official at the same time you send it to the newspaper. Even if the newspaper doesn’t run it the official will appreciate your effort.
- Get a committee to recruit people to write letters to their papers, but don’t furnish a form letter for everyone to sign. The best method to getting published is to discuss some general talking points and to let individuals compose their own letters in their own words.
Conclusion

Advocacy is as much art as it is science. We invite you to use this toolkit as a jumping-off point. Then join Literacy Action Network’s ongoing conversations and trainings that occur throughout the year. Literacy Action Network is always here as a resource for you in this process.

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“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”
– Margaret Mead
You will find both statewide and national links to literacy organizations and information at: www.literacyactionnetwork.org.

Minnesota State Legislature
www.leg.state.mn.us

Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS)
www.casas.org

Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy (CAAL)
www.caalusa.org

International Reading Association
www.reading.org

Commission on Adult Basic Education (COABE)
www.coabe.org

Minnesota Literacy Council (MLC)
www.mnliteracy.org

National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL)
www.ncsall.net

National Coalition for Literacy
www.national-coalition-literacy.org

ProLiteracy Worldwide
www.proliteracy.org

United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
www.unesco.org

US Department of Education
www.ed.gov