Community Engagement Volunteer – Skills Guide

2023



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Community Engagement Volunteer Program Skills Guide

Thank you for joining CNIB as a Community Engagement Volunteer (CEV). In this volunteer role you will support CNIB to advocate on issues that create meaningful societal change for people living with sight loss.

CEVs can get involved in several different ways that speak to their interests, skillsets and time availability. We have designed this toolkit to provide resources that will help build your skills and knowledge for the different types of activities that our CEVs participate in.

The documents in this skills guide will provide you with the information and resources you’ll need in this exciting role.

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# Getting Started

## Guide - Advocacy 101

Advocacy plays an important role in CNIB's mission.by helping to make a more accessible society for people who are blind or partially sighted. CNIB defines advocacy as “persuading a person with influence, the public, businesses, organizations, or the government to change attitudes, policies and/or practices. about an issue.” In other words, advocacy is about trying to make a positive change.

For more information about how we can define advocacy, watch our video [CNIB “What is advocacy?”](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4rPRQXwJObc)

### Are you an Advocate?

There are many misconceptions about what an advocate is. Some stereotypes include:

* You must be an angry or loud personality
* You must have training or a degree in public policy or government relations
* You need to take part in direct action (i.e., attend marches, carry signs)
* You must be a professional lobbyist or be well connected to important people

While some of these qualities are helpful, some of them are not (remember, no one likes an angry person!). An effective advocate uses their own skills and resources to navigate systems, build relationships, and create change. However, there are a number of key qualities that hold true for each area of advocacy. They include:

* **Passion:** Caring about the change you want to make
* **Motivation:** Having a sense of drive and desire for change
* **Empowerment:** Feeling confident with yourself and resources to make change. These can include an understanding of your own strengths, the ability to identify potential barriers and accommodations, and knowing your rights.
* **Organization:** You keep notes and have facts and evidence to persuade others

Ask yourself these questions:

* Do you encounter barriers often that you want to fix?
* Do you want to make a change for yourself?
* Do you want to make a change for others?
* Do you want to make a change for society?
* Do you want to alter hearts and minds to break barriers and create equity?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, you are an advocate!

### Why Advocate?

People advocate for a variety of reasons. Some of these include:

* When their rights or the rights of people the care about aren’t being respected
* When others speak on their behalf
* When an issue is very important to them
* To raise awareness among elected officials, businesses, organizations, decision makers, and the public
* To create change and find solutions
* To work as part of a team toward a common goal

Some examples of things that people connected to the sight loss community advocate for include:

* Access to information and communication
* Access to public services and spaces
* Changes to publicly available services and spaces
* Changes to attitudes, policies, or procedures
* Accessible technology
* Changes to the built environment

### Types of Advocacy

There are four main types of advocacy. Each type can be useful in different situations, and it may even be helpful to use more than one type as you work to advocate towards a specific issue. The most important part is being able to recognize each type and what they might look like when you are advocating. To start, check out [CNIB’s putting advocacy into practice](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v3e0Ti5b754&t=2s) video.

**1. Self-Advocacy**

Self-advocacy involves speaking up for yourself and what you need. Examples of self-advocacy include letting the teacher know that you need to sit at the front of the class or asking for a document in an accessible format. Even though the same issue may affect others, it is something that you are motivated to change because it affects you personally. Are you a self-advocate? Watch [our self-advocacy video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5RIpTnWmskk) to find out if you’re already taking part in self-advocacy. There’s a good chance you are!

**2. Systemic advocacy**

Systemic advocacy is influencing and changing the way systems operate in ways that will benefit the population. Systemic advocates focus on changes to attitudes, legislation, policies, and practices. Examples of systemic advocacy include Black Lives Matter, the #MeToo Movement, climate change campaigns, and CNIB’s Guide Dog Awareness Month campaign. For more information on CNIB’s systemic advocacy campaigns, visit check out our [CNIB’s systemic advocacy video](https://youtu.be/u2KqrZX025c).

For an up-to-date list of CNIB’s current advocacy campaigns, visit [www.cnib.ca/advocate](http://www.cnib.ca/advocate).

**3. Third-party Advocacy**

Third-party advocacy happens when a person or organization that is not directly involved in the issue represents a person or group in advocating for change. Examples of third-party advocacy include unions, elected representatives, an ombudsman, disability organizations, and municipal accessibility advisory committees. CNIB sometimes gets involved in third-party advocacy, but we prefer to empower people to self-advocate where possible.

**4. Education and awareness building**

Education and awareness building is focused on raising the public’s level of understanding and awareness about a particular issue in order to create change. An example of education and awareness building is [CNIB’s Guide Dog Awareness PSA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tMD8IkTlv80).

For further information about raising awareness as part of advocacy, check out our [Top 5 Sight Loss Myths Busted video](https://youtu.be/_aEvFihIqA8).

### Intersectionality

Advocacy works to make positive changes by addressing barriers that individuals face. At CNIB, sight loss is a shared barrier that we are all trying to make changes towards. However, other factors in a person’s life make their experiences and needs unique. Intersectionality is a framework for understanding how a person’s social identities combine to create different forms of discrimination and privilege. Those factors overlap to create a person’s lived experience that can both empower and oppress.

Examples

* Class
* Disability
* Gender identity
* Race
* Immigration status
* Religion

While advocating for the sight loss community, voices from all impacted communities must be included and acknowledged. It is important to recognize and acknowledge that everyone has multiple identities that make them who they are. It also means that an issue can impact individualize in different ways.

**Resources**

* [Diversity and Inclusion: We are CNIB](https://www.cnib.ca/en/support-us/advocate/diversity-inclusion-we-are-cnib?region=on)
* [CNIB Intersectionality Video Series](https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLpAOW00xNyyalFL6XkQN_AQqnoPJtscIY)

### Steps to Self-Advocacy

There are six steps to effective self-advocacy:

1. Define the issue
2. Define solutions
3. Figure out where to go and what to say
4. Find allies
5. Be mindful of timing
6. Evaluate and follow up

**1. Define the issue**

Defining an advocacy issue isn’t always easy. Your issue may be complicated, or the change that you are looking for may not be straight forward. One of the best ways to begin defining an issue is to simplify it. Assume that the people that can help you are hearing about this issue for the first time and are not familiar with it.

Defining your issue will also ensure that you know what your goal is, and you’ll be able to determine when you’ve succeeded.

Let’s look at two examples of defining an issue and consider which one would be more effective.

**Example 1**

I rely on assistive technology to use the internet and your website is impossible for me to navigate.

**Example 2**

I am a customer who is blind. Yesterday, I went to your website to buy a pair of shoes and I was unable to do so. I use computer software that magnifies text on my computer screen, but the way your website has been built does not allow me to find the checkout button or add items to my shopping cart.

While those within the sight loss community might understand the first example, a small business owner or an individual within a large corporation probably won’t have an in-depth understanding of assistive technology. Notice how clearly defining the issue in a way that could be understood by any audience makes Example 2 much more effective.

The most important question to ask yourself when you are trying to define an issue is, “What is the barrier in attitudes, policies, procedures, or the built environment that is preventing me from accessing what I need?”

As Canadians, we have access to a number of human rights relating to areas of life like employment, education, access to healthcare and housing. If you feel your legal rights are not being met or want to learn more about your legal rights as a person with sight loss, visit the [CNIB Know Your Rights webpage](https://www.cnib.ca/en/support-us/advocate/know-your-rights).

**2. Define Solutions**

Your issue should have a solution. Effective self-advocacy is highlighting an issue and working together to find a solution. Pointing out problems without considering potential solutions is complaining.

When defining solutions, it is important to be flexible. Considering multiple solutions will enable more options and more opportunity for collaboration than focusing on one stubborn solution.

The best way to define solutions is through research and evidence. You’ll want to make an emotional approach to your problem so that people understand it’s impact, but you’ll need to present solutions backed by solid research and evidence if you want to persuade others. Evidence could include statistics, case studies, best practices, or photos. The important thing is that you present your evidence in a way that is easy to distribute and understand. This will help you to communicate with the media, decision makers, and the public.

Once you’ve defined your solutions and gathered the relevant evidence, you’ll need to put the information into a compelling argument. Think about what people will need to hear to take action. What can you say to persuade them that acting in your favour is good for them, too? How can you position your solutions in a way that benefits everyone?

Let’s revisit our example from the previous section. While a website redesign may fix the accessibility barriers faced by the customer who was trying to purchase a pair of shoes, a small business may lack the resources to overhaul their website in a short timeframe. But this isn’t the only possible solution. Try to think creatively.

**Ask Yourself:**

* What types of evidence already exist that I can use?
* What evidence do I need to gather myself?
* What steps do I need to take to gather this evidence?

**3. Figure Out Where to Go and What to Say**

Once you have identified the problem and defined solutions, you’ll need to figure out who to talk to and what you’ll say to them to persuade them that change needs to happen.

Figuring out where to go can feel like an overwhelming task. Your goal is to find the person who has the authority or resources to address the issue. If your issue is something that is controlled by the government, you’ll need to determine which level of government has jurisdiction over it. You can then figure out who the decision maker is. Governments often have a public directory that you can search to find out who the decision maker is. You can also reach out to your elected officials to get information. For further advice, check out our [guide on how to navigate the Canadian government system](https://www.cnib.ca/sites/default/files/2023-01/How%20to%E2%80%A6navigate%20the%20Canadian%20government%20system_EN.docx).

If the issue is large and involves many stakeholders, you may want to create a list of all the potential decision makers and influencers. This will help you to stay organized.

**Ask yourself the following questions:**

* Who has the authority to make the change happen?
* Are there any other key players who can influence the decision maker?
* How can you reach those people?

For further tips on how to engage decision makers effectively, check out our [Champions for Change Policy Maker Questions](https://youtu.be/4uPMkG9EQHI) video.

Once you’ve figured out where to go, the next step is figuring out what to say. Try to focus on the three Cs of a good argument: clear, concise, and compelling.

To ensure that your message is clear, concise, and compelling, focus on the following:

* Explain the issue.
* Explain why it is important.
* Explain what can be done to fix the issue.

It may be helpful to make a list of people that you’ll want to call, email, or meet with. Your list could include the person’s name, job title or relevance to your campaign, how you’ll be contacting them, when, with what information, and when you’ll follow up.

For further information on this topic, visit our guides on [how to write a great advocacy letter](https://www.cnib.ca/sites/default/files/2023-02/Guide%20%E2%80%93%20Advocacy%20Letters%20101_EN.docx) and [public speaking for advocacy](https://www.cnib.ca/sites/default/files/2023-02/Guide%20%E2%80%93%20Public%20Speaking%20and%20Advocacy_EN.docx).

**4. Find Allies**

In most cases, you will not be the first person to advocate on an issue. Reach out to your networks to find out if others have experienced similar issues. Your networks may include your family, friends, neighbors, colleagues, people you volunteer with, people you participate in recreation with, community organizations, disability groups, and citizens of your town or city.

Finding others to join your advocacy efforts means that there are more people dedicated to the cause and to sharing the workload. Having a large group of people or organizations advocating on an issue also makes it easier to attract the attention of the media or decision makers.

To find allies, think about who is impacted by the issue. For example, cluttered sidewalks impact people who are blind or partially sighted, but they also impact people who are wheelchair users and parents with strollers.

Ensure that all who join your campaign understand the goals and key messages. All the organizations and individuals participating in the campaign should be working together toward a common outcome. Review the key messages together and determine which members of your team will reach out to the decision makers and influencers on your list.

For more information on this topic, check out our [How to make strong partnerships guide.](https://www.cnib.ca/sites/default/files/2023-01/How%20to%E2%80%A6build%20strong%20advocate%20partnerships_EN.docx)

**5. Be Mindful of Timing**

Your advocacy issue may seem like the most important issue to you, but it is one of many important issues for decision makers. For this reason, it is essential that you understand the climate of the system in which you’re trying to advocate, whether it’s with a local service provider or the federal government. For example, if your advocacy issue falls under the jurisdiction of your municipal government, but there is a mayoral election in a few weeks, you may want to wait until the new mayor is elected before reaching out about your issue.

Think about upcoming milestones that may impact your ability to advocate on the issue, such as awareness days and council meetings. Can you tie your advocacy issue to other milestones, like a budget or election?

If you determine that the timing is right to advocate on the issue, figure out what the timelines of the decision makers are so that you can adequately prepare. If you schedule a meeting with a decision maker, but council has already voted on the issue, your advocacy efforts won’t have an impact on the decision.

**6. Evaluate and Follow Up**

At the start of your advocacy efforts, you had clear goals. You knew what success would look like and how you’d know when you’d achieved it. Now you can celebrate your accomplishments and think about what worked, why it worked, and what you would do differently next time.

Ask yourself the following:

* Was the issue resolved?
* Was your communication clear, concise, and compelling?
* Did allies and stakeholders do what they said they were going to do?
* Which allies and stakeholders do you need to share the outcomes with?
* If the issue was not resolved, is there more information or additional allies that could help you to continue advocating?

If you have any further questions about advocacy or would like further resources, please contact us at [advocacy@cnib.ca](mailto:advocacy@cnib.ca) or visit [www.cnib.ca/advocate](http://www.cnib.ca/advocate).



# Public Speaking

## Guide – Public Speaking and Advocacy

Public speaking can be an outlet to advocate for issues and engage with the public and community stakeholders. When advocating for an issue, you may have an opportunity to speak with a person or group who can help address your issue and create change. While public speaking can be nerve-wracking for some, the more prepared you are, the more confident you will feel.

### Preparing your advocacy message

* Know your audience. Do some background research to identify their interests, concerns, biases, personal experience or sphere of influence.
* Develop your key messages. Key messages are the main points you want your audience to hear, understand, and remember. Effective key messages are concise, relevant, simple and memorable. Clearly explain the issue, why it matters and the change you'd like to see/positive outcome you want.
* Decide on supporting messages. Make sure they are relevant to the audience and clearly explained. Start from the most important reason to less important ones. Supporting messages may include principles, legislation, causes and effects, statistics, anecdotes, quotes from authorities, comparisons or examples.
* Be prepared to address common questions or objections, such as costs, expertise, legality, capacity, and myths. If needed, offer to provide answers at a later date with 'I don't know the answer, but will look into it and get back to you.'
* End with a call to action or clear request.

### Tips for speaking at a meeting

* Use proper titles and correct pronunciation of names.
* Be polite, respectful, and confident.
* Try to have open and approachable body language.
* Create contact by facing the person you are speaking to; if more than one person is present, ask where everyone is seated and turn to look at them all.
* If speaking as part of a team, decide who will say what and when.
* Use simple, straightforward language. Avoid long anecdotes and potentially controversial words.
* Have a clear message and call to action. Tell your audience why your message is important and what exactly you want them to do.
* Let your audience see and feel your enthusiasm and passion. Speak from your heart and experience. Sharing your personal story or lived experiences shows audiences the personal side of your call to action.
* Be aware of time limitations and remember to leave time for questions.
* Thank the audience for listening, the opportunity to speak, and for their support.
* Be prepared to answer common questions or objections; answer the best you can or offer to provide the answers at a later date. Prepare for a range of possible responses, whether positive or negative.
* Leave a written copy of your key messages and your contact details for any follow-up information.
* For in-depth information on presentation skills, please check out our Educate to [Advocate Public Speaking Handout](https://www.cnib.ca/sites/default/files/2023-01/Public%20Speaking%20%E2%80%93%20Educate%20to%20Advocate%20Handout_EN.docx).

### Tips for speaking at networking events

* Consider having a sighted guide to assist with getting around a large venue or identifying people to talk to.
* Circulate the room, talking with as many 'key' contacts as possible. Remember, people are there to network, so don't be afraid to approach someone!
* Join groups talking together, interjecting with a comment or self-introduction.
* Be aware of the politicians and decision-makers circulating the room.
* You may need to politely extract yourself from a long-winded conversation with another person. If you are there for a reason, you don't want to miss your chance to speak to the right person.
* Ask for the person's title, department or organization and name (spelling) and get their business card for follow-up.
* Follow up with an email thanking the person, reiterating your key messages or presenting your request.

## Public speaking — Educate to Advocate Podcast

Link: [Educate to Advocate Podcast](https://soundcloud.com/user-682828220/educate-to-advocate-april-17-2019?si=557a6b1207004308b39377a288f60799&utm_source=clipboard&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=social_sharing)

## Public Speaking — Educate to Advocate Handout

**Presented by Heather Edwards: April 17, 2019**

### Comfortable and Effective Speaking

* Pressure can be different depending on expectations, familiarity with the audience, and familiarity with your material.
* [Toastmasters](https://www.toastmasters.org/): a not-for-profit program teaching public speaking skills, the program is self-paced and provides a safe, supportive environment to receive feedback on your public speaking.

#### General Speaking Tips

* **Speak with confidence.** Pay attention to your posture and face your audience.
* **Vocal variety**. Use rate of speech and tone, as well as a mixture of sentence lengths, to keep the audience interested.
* **Facial expressions.** Make sure your facial expressions match your content.
* **Word choice. C**reate a picture with your words so the audience will know the impact of your ask.
* **Use a natural speaking voice** but make sure your voice carries for a larger audience, speak from the diaphragm.

**Power of the pause**

* **Don’t rush**. If you’ve told a funny story or made a compelling point, pause to give the audience a chance to react.

**When speaking to a larger crowd**

* **It’s not about you; it’s about the content**. The audience has come because they’re interested in your message.
* **You’re the only one who knows your presentation’s material**. You’re the one in charge of communicating the material to your audience.

### Crafting Your Message: Preparing for a Presentation

* **Prepare your message.** Make sure it has an introduction, a body, and a conclusion.
* **Language.** Use language that creates a compelling image or idea for your audience.
* **Introduction.** Clarify the topic and content of your presentation, a rhetorical question can get your audience thinking about your material.
* **Body**. 3 to 5 main points you will expand on, these should be the key points you want your audience to remember.
* **Be concise.** Too many points will be too much for the audience to retain in a short amount of time.
* **Conclusion.** Make sure your message is impactful by including the most important things for your audience to take away. Don’t add additional material in your conclusion. If you forgot to cover something, you’re the only one who knows. Finish with confidence - don’t apologize.
* **Memorize your opening and closing remarks, as well as your main points.** This will give you confidence even if you’re nervous or can’t look at your notes. Memorizing the intro and conclusion also allows you to look at your audience, creating a visual connection for them.
* **Timing.** Because you have an outline, you’ll be able to summarize your message even when you have less time.

### Knowing Your Audience

* Plan for the amount of time you’ve been given, but be aware that you may end up with less time in some situations.
* Know your highest priority “ask” or message: for situations when your audience has less time than expected to listen to you.
* Knowing the type of audience will help you decide whether a longer speech or an “elevator pitch” is most appropriate.
* Do you want to inform your audience, persuade your audience, or both?
* Avoid using jargon your audience may not be familiar with. If you have to use it, explain it.
* Be respectful of the amount of time you’ve been given.
* Don’t fill in too much detail that takes away from your main message.
* Personal stories can help you engage with an audience but limit these depending on your audience.

#### Speaking with Persuasion

* **Know your ask.** What is it you want your audience to do?
* **What’s in it for them.** Show them why they benefit from your idea.
* **What will happen as a result.** Show them what the consequences will be.
* **How will they do it?** Show them how they can work with you.
* What resources are available and how can the audience access them?

**Speaking to politicians and government staff**

* Politicians’ schedules can change quickly, and they often have limited time.

**Seeking accommodations**

* Phrase your requests so your audience can understand what is needed.
* Be clear and concise even in highly intense situations when advocating for yourself or others.
* Be concise and persuasive with potential allies and donors.

### Logistics

* Know the setup of your presentation space. If you are blind, knowing the layout and whether there are steps will be helpful.
* Will there be Q and A at the end? Do you have a plan to manage this process if you are blind?
* Have a plan to deal with slides or other presentation materials.
* Practice alone and with others to increase your confidence, make sure your presentation fits the allotted time.
* “What If?" It’s hard to anticipate everything that could happen, but stay calm and know your material so you can make any situation work.

### Memory Aids

* Knowing your introduction, main points, and the conclusion is helpful - but memorizing the whole presentation word for word can make your delivery seem forced.
* Use mnemonics. An acronym can help you recall main points without reading.
* Use a format you’re comfortable with for notes. Make sure any equipment you need is charged and functioning ahead of time.

### External Resources

* [Orai Communication Coaching App](https://www.orai.com/): an app that identifies filler words, speech that’s too fast or slow, and other factors to help improve your delivery (for best results with VoiceOver, use headphones)
* [Chicago Lighthouse: Tips for Public Speaking as a Person with Vision Loss](https://chicagolighthouse.org/sandys-view/tips-for-public-speaking/)

# Letter Writing

## Guide – Advocacy Letters 101

### The Purpose of an Advocacy Letter

Writing a letter can be a great way to advocate on an issue that has a disproportionate impact on people who are blind or partially sighted. Whether the issue you’re advocating on impacts an individual or a community, the same basic steps to self-advocacy apply. For a closer look at the steps to self-advocacy, see Advocacy 101.

The goal of any advocacy initiative, including letter writing, is to remove barriers faced by marginalized groups. Removing barriers promotes equity and allows people to fully engage in their communities and access goods and services without undue obstacles.

The purpose of an advocacy letter is to present the issue and invite the recipient to collaborate with you to find a solution. It is always best to assume that the recipient of your letter is interested in finding a solution to the issue but doesn’t know how to do so. This will help to ensure that you are entering into the letter writing process with a respectful tone and a willingness to work together toward a solution.

### The Anatomy of an Effective Advocacy Letter

An effective advocacy letter can be broken down into the following distinct sections:

1. The salutation
2. The introduction
3. The issue
4. The solution
5. The conclusion

#### 1. The Salutation

The salutation of your letter is the opening greeting. Salutations often pair a word of greeting with a person’s name and/or title, such as “Dear James” or “Attention Councilor Leung”.

The salutation is the first thing your recipient will read. It sets the tone for what follows, and it lets your reader know that you’re professional and that you’ve done your homework. For this reason, it’s important to think carefully about your salutation.

If you are writing a letter to an elected official, you should always use a formal greeting. Canada has adopted a formal method by which to address various public officials. The styles of address can be found through Heritage Canada at <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/protocol-guidelines-special-event/styles-address.html>

It is important to note that a salutation often differs from a person’s official title. For instance, the Lieutenant Governor is addressed as His/Her Honor. Consult the styles of address for more information.

If the recipient of your letter is not an elected official, you don’t need to use these formal titles, but you should still identify a senior representative by title. For example, “Attention James Leung, President and Chief Executive Officer.”

**A Note About Gender Pronouns**

Pronouns are the words that we use in place of a person’s proper name.

You may have noticed that people are sharing their pronouns in introductions, email signatures, and on name tags. We share pronouns to avoid assuming someone’s pronouns based on factors like appearance. By sharing our own pronouns, we encourage others to do the same. Using someone’s correct pronouns is an important way of affirming who they are and is a fundamental part of being an ally. Allyship helps to build more welcoming spaces for everyone.

Some common pronouns include she/her, he/him, and they/them. Some people prefer not to use pronouns at all.

Here are a few examples of how pronouns are used:

* My friend Sunita uses she/her pronouns. She will be late for the meeting. I will save her a seat, and I’ll take the chair to her left.
* My friend Sunita uses they/them pronouns. They will be late for the meeting. I will save them a seat, and I’ll take the chair to their left.
* My friend Sunita does not use pronouns. Sunita will be late for the meeting. I’ll save a seat for Sunita, and I’ll take the chair to Sunita’s left.

Not everyone will feel comfortable sharing their pronouns. People may choose not to share their pronouns for a variety of reasons, including:

* They are questioning
* They don’t use pronouns
* They don’t feel comfortable sharing at that moment
* They don’t feel comfortable sharing in that space
* They fear bullying or harassment after sharing.

When addressing a letter to a person whose pronouns you are not sure of, it’s best to avoid gender-specific pronouns or use gender neutral language to avoid misgendering someone. You can address the person with their name, their title, or a combination of their name and title instead of using gendered titles like Mr., Mrs., Ms., Miss, Madam, or Sir. If addressing a letter to a group, you can use neutral language like Committee Members or Councilors instead of gender-specific language like Ladies and Gentlemen.

**The Anatomy of a Salutation**

* A word of greeting that precedes the name of the recipient
* The recipient’s name
* The recipient’s title, if applicable. This may come before or after the recipient’s name, depending on the person’s title.

**Examples**

* Dear James Leung
* Dear James Leung, President and CEO
* Attention Councilor Leung
* Dear Committee Members

#### 2. The Introduction

The first line(s) of your letter should explain who you are and why you are writing the letter. This is the bridge between your salutation and the body of your letter, and it gives your reader a snapshot of you and the issue.

If you are a private citizen or individual advocate, and you are writing the letter on your own behalf, you should share your name and who you are in relation to the recipient. For example, you may want to share that you are a blind or partially sighted citizen of a given community, a blind or partially sighted voter in a given constituency, or a blind or partially sighted patron of a business.

If you are writing on behalf of another person or a group of people, this should also be stated in the introduction. You should share your name, explain who you are writing on behalf of, and who the person or group of people is in relation to the recipient. For example, you may want to explain that you are writing on behalf of a blind or partially sighted citizen of a given community, a group of blind or partially sighted voters in a given constituency, or a group of blind or partially sighted patrons of a business.

Next, you’ll want to provide a snapshot of the issue that you’re writing about. Your explanation of the issue should be clear and concise. You’ll have plenty of space to expand on the issue in the next section of the letter. In this section, your goal is to state the issue in as few words or sentences as you can while still communicating the core of the issue.

**A Note About Anger**

It is important to avoid expressing anger in your introduction or in any other part of your letter. While anger is a natural response to encountering barriers, your letter should have a professional, respectful tone that will open the door for collaborative problem solving. Remember that your advocacy efforts may have a real impact on the lives of your neighbors, friends, and community, and it is important that you make every effort to achieve a successful outcome.

**The Anatomy of an Introduction**

* State your name
* State your role, if applicable
* Explain who you are advocating on behalf of, if applicable
* Explain who you are in relation to the recipient, or who the person or group you’re advocating on behalf of is in relation to the recipient
* Provide a snapshot of the issue
* Avoid expressing anger

**Examples**

* My name is Ravi Patel, and I’m a blind resident of Milton. I’m writing to share my concerns about the accessibility barriers posed by sidewalk patios in the downtown area.
* My name is Melissa Jenkins, and I am an advocacy volunteer with CNIB. I’m writing on behalf of a group of blind and partially sighted residents of Milton. We would like to share our concerns about the accessibility barriers posed by sidewalk patios in the downtown area.

### 3. The Issue

In the next part of your letter, you’ll provide more detail about the issue that you presented in your introduction. Your main goal in this section of the letter is to explain the issue in a way that is easy to understand. In order for barriers to be removed, those with the power to create change must be able to understand the issue and how it impacts their voters, constituents, customers, etc.

While explaining the issue may sound straightforward, remember that the person or organization to whom you’re writing may be hearing about the issue for the first time. When you present the issue, it is essential that you choose words that will be understood by your audience.

Let’s look at an example.

Statement 1: I’m blind, and your store is impossible for me to navigate because the floor markings are inaccessible.

Statement 2: I’m blind, and I use a white cane to navigate. While I know that all customers in your store are supposed to follow the arrows on the floor, I am not able to see the arrows, nor can I feel them with my cane when I swipe it along the floor. As a result, I am not able to shop independently in your store.

While statement 1 may be readily understood by those of us within the CNIB community, those outside of the CNIB community may not be familiar with what is accessible or inaccessible for people who are blind or partially sighted. The term “inaccessible” is jargon. While it has meaning for those of us in the CNIB community, the public may need a much clearer explanation of a barrier.

Let’s look at another example.

Statement 1: I’m blind and I use Voiceover. Your website is impossible to navigate with Voiceover.

Statement 2: I’m blind, and I use a screen reader to shop online. I attempted to purchase a pair of shoes on your website, but my screen reader cannot interact with some features of your website, such as the price list and the button that allows shoppers to add items to their cart.

Again, while statement 1 may be readily understood by those of us within the CNIB community, those outside of the CNIB community may not be familiar with what Voiceover is and how it works. The term “Voiceover” is jargon. The public may not even know that such tools exist, let alone how they interact with different features of websites.

When you are presenting the issue, it is also important to include any pertinent dates, times, or names relating to your issue. For example, if you’ve previously contacted the organization about the issue, you should include the name of the person you contacted and the date on which you contacted them, as well as a summary of any response that you received. If you were denied access to a space that is open to the public, or if you received discriminatory treatment, you should note the date(s), time(s), and who was involved. If you encountered a barrier in the built environment, you should state the location of the barrier and the date(s) and time(s) that the barrier was encountered, if applicable.

Remember that you are providing detail to paint a picture of the issue for your recipient. Stick to the facts. Avoid accusations, criticism, and speculation.

**A Note About Persistence**

The path to a resolution is rarely straightforward. The recipient of your letter may not have the ability or interest to champion the issue that you’re advocating on. For this reason, it is important to enter into any advocacy pursuit with an understanding that you’ll need to be persistent.

For those who have the power to create change, especially elected officials, there are many competing causes that require their attention at any given time. The person may not have enough resources to prioritize all of them. This doesn’t mean that your issue is not important or that you should give up. Someone who doesn’t have the resources to address your issue now may have the resources later. Someone who is disinterested now may become interested if they gain a clearer understanding of the issue. You’ll need to convince them that addressing the issue will benefit everyone, including them.

**The Anatomy of the Issue**

* Provide a concise explanation of the issue
* Use language that can be easily understood by the public
* Be specific. Include pertinent dates, times, locations, or hazards. If you spoke with someone about the issue, include the person’s name and what was said in the conversation.
* Explain why the issue creates a barrier.

**Example**

I am blind, and I use a white cane to navigate. I am unable to safely access the front entrance of your establishment because there is no connecting sidewalk between the main sidewalk and your front entrance. As a result, I must navigate through the busy parking lot to reach the front entrance, which puts my safety at risk. I met with James Leung, your regional manager, on April 3 to discuss my concerns. I followed up with James by email on May 29 and did not receive a response. Despite my communications with James, no changes have been made that would allow a safe path of travel between the main sidewalk and the front door of your establishment. This accessibility barrier puts everyone at risk, especially people who are blind or partially sighted.

### 4. The Solution

When engaging in any type of advocacy, it’s important to come prepared with potential solutions. Presenting issues without considering solutions is complaining. While you don’t need to have all the answers, showing a willingness to collaborate and problem solve together will create a tone of cooperation and will make others more open to working with you now and in the future.

Let’s look at an example.

Statement 1: Your menu is not accessible to blind people because it’s only available in print.

Statement 2: Your menu is not accessible to blind people because it’s only available in print. The availability of alternate formats, such as large print, braille, and a digital option, would make your menu more accessible to everyone.

While the first sentence in both statement 1 and 2 is true, the presentation of solutions in statement 2 opens the door for problem solving.

It’s important to propose solutions that are specific and realistic. A specific solution is one that is clearly explained. A realistic solution is one which can be achieved, in practical terms. While our goal as part of the CNIB community is to remove barriers for people who are blind or partially sighted, change doesn’t happen overnight. Small wins lead to big progress.

Let’s look at an example.

Statement 1: You need to make your taxi company more accessible for people who are blind or partially sighted.

Statement 2: Your taxi company can be made more accessible and inclusive for people who are blind or partially sighted by including driver training about the legal rights of guide dog handlers.

While both statements are focused on the same solution—making the taxi company more accessible for people who are blind or partially sighted—statement 1 is not specific enough. It tells the recipient that change is needed, but it doesn’t clearly explain how that change can be achieved.

Let’s look at another example.

Statement 1: Your taxi company can be made more accessible and inclusive for people who are blind or partially sighted by mandating that all new employees must be dog lovers.

Statement 2: Your taxi company can be made more accessible and inclusive for people who are blind or partially sighted by including driver training about the legal rights of guide dog handlers.

Again, while both statements seek to achieve the same thing, statement 1 is not realistic. It is not a solution that the recipient would be able to implement.

Some advocates suggest proposing three possible solutions, with the first one being the ideal solution and the remaining two solutions being either less ideal or impractical. The number of solutions that you propose will depend on the specifics of the issue that you’re advocating on.

Let’s look at an example.

Solution 1: Request that a staff member contact you by phone to assist you with making a purchase from the store’s website

Solution 2: Request that the company send out an email to all customers, offering a discount on the next purchase to those who can’t shop on their website because of accessibility barriers

Solution 3: Request that the company do a complete overhaul of their website to make it accessible to all customers

While all the above solutions are reasonable, the first solution would likely be most attractive to the company. It is specific, realistic, and inexpensive. Solutions 2 and 3 are also specific and realistic but would come at a much higher cost to the company and would take much more time to implement. In this example, you can see how providing multiple solutions makes it easy for the recipient to choose one and resolve the issue, at least in the short term.

**The Anatomy of the Solution**

* Be prepared
* Be specific
* Be realistic
* Consider multiple solutions, depending on the issue

**Example**

To mitigate the safety risks that sandwich boards can pose for pedestrians, especially those who are blind or partially sighted, the city should establish by-laws that only allow sandwich boards and other sidewalk furniture in areas where a clear path of travel for pedestrians can be maintained. If this is not possible, the city should ban the use of sandwich boards on sidewalks.

### 5. The Conclusion

You have found the appropriate salutation, crafted a concise introduction, presented the issue, and offered solutions. While it may seem as though all the work is done, you shouldn’t disregard the conclusion of your letter. This is where you’ll wrap it all up by reiterating the importance of the issue, connecting it to the broader community, detailing any follow-up items, and signing off.

There is no need to provide an exhaustive summary of everything you’ve already stated in your letter. However, you should take this opportunity to restate the importance of the issue so that the message stays with your recipient after they’ve finished reading. If you haven’t already done so in your letter, you can use this space to highlight the impact of the issue on the broader community. For example, if you’ve shared how access to print-only resources creates a barrier for you and others who are blind or partially sighted, you can also note that it is a barrier for people with print disabilities. If you’ve explained how curb cuts create barriers for you and other people who are blind or partially sighted, you can also note that they pose barriers for people who are wheelchair users and parents using strollers.

In your closing remarks, you should outline any action items that the recipient should be aware of. This could include dates and times of any upcoming meetings to address the issue, or a date or timeframe in which you will follow up.

Finally, you’ll want to sign off and include your relevant contact details so that the recipient can get in touch with you if needed. Your sign off should be concise and respectful, just like the rest of your letter.

If you are advocating on behalf of another person or group of people, it is essential that you share the letter with them to ensure that it accurately captures their experiences before you send it. Make sure that the person or group is comfortable with what you’ve written. If they are not comfortable, make any necessary edits until they are satisfied that the letter reflects their experiences.

**A Note About the Value of Advocacy**

While the barriers faced by people who are blind or partially sighted can often seem insurmountable, it’s important to remember that advocacy can and does create change. Consider next stop announcements, the availability of accessible banking machines at most financial institutions, and the presence of accessible pedestrian signals at a growing number of intersections. One person really can make a difference.

**The Anatomy of The Conclusion**

* Restate the importance of the issue
* Explain how the issue impacts the broader community
* Summarize action items
* Sign off
* If you are advocating on behalf of another person or group, seek feedback before sending the letter

**Example**

In summary, we request that an additional bus stop be placed on the west side of the street until an audible pedestrian signal can be installed at the nearest intersection. An additional bus stop will not only mitigate risks for people who are blind or partially sighted, but for all transit users in the area, including youth from the nearby high school and parents travelling with small children from the adjacent daycare facility.

I would appreciate an opportunity to discuss this with you in more detail. I will reach out to your office in two weeks to request an appointment.

Sincerely,

Francisco Martinez

### Escalating an Advocacy Issue

You will have noticed that we have not yet mentioned rights, legislation, or formal complaints. The reason for this is simple: if a solution can be found without a formal complaint, everyone wins. In an ideal situation, the barrier will be removed, the person(s) being impacted by the barrier will have increased safety, access, or independence, and the person to whom you’ve advocated will have a better understanding of the needs of customers or constituents who are blind or partially sighted.

It is important to note that, in some circumstances, your advocacy efforts may be strengthened by referring or linking to a relevant document or piece of legislation. For instance, if you are advocating to a municipality about accessibility barriers for pedestrians, linking to the municipality’s accessibility plan or a pedestrian safety initiative could highlight the goals of the municipality and create a mutually beneficial objective.

However, not all advocacy efforts have a swift and straightforward resolution. If your advocacy efforts have not resulted in a solution, you may need to escalate the issue.

To learn more about being an effective advocate, including the steps to self-advocacy, see Advocacy 101. For more information about the different levels of government as well as disability legislation that may be relevant to your advocacy issue, see Government and Legislation 101.

If you need additional support with an advocacy issue, you can contact [advocacy@cnib.ca](mailto:advocacy@cnib.ca).

If you need additional support with an advocacy issue related to guide dogs, you can contact [guidedogs@cnib.ca](mailto:guidedogs@cnib.ca).

## Advocacy Letters Template

Name of Recipient

Name of business, municipality, or office if applicable

Address

City, province, postal code

Date

Salutation

Introduction

[2 to 3 sentences to explain who you are and why you are writing the letter]

The issue

[1 to 2 paragraphs that provide a clear, concise explanation of the issue, including relevant dates, times, locations, and people]

The solution(s)

[1 to 2 paragraphs that outline a specific and realistic solution to the issue]

Conclusion

[2 to 3 sentences to summarize the issue, connect it to the broader community, and summarize any action items]

Signature

Contact information

## Advocacy Letter Samples

### Sample 1: Summer Patios on Sidewalks

Mayor Roseline Charles

Office of the Mayor

Town of Milton   
123 Main Street

Milton, ON L9T 5W5

August 3

Dear Mayor Charles,

My name is Ravi Patel, and I am a blind resident of Milton. I’m writing to share my concerns about the accessibility barriers posed by summer patios on sidewalks in the downtown area.

I regularly travel downtown for work and volunteer activities. I use a white cane to navigate, and I do so independently, but the summer patios on downtown sidewalks have been impeding my ability to travel safely to and from work and my local mosque. I often encounter these patios on sidewalks which have very limited room for pedestrians to pass each other without someone being forced to step off the sidewalk onto the road. This places all pedestrians at risk for injury, especially those who are blind or partially sighted.

Over the last four months, I have spoken in person and over the phone with Joanna Garcia, Accessibility Coordinator for the Town of Milton. I met with Joanna in her office on March 3 to share my concerns about summer patios. Joanna assured me that she would address the issue with the relevant city staff. I followed up with Joanna over the phone on June 5 to reiterate my concerns about my safety, and she informed me that she had spoken with the relevant city staff but was unable to provide more information. Despite my conversations with Joanna, I continue to encounter patios on downtown sidewalks while I try to get to and from work and the mosque.

What I am asking of your office is that city staff be directed to investigate the accessibility barriers posed by summer patios on sidewalks and establish appropriate bylaws which would limit patios to areas where a clear path of travel around the patio is possible.

As a municipality that aims to improve access to active transportation options, the Town of Milton must follow through on the commitments made in recent pedestrian safety initiatives (see links below) and prioritize pedestrian safety so that all citizens can navigate with confidence, independence, and safety. While summer patios can enhance quality of life for all of us, their presence must not create accessibility barriers for pedestrians. Not only are summer patios problematic for people who are blind or partially sighted, but also for people who use wheelchairs and parents who use strollers. Our downtown sidewalks are already crowded enough with trees, utility poles, and sandwich boards. Pedestrians don’t need any additional obstacles.

I would appreciate an opportunity to discuss this with you in further detail. I will call your office next week to schedule a meeting with you.

I look forward to working with you to find a solution.

Sincerely,

Ravi Patel

### Sample 2: Floor Markings and Stanchions

Hardeep Singh

Branch Manager

Scotiabank

123 Main Street

Milton, ON L9T 5W6

August 3

Attention: Hardeep Singh, Branch Manager

My name is Francisco Martinez, and I have held an account at your branch for eighteen years. As a customer who is blind, I am writing to you to share my concerns about the floor markings and stanchions that have recently been introduced at the branch.

As a result of my blindness, I use a white cane to navigate. While I know that all customers at the branch are supposed to follow the arrows on the floor, I am not able to see the arrows, nor can I feel them with my cane. Additionally, the stanchions that direct customers to tellers are not cane detectable. As a result, I am no longer able to do my banking independently at your branch and must rely on my husband or daughter to accompany me and help me navigate safely through the space.

I ask that you please review the recommendations outlined by CNIB in Clearing Our Path (linked below) and ensure that all floor markings and stanchions within the branch are cane detectable. I know that these features have been introduced to control the flow of traffic and keep everyone safe, but they need to be made accessible for all customers, including those who are blind or partially sighted.

I will call your office next week to follow up with you directly. In the meantime, should you have any questions, please don’t hesitate to contact me at the below phone number or email address.

Sincerely,

Francisco Martinez

### Sample 3: Access to Facilities

James Leung, Chair, Milton Accessibility Advisory Committee

Town of Milton

123 Main Street

Milton, ON L9T 5W5

January 5

Attention: James Leung

My name is Melissa Jenkins, and I am an advocacy volunteer with CNIB. I’m writing on behalf of a group of blind and partially sighted residents of Milton. We would like to share our concerns about the accessibility of the Sports Center’s Maple Avenue entrance.

The Maple Avenue front entrance to the Sports Center is not connected to the main sidewalk. While the distance between the main sidewalk and the building’s front entrance is short, the space is occupied by a garden and is not a safe option for someone who is using a white cane or a guide dog to navigate. This means that people who are blind or partially sighted must navigate around the building and across a busy parking lot to access the front entrance, which puts our safety at risk.

I shared my concerns with Anna, the Front Desk Manager, on September 3 after a member of our group was nearly struck by a car in the parking lot while trying to get to the front entrance. I was assured that my concerns would be passed along and that someone would follow up with me. I did not receive a follow up phone call or email.

On November 23, while attempting to cross the parking lot with my guide dog, I was stopped by a driver who let me know that someone leaving a parking space had almost backed into me and my guide dog. The driver helped me get to the front entrance, but the incident left me shaken. The next day, I wrote a letter on behalf of a group of blind and partially sighted patrons of the Sports Center and sent it to the Center’s general inquiries email address. I have not yet received a response. You will find the letter attached to this email.

To reduce the risk of injury to patrons of the Sports Center, the front entrance should be made more accessible for everyone. This can be achieved by installing a sidewalk that connects the main sidewalk to the front entrance of the building.

While we understand that many patrons of the Sports Center are drivers who will access the front entrance from the parking lot, we urge the Accessibility Advisory Committee to consider the needs of patrons who are not drivers or are accessing the front entrance from the sidewalk. The lack of a direct pathway between the main sidewalk and the front doors does not only impact patrons who are blind or partially sighted, but also people who use wheelchairs, parents with strollers, and those who access the Sports Center from the nearest Maple Avenue transit stop or on foot.

We are asking that this matter be brought before the committee and that we be given the opportunity to make a formal presentation at an upcoming committee meeting.

I will follow up with you next week to find out when the committee will be able to place this matter on the agenda.

If you have any questions, please don’t hesitate to reach out to me using the below contact information.

Sincerely,

Melissa Jenkins

## Advocacy Letters Podcast (Audio)

[Advocacy Letters 101 Podcast Recording](https://cnib.sharepoint.com/:u:/r/sites/cnibtoday/EmployeeCentral/CNIBProg/Advocacy/Professional%20Development%20Resources/Podcast%20-%20Advocacy%20Letters%20101%20-%20Aug%202021%20.mp3?csf=1&web=1&e=fjWsoZ)

## Advocacy Letters Podcast (Transcript)

**Narrator:**

This is a CNIB Foundation podcast.

**Kat Hamilton:**

Hello, everyone, and welcome to this episode of The Advocacy Podcast. Today, we're going to be talking about how to write a really compelling advocacy letter. I'm Kat Hamilton, senior manager from Ontario East & Government Relations, and I'm joining you today from Ottawa. I'm also joined by Sarah Besseau, who's our coordinator for advocacy and community outreach from Ontario West, who is also joining us from Ottawa. Hello, Sarah.

**Sarah Besseau:**

Hello.

**Kat Hamilton:**

Well, Sarah, I'm really excited to be talking with you on this subject today ... is I really strongly believe that writing a compelling advocacy letter can be a really powerful yet understated tool in raising an advocacy issue with a decision maker or third party. And in this podcast, we're going to be walking people through each part of the advocacy letter in order to teach people how to make it really strong and hopefully achieve your end advocacy goal. Sound good, Sarah? Shall I start us off?

**Sarah Besseau:**

Sounds great.

**Kat Hamilton:**

All right. Well, definitely the first part that we wanted to discuss before we dive in is, really, the purpose of an advocacy letter. So an advocacy letter is very understated sometimes as a tool, but at its core, it's really an opportunity to present the issue and invite the recipient to collaborate with you to find a solution. And it's always best when you're putting together your letter to assume that the recipient of your letter is interested in finding a solution but perhaps doesn't really know how to do so yet, and that will really help ensure that you're entering into the letter writing process with a respectful tone and also just a willingness to work together towards a solution.

**Kat Hamilton:**

And it's funny that we call this advocacy letters because I think, more and more, that we're using email now instead of writing a physical letter on pen and paper. And when I was preparing for this podcast, I was just reflecting that accessibility aside, that on some occasions when a recipient is perhaps more traditional or their organization is geared more towards letters ... or perhaps there's, in some rare circumstances, a legal reason that you'd want to send a hard copy. But yeah, I was thinking when I started doing advocacy about 10 years ago now, it was more of a weird hybrid phase of email and a hard copy letter, that you'd send both just in case, so you covered all your bases.

But although we've called this advocacy letter, I think it's important to know that nowadays, a lot of things can be effectively dealt with in writing over email. So if letters doesn't work for you for accessibility or for whoever you're sending it to, then that's absolutely fine. I think it's safe to say that in most situations now, email is also a great option.

So I feel like I've spoken a lot already, Sarah, and you haven't had a chance to tell us very much yet. So I guess with that, now we've gone over the basics and the purpose of a letter. I think going into the foundation of how an advocacy letter is started and built is really important, so I guess my question for you, Sarah, is, how would you even start an advocacy letter?

**Sarah Besseau:**

Great. So I guess at the very beginning of an advocacy letter, when you're just opening the letter before you get into, I guess, the body of the letter, you're greeting the person that you're writing the letter to, right? So you're wanting to say, dear whoever, dear James, or attention Counselor Blank, right? So their name and the title and another word to go alongside it. It's the first thing that the person that you're sending the letter to is going to read, so it really sets the tone and how the letter is going to follow.

So it lets the reader know that you've done your homework, right? So making sure you're putting the right title or, if you're writing to an elected official, making sure that you're putting the right title and the elected official's name is really important, or that you've put the right title there. If you're in a rush or you haven't done your research and you've just put Mr. or Mrs., and it is an elected official, instead of putting their title, it might show that you're in a rush or you didn't do your research. So slowing down, taking your time is really important as well as doing your homework.

If you are writing to an elected official, it's really good to keep in mind to use the formal greeting, and here's a good tip. Canada has a website that you can go to where it has a list of all kinds of officials and the formal greetings that you can use, so the way that you can address them in different ways. So that's a really good resource to use in writing these letters. So if the person you're writing to is not an elected official, it's generally good to find a senior representative with a title to address the letter to.

Now, before I jump back to you, Kat, I just want to touch on another point here that I have in salutations, which is pronouns. And I'm sure a lot of people know what pronouns are, but using them in this context can be kind of a tricky thing. So pronouns are words that we use in place of a person's proper name. Sometimes, people share them in introductions, or we see them a lot of time in email signatures. We share them to avoid assuming someone's pronouns based on factors like appearance, and it encourages other people to use them as well. And it's a really important part of being an ally, which is awesome.

Some common pronouns are she/her, he/him, they/them, and some people prefer not to use them at all. The reason I'm bringing this up is because when you're addressing a letter to someone whose pronouns you're unsure of, it's best to avoid gender-specific pronouns or use gender-neutral language to avoid misgendering someone. There's almost always gender-neutral language to use, and it builds a welcoming space in your letter.

So with that being said, this very small section of your letter, usually only a few words, might seem like a lot of info, but it's really important. So Kat, after the salutation, this is probably the thing that I find the most difficult. I never know how to start a letter, an email, an essay. How do you even just start an advocacy letter after you just addressed it?

**Kat Hamilton:**

Yeah, you're right, Sarah. It's, it is a difficult part of the letter. I think all of the parts of the letters really have their own complexities. And as you were talking, I was thinking about how even, as you said, in those few words in the salutation, it's such a difficult balance to have and know how to address someone respectfully and properly. So I really love that you highlighted that government of Canada resource because I've used that a few times for sure for my own letters.

But yeah, to go back to your question around the introduction, I think it's really tempting, especially if the issue at hand has really upset you or has emotionally affected you in some way and you want to get it off your chest, that you don't just launch into everything. So I think, really set the tone for the letter, and there are some really great kind of formula that you can take on that.

So first off, really simple, just start off stating your name, your connection to the issue, especially if you're writing on behalf of yourself or you're writing on behalf of someone else, and also the relevant pieces of information that connects you to the issue at hand, so for example, that you have a certain disability, if that's relevant to the issue, or you're a resident of a certain community, particularly if you're writing to a politician, because they're really interested in, obviously, the people that live within their constituency or riding or maybe that you're a patron, a long-time patron, maybe, of a particular business, or whatever the connection is, really setting the stage for who you are and indicating, perhaps, why you might be writing.

And then once you've done that, in the next paragraph, I think you'll want to provide a snapshot of the issue that you're writing about. So the explanation of that issue should be really clear and concise, and you'll have plenty of space to expand on the issue in the rest of the letter, so, I think, really stating the issue in as few words or sentences as you can, while communicating the core of the issue. So for example, my name is Kat Hamilton. I am a resident of Ottawa or a particular riding, and I've also been a longstanding customer of Shoppers Drug Mart and have been shopping here for many years, and that that's relevant, perhaps, if you're writing to Shoppers Drug Mart. And you want to identify what the location is of that particular business and that you've been a longstanding customer, which will then lead into what the issue is, so very simple, just a short paragraph.

But I wanted to circle back, maybe, to something that we've touched upon already, and that's a note around anger as you really set the tone for your letter in the introduction. So in advocacy, anger can be a really great motivator to get you going and sit down at your computer or sit down and write a letter and raise the issue, but it can also be really destructive if you come across as angry. And it could also give the impression that you're not really willing to come to the table to collaborate on a solution.

So I say this from my own experience. If you feel like, when you sit down to write the letter, that you're unable to get to that point emotionally, then I would suggest maybe writing out a first version of the letter that you do not intend to send but want to just get all your thoughts on paper. Or call up a friend, someone who's calm and that won't rile you up further, and just vent to them.

And then once you've got all of the anger out or enough of the anger out, then I would suggest sitting down to write the letter after that. And even myself, I'm an experienced letter writer, and I have also asked friends or family to read over a letter before I send it, because sometimes if you are feeling emotional about something or upset, what sounds reasonable to you can still come off as maybe unreasonable or passive aggressive in writing, even though you don't intend it to. So really, having someone else read it as a sounding board, if you feel at risk from that, is a really great strategy.

So those are just a few considerations, really, for making an introduction really clear, concise, and explaining the connection to the issue. But Sarah, I'm really interested because the next section is a lot more kind of open around how to structure the actual issue of the letter. So how do you go about that? Is there a certain formula or some tips that people can use when outlining the actual issue?

**Sarah Besseau:**

Yeah, so you're right. This is the part in the letter where you focus on the issue, is a lot more open. And I think you follow the same kind of ... You've touched on the note on anger. You follow that, I think, through not just the introduction, but the rest of the letter as well, right? And I know my policy is always you write the letter, wait 24 hours, come back to it, and adjust later.

**Kat Hamilton:**

Yeah, that's a good one.

**Sarah Besseau:**

Right? Yeah. But I think when you're looking at the issue, obviously, it's, I think, the meat of your advocacy letter sandwich, and it's a big part of this letter. And I think when you're looking at it, you touch on it. You touch on the issue in your introduction, but this is where you go into it in more detail.

And I think this is where it can get a little bit chaotic because it can be fueled by emotion here. But the goal of this section is to explain it in a way that's easy to understand. So some things that are important to remember in this section is that chances are, if you're writing an advocacy letter, you probably know a lot about the situation, but the person that's reading the letter probably doesn't know a lot about the situation, if anything. So what's important to remember is using straightforward language, choosing words that are easy to understand to target it to an audience that is probably hearing of the issue for the first time.

So I can give an example. So if you are ... Let's see. An example might be, I'm at a store. I'm legally blind. I was at your store. It was impossible for me to navigate because your floor markings are inaccessible. So that is obviously a difficult situation, but another way to navigate this might be, I'm blind, and I use a white cane to navigate. While I know that all customers in your store are supposed to follow the arrows on the floor, I am not able to see the arrows, nor can I feel them with my cane when I sweep it across the floor. As a result, I'm not able to shop independently in your store. So those two options, the longer one, the second one uses a lot more language and a lot more ... It uses easier-to-understand language that the reader of the letter might be able to understand the situation.

So when you're presenting the issue, it's important to also include dates and times and names of your issue of the issue. So if you've had multiple issues at a single event or a single business, you want to include those in your letter because you want to basically paint a picture of the entire situation and the entire issue. It's important to stick to kind of high-level information to avoid speculation or accusations.

So it's a lot of information, and I think it's important to sometimes take a step back from it and maybe approach it from a little bit later because I think it can be fueled from emotion, like all of these parts of this letter. But I also think it's important. I want to touch on, I think, persistence of these advocacy letters. When you're writing this, it's obviously something that's very important to you, and I know it can be very frustrating to wait for a response.

Sometimes, the recipient of your letter might not have the ability or the interest to assist in the issue that you're advocating on, and because of that, it's really important to be persistent. Most change is not going to happen with one letter, but I think every letter impacts. Every letter is impactful, and it's definitely more impactful than no letter at all. So persistence is really important. Sometimes, you have to convince people as well that your issue is going to benefit others for them to help you with your issue. So now that I'm done with that part, I think, what is the phrase? It's better to bring up problems if you also have solutions. Is that right, Kat?

**Kat Hamilton:**

Yeah, definitely. And just to, I guess, add to something that you were saying around keeping the facts really high level, I totally agree with that, and I think most of the time, that's what people need to do. But I think if people are sitting down to write their letters as well and it's a really long, complicated history that's happened over a number of years ... Say it's a very complex issue. I think there's a couple of strategies people can have as well, either write exactly as you said with the high-level stuff and then maybe even attach something as an appendix. I've seen that done particularly in customer service situations where someone ... They called the manager on this day, and the manager said this. And then they called someone else, and then they called head office. And it starts to get very complicated.

You don't want that person to open your email and scroll down and see it's really long and put them off immediately from reading it. So I think put it in an attachment or just even say in the letter that it's a really complicated situation, and I'd really appreciate discussing this over the phone or in person, whatever that looks like, to resolve that. But yeah, it seems so simple, doesn't it, writing a letter, but now we're digging into it, it really is a fine art in many ways.

But yeah, as you mentioned, the solution is probably one of the most important parts of the letter, because otherwise, if you're just writing someone to play what the issues are without even indicating any willingness to have a solution or putting on forward, then really, it's just a complaint. And while that might be really cathartic, it's not going to make any tangible, positive changes once the recipient has read it. They're just going to read your complaint and then be like, okay, that's a shame, and maybe, if they're good at customer service, send you back some letter with some empty platitudes in it.

But that being said, you don't have to have all of the answers or a fully formed solution. And in fact, one solution can just be to propose to the person, let's get together and discuss some solutions together. What would work for you? What would work for me? Because that still shows that you want to reach a resolution, but at that point, you might not know all of the options available or even how the issue can be solved. But it still demonstrates that willingness to have that collaboration.

And to go back to the advocacy toolkit that has been developed by CNIB around advocacy letters, there is a really great example in there that I just wanted to share because we have given some solution-focused sentences from that toolkit. So in the toolkit, there are three solutions to an issue around, I believe, a business's website being inaccessible. So the first solution is to request that a member of staff contact you by phone to assist you in making a purchase from the store's website. The second solution is to request that the company send out an email to all customers offering a discount on the next purchase for those who can't shop on their website because of accessibility barriers. I mean, sure, sounds nice, but isn't necessarily going to solve the issue in the longterm. And then solution three is to request that the company do a complete overhaul of their website to make it accessible to all customers.

So in those examples, while all of the above solutions are ... I would say some of them are more reasonable than others but are all relatively reasonable. Probably, the first solution with a staff member contacting would be most attractive to the company as it's specific, which is really important, realistic, and much more inexpensive than, say, giving discounts to everyone or overhauling the entire website. And the second or third solutions are also specific and realistic, but it would be more expensive and take more time.

So in these examples, you can really see how providing some multiple solutions might make it easier for the recipient to choose and resolve the issue. So if you wanted to give them various solutions as well, then that could be one option to show that you're willing to be flexible in that. And I actually think with solutions three, if it was me writing the letter, I probably wouldn't request a complete overhaul of a website to make it accessible, but maybe it's a case of suggesting some website accessibility services that you might know about or, if it's just some very specific tagging or coding in the backend of the website, maybe offering to write out or talk to one of the website technicians to see, if you provide them the detailed feedback, if they can just make those changes if it's relatively simple.

And I guess, the final thing I want to say on solutions is that there is really a lot to be said for humility when you're advocating effectively. And I think as strong advocates out there that sometimes, some people might be tempted to think that you need to demand absolutely everything as you want it, and that is coming from a place of strength. But I think realistically, coming in with an all-or-nothing approach, you really run the risk of leaving with nothing.

And advanced and nuanced advocacy really thinks from the perspective of the other person as well, so what their needs and wants might be what their restrictions might be, whether that's budget policy, et cetera, and then really thinking about proposing solutions where your needs and their needs meet in the middle. That is really the secret sauce for an excellent solution. So I think that's all I wanted to say at this point around the solution piece. So Sarah, we've really covered a lot so far in this, so we've run through the salutations, the introduction, the issue, the solution. And then once you've gone through all of that process, what is a really great way ... or what tips do you have for people to round off the letter and conclude it in an effective and impactful way?

**Sarah Besseau:**

Well, like you said, we've gone through the salutation, crafting a nice introduction, presenting the issue in an easy way to understand, offered solutions, but we're not done yet. The conclusion is a nice way to kind of wrap everything up and go over the importance of the issue once more. So to end, it's a really good chance to connect it to the broader community and also to detail any follow-up items and then sign off. So this is also a good time to outline any action items in your closing remarks, so that could be dates and times of upcoming meetings where the recipient of your letter might be able to bring up the issue that you've addressed, like a committee meeting, or maybe a timeframe of when you plan on following up.

I think this also shows how important the issue is to you, that you've taken the time to look into when these meetings are or that you've said, I'm going to follow up in two weeks from now. And it shows how important this is to you and also your community. And then in your sign-off, also include contact details that are relevant and up to date. So if they get in contact with you, they're able to. That's very important.

But I think that kind of ends the letter, but now that it's sent off, you're waiting. But what happens if your letter isn't answered or the issue isn't addressed? Or what happens if it is addressed but not in the way that you would've liked to have it addressed?

**Kat Hamilton:**

Right, and I think this speaks to what you were saying earlier around persistence being key. And I feel like we could do a whole podcast just on strategies for how to escalate an issue effectively, because I think in reality, we always say that advocacy is not linear. There are many different paths that it can take, and it's very rare that you put in a complaint. The person responds and says, yes, we'll fix it, and then it gets fixed, so a very important question that you raise here.

So everyone's approach is different, but I would say in general, my rule of thumb is to send the letter. Depending on the urgency or who you're writing to, it really depends. Leave it a couple of weeks. If you don't hear back, then maybe send one or two follow-ups with a week or two in between, and then at that point, if you don't hear back, then you are well within your rights to then look at who can you escalate that to. So that might be someone who oversees that person or department, or perhaps there's even a different complaints department, depending on what the organization is. And again, that process really might be sped up, depending on the urgency and the nature of the issue.

And my advice as well would be to absolutely exhaust that internal process of that organization before taking external action. And what I mean by that is people saying, I'm going to go to the media, or I'm going to write to my MP, if it's not government that you're dealing with originally. So really try and exhaust that. You really don't want to be accused of being unreasonable by escalating something too quickly, so it really is a fine art. It's also, I think, human nature, sometimes, really easy to take offense or read into something when you're not hearing back. But it's always important to keep in mind that for all you know, they might have received a lot of correspondence, or someone might be actively looking into it for you but just needing some more time and not necessarily sharing that information. So you really don't want to blow your chances by making an assumption or taking offense and then escalating something too quickly as well.

So yes, there is really a whole strategy around there if someone doesn't respond, or maybe it's a generic response that they do give you. And in that case, if they respond with some kind of generic response or brush-off or just restate their position and dig in without recognizing some kind of solution, then I think there's even a separate strategy that we could talk about to that, because that's not not hearing back. That is, you're hearing back but not necessarily reaching some kind of conclusion there.

So as I said, I could talk about that for a whole other podcast, and maybe we'll do that in the future if there's interest on that. But for now, I think we will leave it there, and I hope everyone has found this podcast helpful in learning how to build a strong advocacy letter. As we mentioned, if you'd like further resources, then you can also visit the advocacy section on CNIB today, and we will be posting shortly our advocacy letters 101 toolkit that walks you through this process we've discussed and also gives you some really helpful templates that you can use and edit for your needs so you're not starting off just from scratch. So with that, I think we'll sign off, but any final words of wisdom, Sarah, for people that are considering writing an advocacy letter?

**Sarah Besseau:**

I think, just persistence, I think, is really important. I think the notes on persistence and your emotion in the letters, I think, are really important in writing an advocacy letter. I think those are my two cents.

**Kat Hamilton:**

Sounds good. Yeah, I would definitely agree with that. And with that, then, we will sign off for today. I'm Kat Hamilton. I've been joined by Sarah Besseau, and we hope to hear from you all soon. Thanks, everyone.

**Narrator:**

For more CNIB Foundation podcasts, visit cnib.ca/podcasts.

# Government Relations

## Guide – Government Relations 101

Welcome to Government Relations 101. A basic understanding of the different levels of government and disability legislation can help to make all of us better advocates for people who are blind or partially sighted.

In this document you will learn about:

* The Canadian government at a glance
* The federal government
* Provincial governments
* Municipal governments
* Meeting with elected officials

### The Canadian Government at a Glance

When you need to advocate on an issue, it can be challenging to figure out who the appropriate elected official is and how to access them. It’s important to have a basic understanding of how the government works so that you can identify and reach the people who can create change.

There are three different levels of government in Canada:

1. Federal
2. Provincial
3. Municipal

Some issues fall under more than one jurisdiction, so it is important to consider whether the issue that you’re advocating on impacts people in your municipality, your province, or in the country as a whole.

A good example of this is transportation. While an issue with a national airline would impact people who are blind or partially sighted from coast to coast, an issue with your local public transit system would impact those who live within your municipality. You wouldn’t want to contact the federal government to advocate about accessibility barriers for public transit users in Moncton.

### The Federal Government

#### The House of Commons

The House of Commons is made up of elected officials called Members of Parliament, or MPs. Every MP is a member of a political party. When a general election is held, the party with the largest number of elected MPs usually forms the government.

MPs are elected by the constituents who live in their riding. A riding consists of approximately 100,000 people, and Canada is divided into 338 ridings. That's why areas with a high population density, like Toronto, have several MPs in a very small geographic area, while areas with a low population density, like Nunavut, may have a single MP for a very large geographic area.

The job of MPs is to represent the views of their constituents. MPs introduce, debate, and vote on bills that will become legislation.

Some MPs from the party in power serve as Cabinet Ministers. A Cabinet Minister is the formal head of a specific department of government, such as finance, employment, or accessibility. The Cabinet Minister sets priorities and leads policies for their specific department.

Some MPs from the party in power become Parliamentary Secretaries. A Parliamentary Secretary serves as a liaison, helping a Cabinet Minister connect with other MPs. When a Cabinet Minister is away from the House of Commons, the Parliamentary Secretary may be called upon to answer policy questions during Question Period.

Some MPs from the opposition party become Shadow Ministers or Critics. A Shadow Minister or Critic is the lead on a specific issue that matters to their party, and they try to move these priorities forward on behalf of the party.

#### The Senate

The Senate is made up of appointed official called Senators. Senators are appointed by the Governor General on the advice of the Prime Minister. Each Senator represents a specific geographic region.

Like MPs, Senators introduce, debate, and vote on bills that will become legislation. Before a bill can become a law, it must first pass through the House of Commons and the Senate.

#### Areas of Federal Jurisdiction

According to the Constitution Act of 1867, the federal government has jurisdiction over matters of national interest, while the provinces have jurisdiction over matters of regional interest.

Some areas of federal government jurisdiction include:

* Banking
* Justice and criminal law
* Labour
* Public works and government services
* Postal services

For more information on areas of federal jurisdiction, please see our guide on [How to navigate the Canadian government system.](https://www.cnib.ca/sites/default/files/2023-01/How%20to%E2%80%A6navigate%20the%20Canadian%20government%20system_EN.docx)

#### Tips for Communicating with the Federal Government

To figure out who your MP is, visit elections.ca or parl.gc.ca and search by your postal code. Remember, if the issue is not a national issue, contacting an MP will not help you to resolve it.

To write a postage-free letter to your MP, address it to their House of Commons office as follows:

Name of MP

House of Commons

Ottawa, Ontario

K1A 0A6

To find any hired or elected Government of Canada employee, including contact information, visit the [Government Electronic Service Directory (GEDS).](https://geds-sage.gc.ca/en/GEDS?pgid=002)

### The Provincial Government

Like the federal government, provincial governments are made up of representatives that are elected by the people in their ridings to serve in the provincial Legislative Assembly.

The titles of these elected officials vary from coast to coast and can include:

* Member of Provincial Parliament (MPP)
* Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA)
* Member of the House of Assembly (MHA)
* Member of the National Assembly (MNA)

Like federal MPs, Members of Provincial Parliament introduce, debate, and vote on bills, and they represent their constituents' views at the provincial level.

Like the federal government, provincial governments also have Cabinet Ministers and Shadow Ministers or Critics.

Unlike the federal government, provincial governments do not have a Senate.

#### Areas of Provincial Jurisdiction

Some areas of provincial government jurisdiction include:

* Education
* Healthcare (including hospitals)
* Social Services

For more information on areas of provincial jurisdiction, and to learn how to find out who your MPP is, please see our guide on How to navigate the Canadian government system.

### Municipal Governments

Like federal and provincial governments, municipal governments are made up of elected officials. These officials are called Councillors or Aldermen. Depending on the size of a municipality, they can serve the entire municipality or a specific riding or ward within the municipality. A city councillor or alderman represents their constituents at the municipal level, vote on by-laws, develop policies, and deliver programs and services.

#### Areas of Municipal Jurisdiction

Some areas of municipal government jurisdiction include:

* Bylaw enforcement
* Community accessibility
* Parks and pathways
* Police services

There are over 3,000 municipalities in Canada. To find who represents you, please refer to your municipality’s website.

For more information on areas of municipal jurisdiction, please see our guide on [How to navigate the Canadian government system](https://www.cnib.ca/sites/default/files/2023-01/How%20to%E2%80%A6navigate%20the%20Canadian%20government%20system_EN.docx).

### Meeting with Elected Officials

When you are meeting with an elected official about an issue that matters to you, it is important to remember that the elected official may be hearing about the issue and your proposed solutions for the first time. This can feel daunting, but there are some steps that you can take to ensure that your meeting goes well.

**Hear from elected officials about how constituents can effectively engage with them on issues:** [**Champions for Change – Policy Maker Questions video**](https://youtu.be/4uPMkG9EQHI)**.**

#### Four Steps to a Successful Meeting

There are four steps to having an effective meeting with an elected official:

1. Identify the appropriate person.
2. Contact the appropriate person.
3. Prepare for the meeting.
4. Attend the meeting.

**Step 1: Identify the appropriate person**

It’s important that your message is reaching the person who has the power to create change.

If the issue you’re advocating on is a federal government issue, you can identify the appropriate person by visiting the Parliament of Canada website and searching by postal code: www.parl.gc.ca. You can also visit Elections Canada website and search by postal code: www.elections.ca.

If the issue you’re advocating on is a provincial or municipal government issue, you can search the website of your provincial or municipal legislature.

**Step 2: Contact the Appropriate Person**

Once you have identified the appropriate person to contact, reach out to them to set up a meeting. Elected officials have employees who respond to calls and emails. Treat these people the same way that you would treat the elected official. Introduce yourself and give a summary of the issue you would like to discuss.

If your campaign is time sensitive, don’t wait until the last minute to contact the appropriate person. Elected officials have very busy schedules and will not be able to take a last-minute appointment.

Remember that elected officials receive a large volume of emails, so it may be best to contact them by phone. If you don’t receive a response within a week, you can send a respectful follow-up email.

If your elected official is unavailable to meet, you may be able to arrange an initial meeting with one of their employees and schedule a follow up meeting with the elected official for a later date.

**Step 3: Prepare for the Meeting**

Be sure that you have a clear understanding of the issue that you’d like to discuss and prepare a few key messages that you want to share during the meeting. Elected officials may have many meetings each day, so it’s important that you are well prepared to deliver your key messages in a clear and concise way.

Don’t share your entire lived experience. Instead, choose a portion of your lived experience that you want to share as a way to emphasize your key messages.

**Step 4: Attend the Meeting**

If the meeting is at a provincial or federal legislature, consider wearing formal business attire. A meeting in an elected official’s riding office may be less formal. Casual business attire should suffice.

You should arrive 15 minutes before the scheduled meeting. Meetings with elected officials often start late, end early, or get rescheduled because of last-minute conflicts in the official’s schedule. Be prepared for this and be flexible.

It may be helpful to think of the meeting in four different parts.

* First, you’ll want to introduce yourself and briefly explain why you’re advocating on the issue.
* Second, you’ll want to define the issue and its impact to the community. Share some facts to support your argument.
* Third, you’ll need to allow your audience a chance to respond. Listen carefully so that you’ll know what part of your message resonated with them. Give brief answers to any questions. If you don’t know the answer to a question, commit to following up with the information after the meeting. If members of your audience disagree with you, respectfully bring the conversation back to your key messages and brief examples of your lived experience.
* Fourth, you’ll want to wrap up the meeting with a thank you and next steps. If next steps have been discussed, summarize them, and express your gratitude for the opportunity to speak. Leave a written summary of the issue with your contact details.

Many elected officials have social media accounts. If the meeting went well, ask the official if you can take a photo with them to post on social media as a thank you for the meeting. Elected officials, particularly MPs, are keen to visibly showcase who they are meeting with and what they’re doing in the community.

#### Tips on Having an Effective Meeting

* Have a few key messages in mind before you enter the meeting.
* If you will be speaking as part of a team, get organized before the meeting. Figure out who will say what and when so that the meeting flows smoothly.
* Use proper titles. If you’re speaking to an MP named James Leung, address the person as Minister Leung.
* Use correct pronunciation of names.
* After brief introductions, define the issue clearly and concisely. Next, identify potential solutions in order of priority. This will ensure that your most important messages are heard in the event that the meeting is cut short.
* Share your lived experience so that your audience has a deeper context for your call to action.
* Avoid long anecdotes and explanations.
* If you or your audience start to drift from the topic, bring the conversation back to your key messages.
* Remember to leave time for questions.
* Prepare for questions to the best of your ability. If someone asks a question that you don’t have an answer for, offer to send them the information later.
* Thank your audience for listening.
* Leave a written copy of your key messages and your contact details.

For further information on having effective meetings with elected officials, please see our guide on [How to meet with an elected official](https://www.cnib.ca/sites/default/files/2023-01/How%20to%E2%80%A6.meet%20with%20an%20elected%20official_EN.docx).

#### Writing a Follow Up Letter

A follow-up letter is more than just a thank you. While you certainly want to thank the official for taking the time to meet with you, the follow-up letter is also an opportunity to reiterate your key messages and any action items that were agreed upon in the meeting.

Here's a template letter to get you started:

Dear (insert name, using correct title),

Thank you for meeting with me on (insert date) to discuss (topic of meeting).

(Include 2 or 3 sentences that summarize the key points of the discussion).

(Include 2 or 3 sentences that summarize any next steps that were agreed upon during the meeting).

I have attached some fact sheets with more information about (topic) for your reference.

If you have any questions or would like more information, please feel free to contact me at (email address) or (phone number).

Thank you for your time, and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

(Your name)

(Your address, to remind the recipient that you are a constituent)

#### Before Sending the Letter

* Did you define any acronyms?
* Did you omit any technical terms in favor of a clear explanation?
* Is the tone respectful and collaborative?
* Did you do a spelling and grammar check?
* Is the font and format consistent?
* Are all attachments accessible?
* Are all attachments included?
* Did you save a copy for yourself?
* Did you set a date to follow up on your own action items?
* Have you copied the people you want to include?

## How to… navigate the Canadian government system

When you are advocating on an issue, it can sometimes be confusing trying to determine and gain access to the elected official who can help you. This guide is designed to demystify the political system so your message reaches the right person.

Canadian government is divided into three levels: federal, provincial and municipal. Many areas of responsibility are duplicated (such as transport), so it is important to really consider if the issue you are advocating on affects people with sight loss nationally, provincially or locally.

### **Federal government**

The federal parliament in Ottawa is divided into two parts, or ‘houses’: the House of Commons and the Senate. The House of Commons is made up of Members of Parliament (MPs) who are elected by constituents in the 338 constituencies or ridings across Canada. MPs introduce, debate and vote on bills that will become legislation. They also represent the views of their constituents on a national level. The head of the House of Commons is the Prime Minister.

The Senate is made up of Senators, who are nominated by the Governor General of Canada (normally under the advice of the Prime Minister). Senators play an important role in the legislative process and introduce debate and vote on bills. Bills must pass through both the House of Commons and the Senate before they become law.

MPs from the party in power can also be Cabinet Members who help develop policies, assist Cabinet Members as Parliamentary Secretaries, lead federal government departments and set priorities for the Government. MPs from the opposition party can serve as Opposition critics and ‘shadow’ roles that are the equivalent roles to the Cabinet but within their own party.

Some relevant areas for which the Federal government is responsible:

* Banking
* Health (e.g., Canada Health Act)
* Intergovernmental affairs
* Justice
* Labour
* Public Safety
* Public Works and Government Services
* Post Office
* Transport, Infrastructure, and Communities
* Veterans Affairs

To find who your MP is, you can search by your postal code at [www.elections.ca](https://www.elections.ca/) or [www.ourcommons.ca/members.](https://www.ourcommons.ca/members/en) Please keep in mind that it’s not always the most effective strategy to ‘go to the top’ and approach a federal MP if the issue is not a national one.

### **Provincial government**

Like the federal government, Members of Provincial Parliament (MPPs) are elected by their electoral district or riding as representatives in the provincial Legislative Assembly. In some provinces, they are called Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) or Member of the House Assembly (MHA).

As with federal MPs, MPPs introduce, debate and vote on bills, and represent their constituents’ views at the provincial level. Provincial governments also mirror the federal government in that they have a Cabinet, Opposition Critics, and MPPs are appointed as leaders of provincial government departments. There are no Senates in the provincial governments.

Some relevant areas for which Provincial governments are responsible:

* Culture
* Education
* Health (including hospitals)
* Intergovernmental relations
* Social services
* Tourism, Parks and Recreation
* Transportation

To find out who your MPP is, you can search on your provincial legislature’s website:

Alberta

[www.elections.ab.ca](http://www.elections.ab.ca/)

British Columbia

[www.leg.bc.ca/learn-about-us/members](http://www.leg.bc.ca/learn-about-us/members)

Manitoba

[www.electionsmanitoba.ca](http://www.electionsmanitoba.ca/)

New Brunswick

[www.electionsnb.ca](http://www.electionsnb.ca/) or [www.gnb.ca](http://www.gnb.ca/)

Newfoundland & Labrador

[www.elections.gov.nl.ca](http://www.elections.gov.nl.ca/) to find your riding and [www.assembly.nl.ca](http://www.assembly.nl.ca/) to find your MHA

Northwest Territories

[www.electionsnwt.ca](http://www.electionsnwt.ca/) to find your riding and [www.assembly.gov.nt.ca](http://www.assembly.gov.nt.ca/) to find your MLA

Nova Scotia

[www.electionsnovascotia.ca](http://www.electionsnovascotia.ca/)

Nunavut

Go to [www.assembly.nu.ca](http://www.assembly.nu.ca/) and click on ‘Members’

Ontario

[www.elections.on.ca](http://www.elections.on.ca/) to find your riding and go to [www.ola.org/en/members](http://www.ola.org/en/members) to find your MPP

Saskatchewan

[www.elections.sk.ca/voters/findmyconstituency](http://www.elections.sk.ca/voters/findmyconstituency)

Yukon

Go to [www.electionsyukon.ca](http://www.electionsyukon.ca/) and click on ‘Electoral District Maps’ to find your riding and [www.yukonassembly.ca/mlas](http://www.yukonassembly.ca/mlas) to find your MLA

### **Municipal government**

Municipal government officials are called councilors or aldermen. As in the federal and provincial governments, they are elected collectively in the whole municipality or by ward/riding in the municipality. Councilors represent their constituents at the municipal level, pass by-laws, develop policies and deliver programs and services. The elected head of the council is the Mayor (or sometimes called Reeve).

Some relevant areas for which Municipal governments are responsible:

* Animal Control
* Business licenses
* By law enforcement
* Community accessibility
* Community support services
* Museums, libraries, and other cultural centres
* Parks and pathways
* Police services
* Public lighting
* Public transit
* Recreation programs and facilities
* Roads and streets
* Social Services

There are over 3,000 municipalities in Canada. To find who represents you, please refer to your municipality’s website.

## How to… meet with an elected official

Meeting with an elected official can have a big impact. It shows them that you really care about a particular cause and informs them how they can help. Meeting with an elected official can appear daunting but follow the steps below to help you prepare for a successful meeting.

**Step 1 – Find who your elected official is**

You want to make sure you are targeting your message to the right person, so it’s important to know who that is. For federal representatives you can search via postal code on the Parliament of Canada website: [www.ourcommons.ca/members](http://www.ourcommons.ca/members) or [www.elections.ca](http://www.elections.ca/). Each provincial and municipal legislature will also have its own list of candidates on its website. For more information, please see our [guide on how to navigate government](https://www.cnib.ca/sites/default/files/2023-01/How%20to%E2%80%A6navigate%20the%20Canadian%20government%20system_EN.docx).

**Step 2 – Call your elected official**

Once you have the correct contact details for the official, call their office to set up a meeting. Elected officials will have administrative staff who will likely answer your call. Treat them the same as you would the elected official. Introduce yourself and give a summary of the issue you would like to discuss with the legislator. Elected officials have busy schedules and would not be able to meet immediately, so don’t leave your appointment to the last minute if your campaign is time sensitive.

You can also email the official, but this also runs the risk of your email getting lost among the thousands of emails that the official receives every week.

Make sure you understand how much time the legislator is giving you for the meeting. Meetings can be as short as 15 minutes, which means preparation is essential.

**Step 3 – Prepare for the meeting**

Legislators have multiple meetings per day. Practice your message so it is clear, concise, and contains your key messages. You do not need to be word for word perfect, but you do need to feel confident and comfortable. While preparing, choose a portion of your personal story as a way into the conversation about the wider issue. You don’t need to be an expert on everything to do with the subject but contact CNIB to gather any fact sheets or information to support your message and leave with the official.

Most importantly, don’t forget to double check the date, time, location of the meeting and how you are going to get there in advance. Some government buildings also have additional requirements (photo ID, prohibited items, etc.), so make sure you know what they are.

**Step 4 – The meeting**

Arrive 15 minutes early and let the front desk know you’ve arrived. While the meetings may start late, end early or be shifted altogether, it is important to be early, flexible and courteous.

Appropriate clothing for any meeting will be neat and professional. When attending a meeting at a provincial or federal legislature you should wear business attire – a jacket or suit being appropriate.

A meeting in a government official's riding office may be less formal – casual business attire may be sufficient.

**The meeting should be divided into five parts:**

1. Introduce yourself including why you are an advocate. You want to get your unique story across within a concise amount of time.
2. The goal of the meeting should be outlined immediately after introducing yourself. Briefly outline the issue and include the impact to yourself and/or the community, and some facts/figures that support what you’re saying.
3. Listen carefully during their response; you ideally want to be able to tell what part of your message resonated with them. Answer questions briefly or commit to sending answers after the meeting if you’re not sure.
4. Sum it up with next steps and take notes to ensure you remember what has been said so that you can refer back and follow up as needed.
5. Leave behind a fact sheet summarizing your “ask”. Keep it short – one page, if possible, and include your contact information should they have any further questions. The leave-behind is the document they will pass along to others if they are interested in your issue.

Many decision makers now have official social media accounts. If the meeting went well, ask the decision maker if you can take a photo with them to put up on social media to thank them for the meeting.

## How to… make a municipal deputation

Many people are interested in using deputations as an advocacy tool. However, it’s common to feel you don’t have the confidence or knowledge to make a deputation effectively. Here, we will go through what a deputation is, the benefits of a deputations, and how to make an effective deputation.

Each municipal government has different committees that are made up of councilors, Deputy Mayors and Mayors, or other elected officials. Sometimes these committees can also include members of the public (ex. an Accessibility Advisory Committee). For the purpose of this guide, we will be focusing on deputations made to elected committees, although Accessibility Advisory Committees often work in a similar way.

Each committee has their own specialized topic area (ex. Transportation). About once a month, the group of elected officials that make up that committee will come together to have a meeting. Agenda items may include issues relevant to the committee, updated information from city staff about projects related to their area and hearing from members of the public. They will then have in-depth discussions usually followed by a vote or listed recommendations for the broader city council.

Those items will then be discussed at the next city council meeting, where the entire city council will vote to accept or reject the recommendations.

### What is a deputation?

There are two types of deputations – a written deputation and a spoken deputation. It can be a written letter or email to a councilor or committee. It can also be a short (3-5 minute) speech. You will be told in advance how much time you have so you can prepare accordingly.

Committee meeting agendas usually have a spot for correspondence. It is important to note that this can vary greatly across different Canadian municipalities. Some will only accept correspondence on a particular agenda item, while some may accept correspondence about an issue not currently being discussed. If in doubt, reach out to the administrator that coordinates and oversees the committee.

### Why make a deputation?

* It is put on public record, which means it will be placed on the city’s website for anyone to see and learn from.
* It can be very powerful when everyone comes together to speak and advocate on a specific agenda item.
* It saves time by talking to many decision makers at once.
* When an item is already on the agenda, it could mean that a decision is being made about the issue. In providing a deputation, you would be stepping in at a critical point in the decision-making process to offer a meaningful influence.
* On the other hand, the item may not be on the agenda, and you will be raising a new issue that others aren’t aware of.

### How to make a deputation

As mentioned before, this will look different from municipality to municipality, but this document can still be used as general guidelines. If in doubt, check with your municipality’s website, and information will be there for you – or contact your municipalities administrator for more information.

#### 1. Contact the Committee

To depute at a committee, the first step is determining the appropriate committee that oversees decision making around your issue and the committee’s direct contact. Each will have one municipal member of staff who is solely there for administrative purposes (their title may vary by municipality. Ex. Secretary or Clerk). On the municipality’s website, you will find a heading like “city hall” or “committees” where you will find a list of committees. Click on the one you want, and you will find the staff contact to reach out to. Alternatively, you can call your local 3-1-1 line and explain that you want to contact a committee that oversees a particular area. Sometimes you can find information directly on the municipality’s website about how to make a written or spoken deputation.

Once you find the staff member’s contact information, use that to submit your written deputation or request to speak at the next agenda meeting. If it is tied to a specific agenda item, be sure to put down what the agenda item is. This makes it easier for the city administrator to put your deputation on the meeting agenda or slot you in for a spoken deputation.

#### 2. Depute!

It is important to remember that your deputation will become public and put on public record. For this reason, they will normally not accept anonymous submissions, so make sure your name and contact information are clearly visible. Remember to not use offensive language as that cannot be put on public record. Although your name will be attached to the deputation, your contact details will likely be redacted.

There are pros and cons to both types of deputations, whether you choose written or spoken. Deciding which to choose boils down to your preferences and strengths as an advocate. If you feel that you can write a great letter and that you need time to gather your thoughts, a written deputation is great. However, if you are a powerful speaker with a story to share, then a spoken deputation might be for you. Ultimately, it comes down to you and whatever you feel most confident with.

### Option A — Written Deputation

If you are submitting a written deputation, you are done, barring any further follow up after the committee meeting. You may want to attend the meeting it is read at in person or watch it online to see how the discussion goes.

### Option B — Spoken Deputations

During the COVID-19 pandemic, spoken deputations can be done a few different ways. A lot of municipalities have switched to an online or phone system. Other municipalities are still doing things in person. If you have a choice, do whatever is most comfortable for you. Over the phone or online can be just as powerful, especially if you have difficulty with transportation or other barriers that get in the way of going in person. If you do go the online route, make sure to check what software they use and whether it is accessible. You do not want to turn up on the day assuming that everything is fine not being able to login or use because of accessibility issues. When in doubt, ask ahead of time so that you feel confident.

Arrive at the beginning of the meeting or 15 minutes before if possible. This gives you time to gather your thoughts or sort out any tech issues. Things can get changed around on the agenda and you may be asked to speak earlier than you were scheduled. Often, if many people request to depute at a meeting, they will move the topic up to the beginning so that everyone has a chance to be heard. Attend the meeting from the beginning even if your agenda item isn’t until later, as you don’t want to miss your opportunity to be heard.

If you are going in person, the logistics will be specific to the municipality. Many places require photo I.D., so remember to bring that so you don’t get turned away at the door. You will often be issued a badge. Usually, you will have to go up to a podium or desk with a built-in mic to speak. When you get in the room make sure you know where it is.

Do not be afraid to ask city staff logistics questions when you arrive. You can also ask some of these questions when you make your request to speak. If applicable, let them know that you have sight loss and what your accommodation needs are. For example, if you need a sighted guide or any help to get up to the podium. It will help you feel confident not having to worry about how to get there. Always advocate for yourself, and don’t leave it to the last minute.

Bring notes if that will make you more comfortable. It will not make you look any less professional or unprepared. Whether you have notes or not, make sure to practice everything in advance. This will be what makes you look most prepared and confident.

### How to Find Out When a topic will be on an Agenda

Finding out when an item will be on a committee meeting agenda is not always straightforward, but you can do is keep up to date about what things are coming down the pipeline and contact the committee’s staff member to see if they have any further details about when the item will be up for discussion. Committee members might not even know when specific items will be on an agenda until shortly before the meeting as timelines and priorities can shift. Agendas are usually posted online a few days before the meeting. As soon as you see the topic or issue you would like to depute on come up on a meeting agenda, make sure to call the committee admin to make your request.

Because the agenda is only posted three to five days before the committee or general council meeting, there is a tight turnaround time to prepare. Make sure that if you know there is something coming down the line which you would like to talk about, that you have it ready to go – even an outline.

Unfortunately, things can get complicated. An agenda may be published, and there will be city staff reports with information about the topic that you may want to respond to in the moment. The key is feeling confident in what you have to say. Have your speech outline ready if you do get put on the agenda. This is less of a concern if your topic is not already on the agenda.

### Tips for Putting a Deputation Together

Remember that you will only have three to five minutes for your deputation. Normally, you will be given a warning and then cut off if you go over the allotted time limit. Be prepared that there may be a lot of people making deputations or other agenda items at the meeting. You may go in being told you have five minutes, but they may shorten your limit during the meeting. It is not personal, and it happens often. You may have five minutes worth of notes but be prepared with a shorter elevator pitch that you can express.

Introduce yourself; explain who you are and why you are there. Then go into how you are connected to the issue. Make sure you get to your main point quickly explaining what the issues is along with your recommendations. Councilors often wonder “What would you like me to do and how can I do what you are asking?” For example, if they are voting on a particular item, urge them to vote a particular way or take a particular action. This will all depend on what the exact issue is. Always make sure that you have a clear and specific request in your deputation. If you don’t, they will not know what information you have just provided.

### After the Deputation

After you have completed the deputation, there is normally an opportunity for councilors to ask questions about what you have just said. They may not have questions though; you do not need to worry about either case. As a community member, it is very unlikely for them to grill you. However, you may get “devil’s advocate” type questions. For example, “I only have $X amount in the budget, what would you do if you were me?” or other unfair situation questions. If you are put in this situation, reinforce your message. You could respond along the lines of “I can’t tell you how to spend your money, but what I’m here to tell you is that however you decide to do this, it needs to take accessibility into account.” It is important to remember that it’s ok to not have the answer; it’s fine to say, “I’m not sure, but if you commit to me, I can report back with the answer.” And then simply follow up after the meeting with the administrator’s office to submit the supplementary information.

Once the item is complete, you can stay to the end of the meeting because it will be open to the public. If you choose to leave before the meeting is over, make sure the item is complete. This will mean waiting until everyone has been able to depute, the councilors have discussed the item, they have voted and given their recommendations. The outcome shared will certainly be very interesting to hear because you showed up to share your thoughts on it!

If you do leave early or would like to see anything again, everything should be posted online afterwards including minutes and a recording. You can also call 3-1-1 if you aren’t online but would still like the information. Municipalities are required to publish or provide all these things, so it will be available to you. Following the meeting, the councilors will take their vote outcome or recommendations to be discussed at the general city council for the final decision to be made.

### Final Thoughts

Remember that what you say will be recorded. Often meetings are recorded on video, and media may be present if it is a contentious issue. This means that you may be approached by a member of the media after you’ve made the deputation if it has sparked interest in them. Know in advance what you would say by speaking with your local advocacy lead if you’re speaking as a private individual or on behalf of CNIB.

It generally is not the case, but smaller municipalities may allow you to depute at a general council meeting. However, the committee meeting is where you want to target your recommendations because more in-depth discussion will take place here. Everything you share will get forwarded to the general city council.

We have covered all the basic details about how to complete a deputation and why they are important, Deputations are a fantastic way to have your voice heard in your community. Your confidence is key. If in doubt at any stage including putting your deputation together, reach out to your local advocacy lead. CNIB has a wide range of key messages that we can share.

It's a long sounding name, but it’s not as scary as it sounds! Good luck!

# Public Relations

## How to… approach the media

Media coverage is a great way to let the public know about an advocacy issue. Although e-mail and the internet can reach thousands, even millions of people, having local and national coverage in the media draws attention to an issue and adds credibility and perspective to the issue. Sometimes the pressure of public exposure is all that is necessary to get decision-makers to solve a problem. Elected officials read the news too!

#### Credibility and perspective

Media coverage is particularly valuable for an advocacy campaign. When a journalist covers a story, they’re expected to research the issue, talk to people on both sides, and check the facts. They add perspective to an issue because they attempt to provide balance. And it’s part of their job to interview different spokespeople to validate what you told them. You should anticipate who they might speak to and what those people might say. That's why it’s so important to work with stakeholders in advocacy.

### Contacting the media

Journalists may become interested in a story because:

* A member of the public tells them about it.
* They hear about it (either through social media or elsewhere) and want more information.
* CNIB reaches out to the media.

Like any other relationship, trust develops over time. Journalists appreciate people who return their calls promptly, as they often work to a tight deadline and people who provide them with accurate, reliable information. Be prepared with your key messages ready before you contact them. Journalists are very busy. Don't take it personally if you don’t hear back from them.

In smaller communities, getting to know the people who cover local news can be fairly easy. In larger cities, it can be challenging to know all the journalists, producers, and news desks. However, some journalists have a “beat,” such as city council or disability issues. Even if you have not met journalists before, you can learn a bit about them ahead of time by researching their work and following their coverage.

### Contacting the media checklist

* Why will the media care about the story/issue? Is it genuinely something that will be of interest to their audience? Why?
* Is it timely? I.e., Why are you telling me this now? It doesn’t mean the story/issue itself has to be something new – new information can also make a story relevant or timely.
* Does the story/issue directly involve anyone else except you? Have you contacted them for their consent to contact the media?
* What is the key thing you want the media to report, and can you summarize this in one sentence? What is the solution to the problem that you want the media to put forward?

### Speaking with the media

* Be clear about whether you represent yourself and/or your organization. Never represent CNIB without speaking to your organizational contact.
* If your interview is on camera, ask the reporter where you should be looking. Typically, you would be speaking directly to the interviewer. It is rare to see a spokesperson look directly at the camera (usually just in telethons or scripted talkbacks). If you are on a panel with multiple people, try to respond to the person you are speaking to.
* Body language matters. Try to look confident and professional.
* For radio interviews, use your voice to portray your enthusiasm and keep a smile on your face so it is in your voice (unless the topic is a distressing one – in that case, your natural emotions will direct you).
* The rules of polite conversation apply. Never get openly angry or be rude.
* Be proactive by respectfully launching into your key messages after introductions with “Thank you for taking the time to meet with me. I would like to speak to you about….”
* This is your interview, so make sure your message gets across even if you have to politely say, "I would like to finish answering your earlier question" and “correct factual errors by the interviewer.”
* Never give inaccurate information. If you are unsure, simply say, "I’m sorry, I don’t know that. I’ll be glad to check and get back to you."
* Never say, "No comment." Maintain an open, positive attitude. If you are waiting for direction from other people or need time to study the issue, say so.
* Don’t repeat a negative comment. Instead, try to respond with a positive. "Actually, did you know…" or "In point of fact, our organization…" or "the real issue is…."
* Avoid one-word answers like "yes" and "no" by adding in part of your key message "yes, and…."
* When there is an opportunity to give additional comments (usually the interviewer’s last question), restate your core message or summarize your key messages.

### Speaking with the media checklist

* For in-person interviews, arrive 15 minutes early and let the reporter or front desk staff know you’ve arrived. Try to be flexible as the meeting may start late, end early or be shifted altogether. It is important to be early, flexible and courteous. Remember: they are helping you get your important message out to the public.
* Bring materials to help the audience understand, like fact sheets and other background materials. Bring contact information for anyone else who is willing to talk to the media (remember to ask them first!)
* Clothing instructions often come with interview requests, such as staying away from green (media projection screens are green) outfits. It’s best to avoid fussy prints and bold jewelry as they can distract from your message.

### Other media outreach ideas

* Writing a letter to the editor. This should be in response to a relevant article that has recently been published. Your letter should be around 200-300 words.
* Writing an op-ed, which is a guest newspaper editorial written by experts or members of the community on a particular issue.
* Writing a proactive letter to a newspaper to inform the readership about a proposed change (national/provincial legislation, modifications to local built environment) that might affect people who are blind or partially sighted.
* Calling into a "phone-in" part of a radio show when they mention an issue that you’re passionate about.
* Making yourself available as a source to the media in case they need a comment from a person with sight loss for their story.

## How to… use social media for advocacy

Social media can be a great way to extend the reach of your campaign online (showing how many people care about the issue) and get people fired up about your cause. Many businesses, decision-makers, municipalities, politicians, news outlets/journalists, and organizations have social media accounts. You can amplify your message by sharing your campaign on social media and by tagging the appropriate audiences.

Here are some tips to make your campaign effective.

### Choose your platform

* Twitter is a very time-sensitive platform. Content can be tweeted as it happens and allows for real-time interaction. Twitter users are comfortable with seeing a lot of content. Tweets are limited by character count, but you can post a series of tweets as a thread.
* Facebook is better suited for longer-form content and typically more restricted with user privacy settings.
* Instagram is a social media platform for sharing photos and videos.
* LinkedIn is a social network that focuses on professional networking and career development. You can use LinkedIn to display your resume, search for jobs, and enhance your professional reputation by posting updates and interacting with others.
* TikTok is a video hosting app where users create short videos based on trending filters, sounds, and activities, often featuring music in the background. Many viral trends start on Tik Tok, including memes, lip-synced songs, and comedy videos.

### Choose your platform(s) wisely

When considering a social media platform, consider what you hope to get out of the platform.

* Who is your intended audience (general public, journalists, municipalities, politicians etc.)?
* Is your social media account private or public? If it’s private, you can’t engage with audiences outside of your followers.
* Do you want to post a video or photo, or is your content primarily words? What is the length of your content? Is it accessible?
* Do you want to rally a group of people to get together and have a more interactive platform to organize and/or privately chat with people?

### Have a clear and concise message

Brevity is the soul of social media! Social media moves fast and has shortened our attention spans. No one will read a long rambling post that doesn’t have clear goals and points. Be direct, concise and have a clear call to action.

### Build your follower base

Like any good relationship, social media is a two-way dialogue between you and your followers, enabling you to initiate conversations, offer insights and be a thought leader. To build your follower base, start following or adding other people and groups online who are interested in the same or similar causes to you. Not only will you keep informed about the latest news on these issues, but people will start to follow you back and show mutual support for your campaign. As well as posting your own content, repost other peoples’ content when relevant to your cause to show support and potentially gain new followers in the process.

### Hashtags

Hashtags are a way to group posts about a similar topic. They allow people to easily search for content about a topic. Typically, you’ll find hashtags at use on Twitter, Instagram, TikTok and LinkedIn. While you can use them on Facebook, they are more common on the other platforms listed above.

To make your hashtags accessible, capitalize the first letter of each word (sometimes called "camel case” at the end of your post. #Braille #Literacy #Vancouver

To direct more online traffic to your pages, it is much more effective to piggyback on other hashtags that people are already looking for rather than creating your own. One example is using the universal accessibility hashtag #a11y to replace the word ‘accessibility’ in a sentence. If your advocacy work relates to a time-specific hashtag like #WhiteCaneAwarenessMonth, use these at the correct times to help the theme trend and make yourself more visible online.

### Maximize visibility

If you want to get another user’s attention, such as a decision maker or an organization, you can tag them in posts. If you have a positive meeting with a decision maker or organization, it’s perfectly acceptable to ask them if you can take a photo with them to put on social media. Don’t forget to ask them for their official account name so you can tag them, and they can repost the message to their followers.

### Be friendly, be credible

It is a natural part of any advocacy campaign cycle to meet frustrations and roadblocks to success. But as in-person, no one will want to partner with someone online who is incoherent, angry or offensive. Even if you come across someone being negative or unhelpful to your campaign, try bringing them to your side by sticking to the facts and backing them up with links to external evidence if applicable.

If you appear to be bullying or ‘trolling’ someone online, you will alienate potential supporters and destroy any credibility, even if your advocacy campaign is valid. And if possible, try to take any escalating arguments to a private message as soon as possible. A public slanging match doesn’t make anyone look good.

### Quality over quantity

No one enjoys being spammed with a flood of messages and will unfollow people who start to do this. Think carefully about any upcoming milestones (for instance, an important meeting or legislation going to the next stage in parliament), build your timelines around this, and only increase the frequency of posts during this time. If you need extra help, free social media scheduling tools can auto-time posts for you to have the most impact.

## How to… build strong advocate partnerships

**Why work with others?**

No man is an island. Making connections, finding allies, and building supports are all part of advocacy. Although some problems can be solved on an individual, case-by-case basis, many advocacy issues are often part of a wider systemic problem.

If you’re experiencing an individual issue, chances are someone else has experienced the same issue. Your advocacy efforts may result in positive changes for other people with sight loss. Even if the problem is personal to an individual with sight loss, other groups may want to offer support because of their concern for disability issues or their interests in fairness and equality.

There are so many benefits to working with others, such as learning from their experience, increasing support for your issue, and having a group of people to share in the efforts. There is strength in numbers, and the momentum from others can help keep a campaign going when all seems lost.

**Who could I partner with?**

The answer to this question relies heavily on what the issue is. Potential allies to consider are:

* Consumer groups (if your issue is a consumer issue like transportation, access to public spaces, or access to media)
* Local groups for people with sight loss including recreation or peer support groups
* CNIB Community Engagement Volunteers across Canada (either locally or nationally)
* Your elected officials
* Municipal accessibility committees
* Medical professionals like optometrists and ophthalmologists (if eye health related)
* Members of the wider disability community (for example: accessible information can affect people with hearing loss, people with dyslexia, those with learning disabilities, etc.)
* Journalist or media contact (if you think you have an 'exclusive' story their readership will be genuinely interested in)

**Remember:** if you are advocating on behalf of another person who has sight loss, it is their decision if they want to involve other people.

**How do I get started?**

You never know if someone is able or willing to help you unless you ask. Keep your request for support simple by including just a few sentences outlining what the issue is, and how you think that the group might be able to help or why they'd be interested. Try and be as specific as you can about what you'd like them to do, such as sign a petition or attend an event. If someone responds to you to say that they cannot help, don't be afraid to ask if they have any ideas of other groups that can assist. If they are interested, at this point you can send over more detailed information on the issue.

**Remember:** Relationships are a two-way street and need to be nurtured. Keep in mind that your allies might want your support on their own issues in the future. You also never know when you might also need to call on them again for a shared issue. Once the relationships are built, they need to be maintained.

**Initial points to consider:**

* Does the person with sight loss (if it's not you) want to involve others in the issue? If so, who?
* Who else might be experiencing the same problem? Other members of the CNIB community who are blind or partially sighted? CNIB advocates who are blind or partially sighted in other parts of the country? For example, access to automated teller machines is a problem everywhere. The installation of an accessible pedestrian signal is relevant to people who use the crossing. Does it make sense to try to find other people with the same problem to work together on a solution?
* Are there other local organizations that might have an interest in or be able to help with this situation? For example, if a person who is blind or partially sighted is having trouble with the landlord of geared-to-income housing unit, a group that represents low-income tenants might be interested and help. Or a group advocating for more support for special needs children in the school system might be helpful if a student with sight loss is receiving inadequate classroom support.
* Does this issue relate to an issue of national concern? For example, getting a tax break for talking books is not only relevant to people who are blind or partially sighted but also to people with learning disabilities. Changes to the federal Income Tax Act would affect many people across the country. Working together with other groups is more effective than working alone.
* What is the best way to approach each organization or individual? Is it in person at a public meeting, on social media, or direct contact via phone or email?
* Why should they care about the issue and how does it affect them? How can I summarize the issue in a few sentences and be specific about how they can help me? Do they know of anyone else I haven't already considered?
* What is my plan to keep them informed as the advocacy issue progresses, and how will I follow up to ensure that I maintain a good relationship with them?

## How to… deal with unexpected situations

Even when you make the most detailed preparations, you’ll still sometimes encounter unexpected situations. Below are some examples of common scenarios that might arise during your advocacy work and how you can respond to them. Embrace the unexpected by being prepared.

**Unexpected Reactions and How to Respond to Them**

Whether you’re meeting with your local MP or presenting to a large group, you may be expecting one type of response but receive another. For instance, you may expect someone to respond positively to your advocacy efforts but receive a neutral response, or you may expect a negative reaction but receive a positive one. No matter what the reaction of your audience, there are things you can do to keep your advocacy efforts on track.

**Reaction: Positive**

* When you receive a positive reaction to your advocacy efforts, show your appreciation.
* Confirm the next steps. Who will do what? When? How?
* Offer to give credit for the support you’ll receive. For instance, give the business a positive review on social media, write a letter to the editor to applaud their efforts, or tell others in your community about the new accessibility features they’re introducing.

**Reaction: Neutral**

* When you receive a neutral reaction to your advocacy efforts, use the inquiry approach. Ask if the person understands the scope of the barriers and the impact they’re having on people who are blind or partially sighted.
* Reiterate your key messages to emphasize the importance of the issue. You may need to be prepared to express your key messages in a few different ways, in case your first attempt to explain the issue doesn’t have the desired impact.

**Reaction: Unsupportive**

* When you receive an unsupportive response to your advocacy efforts, find out why the person is unsupportive.
* To highlight why the issue is relevant to your audience, refer to facts, comparisons, or the economic or social consequences that could arise if the issue isn’t rectified. Help them to understand why working together toward a solution is in everyone’s best interest.
* Explain how the issue could impact them directly, either positively or negatively. For instance, if there is no safe path of travel for someone with sight loss, this may also mean that there’s no safe path of travel for a parent who is pushing a stroller. If large-print signage will benefit people with sight loss, it will also benefit our growing population of seniors.
* Try and consider what is motivating the person beyond what they are saying. For example, a politician might be receiving a pressure from taxpayers organizations to not spend money, but you are asking them to invest more money in a program. If the information is public knowledge then you could bring it up to show you are aware of the constraints they have (and then use that as a bridge for your argument), but if it’s an assumption you are making then it is better to keep that in mind when structuring your argument, without mentioning it directly.

**Reaction: Disinterest or No Response**

* If you don’t receive a response from the person or business within a reasonable amount of time, reach out to ensure that your original email or phone message was received. Let them know you’re following up on your original message and provide the date when you contacted them the first time. If you’re reaching out by email, you can forward them your previous email for their reference. Ask if anything is being done in response to your initial inquiry.
* Request a response by a certain date. Provide them with a “carrot or stick” scenario to consider. A carrot is something that you can offer them, like additional information or an educational presentation. A stick is a consequence that may arise if they refuse to engage, like escalating the situation to another department or contacting the media. Consequences should always be gradual (i.e contacting the head of the department before containing the CEO or going to the media) so that you can demonstrate you have been reasonable in taking the necessary steps if you do need to escalate.
* Do not mention a consequence that you are not willing to follow through on, as this undermines your credibility.

**Unexpected Situations and How to Respond to Them**

**Situation: You cannot find the building where you’re supposed to be presenting, or you can’t find the person who is supposed to be meeting you at the venue.**

* Give yourself plenty of time to get to the venue.
* Have a backup plan that will help you in case you can’t find the venue on the first try. Will you use a navigation app? Will you ask a passerby for directions?
* Before you finalize your plans, ensure that you have the correct address of the venue and the name and contact information of the person you’ll be meeting. Let them know that you will reach out to them with a phone call or text message if you’re having trouble finding the venue.
* If your contact person is meeting you at the venue, give them a brief description of yourself so that they’ll know who to look out for. You can tell them that you’ll be holding a white cane, accompanied by a guide dog, or wearing a green sweater.

**Situation: The topic or questions are different from what you expected**

* Make a quick mental adjustment and modify your key messages.
* If you do not know the answer, let them know that you do not have that information but you will find out and follow up with a response.
* Redirect the conversation back to your key message with a short bridging statement, such as, “That’s an interesting question. I’d like to reiterate...” or “while I can’t speak to that directly, what I can say is…”

**Situation: Someone else is dominating the conversation**

* Be proactive. Right after the introductions, deliver your key messages by saying something like, “Thank you for taking the time to meet with me. I’d like to talk to you about...”
* Be prepared to interject. Use bridging phrases, such as, “Yes, you’re correct, and...”, “I see. Well, I’d like to say that…”, “As I was saying…”, “May I add that…”

**Situation: The conversation or meeting comes to a sudden end**

* Quickly arrange a follow up plan. Who should you contact to set up a subsequent meeting? When? How? What information would be helpful in the meantime?

**Situation: Your technology isn’t working, or you’re missing materials**

* Bring back up copies of your notes in alternate formats, such as digital or braille.
* See if the organizer can assist i.e by printing off your notes in large print or helping you access your emails to retrieve a digital copy.
* You don’t need to memorize your presentation, but it is good to read through your notes leading up to the meeting, so you feel comfortable with the content and know what you want to say.
* Be flexible. It’s okay if things aren’t perfect. You can still deliver your key messages in a slightly modified way.

**Situation: You have to cancel at the last minute**

* Advise the event organizer as soon as possible and ask whether they’d like to reschedule, or whether you can send someone else in your place. If you are representing CNIB, let us know as soon as possible so we can help make alternate arrangements.
* If they’d like someone else to attend in your place, provide that person with the key messages and materials they need in advance.

**Situation: Someone is misinformed or makes an insensitive remark about your sight loss**

* Inform or correct them as tactfully as you can. Remember that not everyone knows someone with sight loss, and they’re probably not trying to be insensitive. Say something like, “It’s actually very startling to a person with sight loss when you grab their arm without asking. I know you’re trying to help, but I’ll ask for your help if I need it,” or, “It’s actually not a compliment to tell a person that they don’t look blind. Blindness comes in so many forms.”

**Situation: Someone denies you access with your guide dog, or acts like they are doing you a favor by allowing your guide dog access**

* Quickly explain the facts. In all of Canada’s provinces and territories, human rights legislation prohibits discriminating against a person who is working with a guide dog. Guide dogs and their handlers have the right to access all the places that the public has access to.
* Offer to follow up with more information about guide dogs and the rights of guide dog teams.
* If the person still denies you access, decline the meeting and follow up with your local advocacy lead for support.

# Campaigns

## Guide – Volunteer Advocacy Campaign Planning

### Introduction

This guide is designed to support community advocates (that’s you!) as they work to remove systemic barriers that disproportionately impact people who are blind or partially sighted. You will learn about:

* Getting started
* Choosing an issue
* Defining Roles
* Campaign Goals
* Key Messages
* Activities
* Timeline
* Engaging Stakeholders
* Evaluation

### Getting Started

An advocacy campaign is an organized effort to mobilize people to support a specific issue, policy, or position. An advocacy issue may come to your attention through a variety of sources:

* A friend or family member
* A colleague
* Media
* A government announcement
* A stakeholder organization
* The wider disability community

**Example: CNIB’s Accessible Insulin Pump Campaign**

CNIB’s accessible insulin pump campaign was launched in response to feedback from Canadians living with diabetes and sight loss regarding the inaccessibility of insulin pumps. People who are blind or partially sighted are unable to safely and independently use insulin pumps because users must interact with visual features on a digital display screen.

#### Choosing an Issue

As an advocate for the sight loss community, you will encounter many important issues affecting those who are blind or partially sighted. While every advocacy issue matters, you won’t have the capacity to launch an advocacy campaign for all of them. Additionally, an advocacy campaign isn’t always the right solution to a particular problem. Before developing a campaign, you should think carefully about the specific issue you want to address and ensure that an advocacy campaign is the best way forward.

Ensure that the issue:

1. **Is systemic**

An issue is systemic when it is created and maintained by social, economic, or political institutions and forces, meaning it has consequences for a number of people. For example, systemic issues may take the form of attitudinal barriers, barriers caused by government policies and laws, or barriers related to inaccessible business practices. You should choose an issue that impacts the broader sight loss community, not just an individual.

1. **Matters to the affected community**

An advocacy campaign should be informed and led by community members. If your campaign is focused on an issue that you don’t have personal experience with, you should engage with members of the affected community to make sure the problem you’re addressing matters to them.

For example, if your campaign is advocating for the rights of guide dog teams but you’re not a guide dog handler, you should consult with guide dog handlers in your community for their perspectives.

1. **Is based on research and facts**

Over the lifespan of your advocacy campaign, you’ll need to speak with various stakeholders about the issue. Ensure that you have all the relevant facts about the issue so that you’re prepared to speak about it when asked. Be sure to gather research from credible sources. Potential sources of information could include:

* Advocacy and non-profit organizations (e.g. CNIB resources)
* Government publications (e.g. Statistics Canada research reports)
* Scholarly research articles
* Persons with lived experience

1. **Is aimed at the appropriate audience**

You wouldn’t want to approach your municipal government with an issue that is regulated by the provincial government, nor would you want to contact the Premier about an issue with a local business. Be sure that you are contacting the person or organization that has jurisdiction over the issue and thus the power to help you create change.

#### Campaign Plan Template — Background

Once you have chosen an issue, you’re ready to begin writing a campaign plan. You can create a campaign plan in many ways, but your plan should include the elements outlined in this guide.

The first section of your campaign plan should outline the context of the campaign, including a summary of the problem being addressed and any information that’s relevant to your campaign goals and activities. This information will allow everyone to understand the campaign issue and objectives, identify key opportunities, and determine the best direction for action.

You do not need to provide a detailed explanation of the campaign issue in this section, as that step will come next. The background section should only include the basic information someone would need to understand the reason for the campaign.

The types of information you may want to provide in this section could include:

* Definitions of key terms
* Key facts and data about the campaign issue
* Key pieces of legislation relevant to the campaign issue
* Important dates or upcoming events
* Recent updates or significant changes related to the campaign issue
* Key stakeholders related to the issue area, such as other local advocacy groups or government representatives for the relevant jurisdiction
* Past or current local campaigns, actions, or advocacy events related to the campaign issue

#### Background Sample (CNIB Insulin Pump Campaign)

* Insulin pumps are medical devices that are used by people with diabetes as an alternative to administering insulin through a syringe or pen.
* Diabetic retinopathy is the fourth leading cause of blindness in Canada, and approximately 750,000 Canadians live with diabetic retinopathy.
* 2021 marked the 100th anniversary of the discovery of insulin by Sir Frederik G Banting at the University of Toronto.
* November is National Diabetes Awareness Month, with 14 November being World Diabetes Day.
* The Federal government allocated $35M over five years in the 2021 budget to implement a national framework for diabetes in Canada.
* In June 2021, Bill C-237, an act to establish a national framework for diabetes, passed into law.
* In 2020, CNIB ran an awareness campaign for National Diabetes Awareness Month, sharing the stories of Canadians with lived experience of diabetes and sight loss and their struggles in managing their insulin. CEO John Rafferty also submitted an OpEd that was picked up by print media.

#### Campaign Plan Template — The Issue

The background section of your campaign plan summarized the key points and information needed to understand the context and landscape of the campaign. The next section should explain the campaign issue in greater detail. The purpose of this section is to briefly explain:

* The problem
* The impacts of the problem
* The people or communities affected by the problem
* The actor or actors responsible for enabling a solution

#### Issue Sample (CNIB Insulin Pump Campaign)

CNIB’s accessible insulin pump campaign was launched in response to complaints from Canadians living with diabetes and sight loss regarding the inaccessibility of insulin pumps.

People who are blind or partially sighted are unable to safely and independently use insulin pumps because users must interact with visual features on a digital display screen.

Insulin pump manufacturers have a responsibility to ensure that a significant segment of their end-user market can safely use their device. Pump manufacturers should be designing pumps using universal design features. We do not need a special pump that blind people can use, we need pumps that everyone can use.

Insulin pump manufacturers assert that retrofitting existing insulin pumps with accessible or audible features is problematic because regulating authorities would then view them as new devices, requiring a new approval process.

Health Canada has processes in place for approving medical devices based on efficacy and safety, but there are currently no criteria to ensure medical devices entering the market are fully accessible.

This has resulted in apathy in making improvements to the accessibility of existing devices.

#### Campaign Plan Template — Roles

It may be helpful to form a campaign team of engaged participants who can support the development of your campaign. This could include people in your family, social networks, or other volunteers passionate about the issue. When considering who to recruit, think about people with subject matter expertise or lived experience related to your campaign issue who you could engage.

Once you’ve identified the members of your campaign team, gather everyone together for a campaign kickoff meeting. This is your opportunity to set expectations, outline goals, and divide tasks.

Projects run most effectively when everybody involved has a clear idea of their responsibilities. Your campaign plan should specify the role of each person involved to keep organized and prevent misunderstandings. It is helpful to create a table or list that defines the role of each team member and their responsibilities as a member of the campaign team.

#### Roles Sample

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Name** | **Role** |
| Doris Day | Project Lead |
| Jackie Chan | Spokesperson and Government Relations Coordinator |
| Idris Elba | Social Media Coordinator |
| Salma Hayek | Event Coordinator |
| Sam Smith | Researcher and Writer |
| Nina Simone | Researcher and Writer |

### Developing the Campaign

#### Campaign Goals and Asks

Now that you’ve chosen an issue and identified the key members of your team, you’ll need to determine the specific outcomes that you want to achieve in your advocacy campaign. Identifying your campaign goals will allow you to craft your key messages, determine a timeline of activities, and engage stakeholders.

Remember that specificity is important when defining your campaign goals. While we can all agree that making neighborhoods accessible is important, “make my neighborhood accessible” is not a specific enough goal, nor does it include any information that would allow you to determine whether you’ve been successful.

A more specific and measurable goal could be something like, “Persuade the City of Moncton to designate funding to install APS on all signalized intersections as part of the next annual budget.” This achieves the goal of making the neighborhood more accessible but provides specific, measurable information about what you want to achieve and when.

When considering your desired outcomes, think about your capacity and the available resources. Small advocacy initiatives can be extremely powerful, but be mindful of the concrete results you want your campaign to achieve.

Don’t be afraid to be bold and get creative! There are many changes that can be made in a community, but which they may not all get the attention needed to drive change. “Small” issues are often the ones that have the greatest impact on people’s day-to-day lives.

#### Goals Sample (CNIB Insulin Pump Campaign)

* Health Canada commits to making accessibility one of the criteria it uses when approving insulin pumps for the Canadian market and providing a projected timeline for implementation.
* Build on the successes of CNIB’s 2020 diabetes awareness campaign to further raise awareness of this issue among the diabetes community, federal politicians and policymakers, and the public

#### Key Messages

Your key messages are the information that you’ll share with decision makers and the public in order to persuade them that your issue matters.

Your key messages should clearly articulate the relevant background information, the issue, and the call to action. A call to action is a statement calling for members of the public to do something that will support the campaign objectives, such as contributing to a letter writing campaign or signing a petition. This gives people a clear and direct entry point to support your campaign and get involved with the issue.

#### Key Messages Sample (CNIB Insulin Pump Campaign)

* 2021 marks the 100th anniversary of the discovery of insulin by Frederick G Banting at the University of Toronto
* We have come a long way since that discovery, with the first insulin pumps being developed in the 1970’s. In spite of technological advances, insulin pumps have become less accessible over time, as tactile features are consolidated or removed in favor of digital displays.
* Whether through diabetes or another condition, sight loss can affect anyone at any time. We call on all people living with diabetes to support us, as we share a common goal to widen and improve access to insulin devices.
* Health Canada has an established process for approving medical devices and ensuring that they are safe, effective and high quality. Approval criteria should be expanded to include accessible and universal design. The six million Canadians living with disabilities deserve equal access to medical devices and autonomy over their own health.

#### Activities

You will need to determine the specific activities that will allow you to reach your advocacy campaign goals. Activities vary widely depending on the scope and nature of your campaign. For more information and advice on a range of advocacy activities, visit our [Advocacy Resources](https://www.cnib.ca/en/advocacy-resources) page.

Keeping track of the specific activities required for your campaign is one of the most important steps to stay organized, track progress, and maintain effective collaboration between team members.

It is important that you engage the members of your campaign team as you build out your strategy. Each member of your team may bring different skills and experience, and working together will help strengthen your plan.

#### Activities Sample

1. Internal Communications

* Provide weekly updates to campaign team members every Friday.
* Hold weekly all-member update meetings every Monday.

1. Community Relations

* Provide updates and key messages to disability community and partner organizations, urging them to share content on their social media and encourage their membership to take action.
* Notify City Councillors in relevant wards about the forthcoming campaign and request meeting to discuss.
* Outreach to community members with lived experience for testimonials.

1. Media Relations

* Contact local journalists about coverage of the campaign.
* Invite media to end-of-campaign action to be held at City Hall.

1. Social Media

* Create Facebook page and Twitter accounts for the campaign.
* Share petition link on social media encouraging others to sign and share.
* Publish an open letter to City Council and tag relevant Councillors with a call to action.

1. Special Events

* Contact bylaw to inquire about permits for end-of-campaign action at City Hall.
* Solicit volunteers to assist with end-of-campaign action.

#### Timelines

Along with outlining the activities that will allow you to reach your advocacy campaign goals, you will need to determine your timelines for completing them. This will keep you organized and help you to avoid feeling overwhelmed by all the moving parts of the campaign.

Organize your activities into a table, in order of when they need to happen. Share it with your campaign team to determine if you’ve missed anything. Once you’re confident that everything is in order, assign a date to each item. It may help to work backward, assigning a deadline to the last item first and then moving through each activity until you reach the start date of your campaign.

When building timelines, you’ll need to be mindful of what’s happening around you in relation to your advocacy issue. Take note of any relevant political activities, competing interests, or milestones that may impact the success of your campaign.

#### Timelines Sample

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Task** | **Date** |
| Notify City Councillors in relevant wards about the forthcoming campaign and request meeting to discuss. | January 30 |
| Provide updates and key messages to disability community and partner organizations | February 1 |
| Share petition link on social media encouraging others to sign and share. | February 2 |
| Contact local journalists for coverage of campaign. | February 10 |
| Contact bylaw to inquire about permits for end-of-campaign action at City Hall. | February 24 |

### Engaging Stakeholders

It is essential to identify other organizations, individuals, or groups that are advocating on the campaign issue and look for ways to work together to increase success. This can also greatly expand the reach of your campaign, as you can leverage each of your respective networks.

It is also important to consider unlikely allies that may share some common ground related to your campaign issue. When different groups with different priorities can unite on an advocacy issue, this strengthens the case for change and can influence decision makers. In the case of e-scooter advocacy, CNIB has found unlikely allies in the cycling community, lending strength and support to the voices of both communities.

There is no secret to outreach. If someone in your network works for or is familiar with the organization that you want to connect with, ask them who would be the best contact person for your issue. If you don’t have a contact who can help you to connect, you’ll need to begin with an introductory phone call or email.

An introductory email should include:

* Who you are and who you represent
* A brief overview of the campaign
* A link to your campaign website, if applicable
* Why you think your campaign will matter to them, such as how the issue impacts their community
* What they can do to help. Be specific. Instead of asking for their support, ask them to sign a letter or invite their community to your event.

For further information and advice on stakeholder engagement, see our [guide on How to build advocacy partnerships.](https://www.cnib.ca/sites/default/files/2023-01/How%20to%E2%80%A6build%20strong%20advocate%20partnerships_EN.docx)

### Evaluation

While the impacts of advocacy work can be difficult to quantify, evaluating the outcomes of your campaign can highlight important insights and lessons learned. Once the campaign is complete, it’s helpful to determine whether the goals of the campaign were met and, if applicable, to compare outcomes with other previous campaigns. This way, you will have a better understanding of best practices which you can apply and improve upon for future campaigns.

Quantitative methods, or statistics, are typically the easiest evaluation metrics to collect and analyze for the purposes of your advocacy campaign.

The following metrics may help to evaluate the success of your campaign:

* Number of people sending letter to MP
* Number of social media impressions
* Number of website traffic to campaign website
* Number of external partners promoting action

## How to… create a successful campaign strategy

The key to success for any campaign is to have a winning strategy in place before you start. If you don’t, then you could miss out on key opportunities to speak to the right people, at the right place, at the right time. This template is designed to help you use the fundamentals of campaigning to get started on your plan. Good luck!

### Step 1 – What exactly is the issue?

As advocates who are keen for change, we often want to break down barriers all at once. But it is important for you to pinpoint exactly what needs to be changed. For example, “My local neighborhood is inaccessible” is too general a problem to tackle successfully. Exactly what is inaccessible in your neighborhood? If there are too many examples to choose from, then pin it down to one problem: “My neighborhood is inaccessible because local store owners put out advertising boards on the street”.

Make sure you have clearly defined your goals so you know what you are aiming for and will know when you are successful. Your goal should be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Timely).

**Your turn**

Write a one-sentence summary of the issue.

Write a SMART goal for your campaign.

### Step 2 – What is the evidence for the issue?

For your campaign to be successful, you need to identify the facts that will convince people of your argument. It may take some effort, but you need to determine how to present your argument in a simple and effective manner. It is crucial to have information that is targeted to your audience and in a format that is easy to distribute and understand. Having some good facts and figures at hand will also make you feel more confident about approaching decision makers.

Gather evidence to support your campaign. This could be finding current statistics, photos, case studies, best practice examples, and more. The information needs to be clear, concise, and presented in a way that is easily understandable in order to motivate others to take action.

**Your turn**

What types of evidence already exist that I could use?

What evidence do I need to gather myself?

What steps do I need to take to gather this evidence?

### Step 3: Know your audience

As you gather evidence, you need to think about who the target audience is for the campaign. The target audience should be the person or organization who is responsible for the campaign issue and has the power to bring about the change. For example, if you want to change a dangerous street crossing in your city, this is dealt with municipally rather than federally, so your primary audience would be on a local rather than national level. You might also have secondary target audiences who could also help you achieve your campaign goal.

**Your turn**

What decision makers can bring about the change needed?

Are there any other key players?

Who influences the decision makers?

### Step 4 – Build relationships

Relationship building is a crucial skill for any campaign to succeed because it means you can have many people working towards the same goal. It is also more likely to grab the attention of decision makers and the media if a large group of people are working on one issue. A good place to start is to think about what groups are affected by the issue. For example, clutter on streets doesn’t just affect people who are blind or partially sighted, but also wheelchair users and parents with strollers. Local disability groups can often provide a wealth of knowledge and support, as well as larger organizations like CNIB. It is essential that whoever joins the campaign understands the objectives and messages. Reach out to different organizations that can come together united under a common goal.

**Your turn**

What people, groups and organizations can I connect with who might be affected by this issue and want to help?

### Step 5 – Timing

As with any plan, timing is key for when you want to launch your campaign. You should think about what milestone events on the timeline are important for your campaign (such as legislation dates, awareness days, local meetings) and what needs to be done to prepare for each deadline (for example, you don’t want to meet with a decision maker and find they already voted on the issue the week before!). Having deadlines for different phases will help shape your campaign and keep it on track for success.

**Your turn**

What are the important dates coming up in the future for this campaign?

### Step 6 - Monitoring success

At the beginning of the campaign, you would have set clear goals for what you wanted to achieve. You had a clear idea what success would look like, and how you would know when you achieved it. Now you can measure the impact the campaign has made. Celebrate what you have achieved (what worked and why?) and think about what you would do differently next time.

**Your turn**

Look at the objectives of the campaign – which ones did you meet?

What is the evidence that you achieved this?

Were there any you didn’t meet, and if so, why?

What would you do again differently?

# Legislation

## Disability Legislation at a Glance

CNIB believes that people who are blind or partially sighted have the right to live the lives they choose. There are laws and standards that help us to advocate alongside people who are blind or partially sighted when they experience barriers or discrimination. Having a basic understanding of the laws and standards that protect our rights will help you to be a better advocate.

* The laws and standards that we’ll explore here include:
* The Canadian Human Rights Act
* The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms
* The Accessible Canada Act
* Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

## Federal Legislation

### The Canadian Human Rights Act

Link: <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/h-6/>

The Canadian Human Rights Act ensures equal opportunity for all individuals in Canada who may be victims of discrimination based on prohibited grounds.

The prohibited grounds within the legislation include the following:

* Race
* National or ethnic origin
* Color
* Religion
* Age
* Sex
* Sexual orientation
* Gender identity or expression
* Marital status
* Family status
* Genetic characteristics
* Disability
* Conviction for an offense for which a pardon has been granted or in respect of which a record suspension has been ordered.

The Canadian Human Rights Act applies only to federally regulated activities. There are separate provincial and territorial anti-discrimination laws that apply to provincially regulated activities.

The Canadian Human Rights Commission was created as a result of the Canadian Human Rights Act. The role of the Canadian Human Rights Commission is to investigate claims of discrimination based on the prohibited grounds listed above.

### The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms

Link: <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/const/page-15.html>

The Canadian Constitution is a set of laws that determine how Canada operates. The Constitution is the supreme law of Canada. All other laws must comply with the laws set out in the Constitution.

The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms is part of the Canadian Constitution. Section 15 of the Charter outlines equality rights as follows:

**15.** (1) Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability.

This section of the Charter clearly states that everyone in Canada is to be treated with the same respect, dignity, and consideration. This means that governments must not discriminate in laws or programs.

### The Accessible Canada Act

Link: <https://laws.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/A-0.6/index.html>

The Accessible Canada Act prohibits discrimination based on disability. It applies nationwide and focuses on areas of federal jurisdiction, including the federal public sector, Crown Corporations, and all federally regulated organizations.

The goal of the Accessible Canada Act is to create a barrier-free Canada by 2040 by identifying, removing, and preventing barriers.

Accessibility Standards Canada was created as a result of the Accessible Canada Act. The role of Accessibility Standards Canada is to develop legal requirements for accessibility in areas of federal jurisdiction.

As a result of the Accessible Canada Act, federally regulated organizations must create accessibility plans that are consistent with the rules outlined by Accessibility Standards Canada. In developing accessibility plans, organizations must consult with people who have disabilities; create processes to receive and respond to feedback; and report on progress toward implementation of accessibility plans.

If an organization covered by the Accessible Canada Act is found to have contravened the legislation, penalties may be assessed. These can range significantly, depending on the severity of the contravention and other factors.

### Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Though the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is a piece of international legislation, Canada ratified the Convention in 2010. This means that Canada is committed to applying the rights outlined in the convention and is bound to the Convention under international law.

The Convention requires that States Parties (countries that have ratified the Convention) protect the rights to equality and non-discrimination of persons with disabilities in a variety of areas, including freedom of expression and opinion, respect for home and the family, education, health, employment, and access to services. The Convention also explains the types of actions that States Parties must take to ensure equal rights for people with disabilities.

As part of its commitment to the Convention, Canada must submit a report to the United Nations every four years, outlining how the country has advanced the rights of persons with disabilities.

## Provincial Disability Legislation

### Provincial Human Rights Laws

Provincial and territorial human rights laws are similar to the Canadian Human Rights Act and apply many of the same principles. They protect people from discrimination in areas of provincial and territorial jurisdiction, such as restaurants, stores, schools, housing, and most workplaces.

Provincial and territorial human rights acts include the following:

* Alberta Human Rights Act
* British Columbia Human Rights Code
* Manitoba Human Rights Code
* New Brunswick Human Rights Act
* Newfoundland and Labrador Human Rights Act
* Nova Scotia Human Rights Act
* Ontario Human Rights Code
* Prince Edward Island Human Rights Act
* Quebec Charter of Rights and Freedoms
* Saskatchewan Human Rights Code
* Northwest Territories Human Rights Act
* Nunavut Human Rights Act
* Yukon Human Rights Act

### Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)

Link: <https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/05a11>

The AODA was established on June 13, 2005. It aims to identify, remove, and prevent barriers for people with disabilities. It applies to all levels of government, non-profit organizations, and private sector businesses in Ontario that have one or more fulltime, parttime, seasonal, or contract employees.

The AODA outlines five standards:

1. Information and Communications Standards
2. Employment Standards
3. Transportation Standards
4. Design of Public Spaces Standards
5. Customer Service Standards

There are currently two new AODA standards under development:

1. Healthcare Standards
2. Education Standards

### The Accessibility for Manitobans Act (AMA)

Link: <http://web2.gov.mb.ca/laws/statutes/ccsm/a001-7e.php>

The AMA was established in December 2013. It aims to proactively identify, remove, and prevent barriers in key areas of daily living

The AMA outlines five standards:

* The Customer Service Accessibility Standard
* The Employment Accessibility Standard
* The Information and Communication Accessibility Standard
* The Design of Public Spaces Standard
* The Transportation Standard

The Manitoba Government is committed to achieve significant progress by 2023.

### An Act Respecting Accessibility in Nova Scotia

Link: <https://www.nslegislature.ca/legc/bills/62nd_3rd/3rd_read/b059.htm>

The Act Respecting Accessibility aims to make Nova Scotia inclusive and barrier free by 2030.

It includes six accessibility standards:

* Goods and Services
* Information and Communication
* Transportation
* Employment
* Built Environment
* Education

For more information on disability rights in Canada for people who are blind or partially sighted, please visit our [CNIB Know Your Rights](http://www.cnib.ca/knowyourrights).

# Further Resources

1. To learn more about CNIB’s advocacy work, visit [www.cnib.ca/advocate](http://www.cnib.ca/advocate).
2. If you are looking for information around your legal rights as a person with sight loss, please visit our [Know Your Rights webpage](http://www.cnib.ca/knowyourrights) to access our legal information resources. Please note, CNIB does not provide legal advice or representation.
3. For information on how to advocate for guide dog access, visit our [Guide Dogs Champions webpage](https://www.cnib.ca/en/guide-dog-champion).
4. To keep informed about Advocacy news and events in your region, subscribe to our [Advocacy e-newsletter Equalize](https://confirmsubscription.com/h/d/E9B28A2DA457508) and explore [previous editions](http://www.cnib.ca/equalize).

Thank you for your interest in taking action to create a society that is more accessible and inclusive for all. If you have any questions or would like further resources that aren’t on this page, please email us at [advocacy@cnib.ca](mailto:advocacy@cnib.ca).

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