

# COMMUNICATING WITH YOUR LEGISLATORS\*

*\*Required for your FINAL REPORT*

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The Washington State Legislature makes funding allocations to the Washington State Arts Commission (ArtsWA). A portion of this funding supports our grant programs. As the state makes its funding decisions, it is important that Legislators understand the impact arts funding has in their districts. The best way for them to know is to hear from constituents! To that end, we require you as a grantee to write at least one letter to a state senator or state representative and tell them about the effect your grant had on your organization and/or community. These letters are extremely effective in helping elected officials understand the return on the state's investment in the arts and arts education. These are not fundraising or "ask" letters but simply reflections on the impact that receiving arts funding from the state had on your organization and community. A copy of your letter is part of your Final Report submission.

## Letter-writing suggestions

- Keep your letter to a page.
- The sample letter provided can help structure your thoughts - but use your own words.
- Express appreciation for the state's support. If you are aware of past support of the arts and arts education by your elected official, be sure to thank them for their sustained support.
- Tell a compelling story about how your work in the arts positively affects community.
- Emphasize *public benefit* (such as improving K-12 education, providing access for underserved communities, engaging the community in positive ways, improving the economy).
- Talk about whom the program or project served.
- Consider your legislators' interests and priorities, regarding education, jobs, economy, etc.
- Consider including an inspiring quote from a participant.
- Note private or other public dollars your organization has raised to match the state grant, and describe how the state grant helps leverage these dollars or builds other momentum.
- Consider having your organization's board chair sign or co-sign the letter.

## Legislative Session Timeline

Legislative sessions begin in mid-January every year and run through late April or longer; budget setting occurs in odd-numbered years. Communications with legislators may get the most attention before the session starts, or early in the session, before significant bill deadlines occur.

## Additional information and resources

- Find your legislators: <http://apps.leg.wa.gov/DistrictFinder/Default.aspx>
- Washington State Arts Alliance: [www.wsartsalliance.com](http://www.wsartsalliance.com)
- ArtsEd Washington: [www.artsedwashington.org](http://www.artsedwashington.org)

## SAMPLE LETTER TO WASHINGTON STATE LEGISLATOR

(Date)

(Organization Letterhead OR Name)

(Organization Address)

(City, State Zip)

The Honorable (Name of your State Senator or Representative)

(Address)

(City, State Zip)

Dear (Senator \_\_\_\_\_ or Representative \_\_\_\_\_):

As one of your constituents [*only include if accurate for the letter-signer!*] I am pleased to inform you of some valuable work happening in your district, thanks to state funding for the arts. Our (organization/school), (Name of Organization/School), received a matching grant of \$(Amount of Grant) from the Washington State Arts Commission to (to do WHAT – name the key grant-funded project or program).

This funding really makes a difference in our community... *add 1-2 concise sentences here to explain WHY IT MATTERS, such as*

- *describe the public benefit of the funded program*
- *describe how this program or project supports overall educational success (e.g., “We help develop student success by...”, “we help students develop essential 21<sup>st</sup> century skills such as communication and critical thinking by...”)*
- *describe how this funding helped attract other funds or community support and engagement*
- *describe the impacts on local economy or other measures of community health*

*[Optional – invitation to observe:]*

We are very proud of all that our grant-funded program is doing for our community, and would like to invite you to see for yourself by observing one of our programs in action. (Name specific event info, or indicate general options for in-school visits.) To receive more information, or to schedule a time to visit, please contact (Organization Contact Name) at (Include Phone and/or Email Address). On behalf of the students, teachers, artists, and community members in our network, we extend our appreciation for the state’s investment in our work.

Sincerely,

(Signature)

(Type Your Name)

(Your Title with the Organization)