



# Self-Advocacy Toolkit

Lead with Your Voice. Thrive with Your Community.





# Welcome!

At Thrive Virginia, we believe every voice matters—especially yours.



**Our Mission:** Thrive Virginia uses person-centered and collaborative services to empower those fighting poverty to achieve individualized prosperity and community connections.

Through this Self-Advocacy Tool Kit, we want to help you:

- ✓ Connect with your community
- ✓ Share your voice on issues that matter
- ✓ Make a difference for your family, your neighbors, and your future

## **A Note About Nonpartisanship**

*Thrive Virginia is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization. We are not affiliated with any political party or candidate, and we do not support or oppose political figures.*

*We encourage civic participation because it helps families and communities thrive, guided by community needs and connections, not partisan interests.*



[www.thriveva.org](http://www.thriveva.org)



# Community Action Agencies



Community Action Agencies like Thrive Virginia were created to uplift and partner with communities fighting poverty—not to decide for them. We deeply value the voices and lived experiences of the people in the localities we serve. We believe that families and community members know best what matters to them and should drive the conversation about their own needs and solutions. Our role is to listen, support, and help turn community wisdom into action.

## What's Inside:

- ✓ What is Advocacy?
- ✓ Why Your Voice Matters
- ✓ How to Advocate (Step-by-Step)
- ✓ How to Write an Effective One-Pager for Meeting or Corresponding with Legislators/Other Community Officials
- ✓ Sample Letters, Emails, and Phone Scripts
- ✓ Storytelling Tips
- ✓ Advocacy Terms You Should Know
- ✓ Helpful Links and Resources





# What is Advocacy?



Advocacy is about speaking up when you see a need in your family, school, neighborhood, or community.

**You are already advocating when you:**

- **Ask for safer community spaces, better resources, or any other improvement to your community**
- **Tell others about resources that helped you**
- **Vote for leaders who care about the needs and families within your community**
- **Share your story to help others understand real challenges**

**Advocacy is about hope, solutions, and action—not necessarily politics.**

## Why Your Voice Matters

When you share your experience:

- Leaders better understand the everyday experiences of families working hard to build stability and opportunity.
- Programs that help families build self-sufficiency and opportunity can grow.
- Local investments in support services can have a greater impact.

Your voice can help protect effective, efficient services that contribute to family stability, such as safety, food access, quality childcare, education, workforce pathways, economic opportunities, healthcare, and more.



**You know your family's needs better than anyone.**  
**By sharing your story, you help others invest in outcomes that work.**





# How to Advocate: Simple Steps



## 1. **Pick Your Issue:**

Think about what would make the most significant difference for you or your children.



## 2. **Find the Right Person:**

Use these tools if a legislator can address the root of the need at the state or federal level:

- Find Your Virginia Legislator: [Click here - Virginia General Assembly](#)
- Find Your U.S. Congress Member: [Click here - United States Congress](#)



## 3. **Share Your Story:**

Speak from the heart about your experience and the challenges or progress you've seen.



## 4. **Ask for Specific Help:**

Example: *"Please invest in programs that help families access (insert the issue you are advocating for) so parents and caregivers can pursue work, education, or stability."*



## 5. **Follow Up:**

A brief thank-you message, or follow-up, builds trust and shows accountability.



**Note:** Local resources can be found in our Helpful Links and Resources list section.



[www.thriveva.org](http://www.thriveva.org)



# How to Write an Effective One-Pager for Meeting or Corresponding with Legislators/Other Community Officials



A one-pager is a simple but powerful tool used to clearly and quickly share important information with decision-makers. It is a single-page document that outlines who you are, the issue you care about, why it matters, and what action you ask a legislator or decision-maker to take. A well-prepared one-pager helps you stay organized during meetings or correspondence and ensures leaders have a clear takeaway about your concerns. It also shows that you are respectful of their time and serious about your advocacy.

## 1. Title & Subtitle

- Title: Clearly state your "ask" and the main benefit.
- Subtitle: Provide more context and details about the issue.

## 2. Introduction: Who You Are & What You Represent

- Organization/Personal Overview: Briefly describe your organization and its mission or who you are, a concerned constituent who wants to see change in their community or related to a certain issue. Example: "I am Susan Jones, a concerned constituent (or another description like a concerned parent) of (insert locality)."
- Problem Context: Provide a summary of the issue and why it matters, supported by brief evidence.

## 3. The Problem

- State the Issue: Clearly describe the problem you seek help with, using factual, compelling language.
- Data & Impact: If possible, support your points with data or studies that demonstrate the scope and severity of the issue. Make it easy for them to research the data in case they want to learn more later. You do not have to have all the answers, but some supportive information often helps.

## 4. Proposed Solution

- Summary of Solution: Provide a clear, brief explanation of the solution you are advocating for.
- Benefits: Explain how these solutions will address the issue.

## 5. The Ask

- What You Want Legislators to Do: Clearly define the action you want the legislator or decision-maker to take.
- Why It Matters: Emphasize how this action will make a difference. Your story and lived experience matter.





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## 6. Support & Backing

- List of Supporters: There is power in numbers. If possible, include organizations, groups, or individuals who support the legislation or issue.
- Cosponsors/Endorsements: If applicable, list any legislative cosponsors or signatories to petitions or letters of support.

## 7. Quantify the Ask

- Funding Request (if applicable): If you're requesting funding, provide a clear financial figure or projection.
- Projected Impact: Explain how this funding will directly benefit families and communities.

## 8. Background and Context

- Issue Background: Provide brief context or history to show how the problem developed and why it requires action now.
- Connection to the Community: Explain how the issue affects the legislator's constituents specifically.

## 9. Visuals and Graphics

- Use Graphics Wisely: Include relevant visuals like charts, graphs, or photos that illustrate the issue or proposed solution.
- Balance with White Space: Ensure the document is easy to read by balancing text with ample white space.

## 10. Closing & Call-to-Action

- Reaffirm the Ask: End with a clear, direct call to action.
- Availability for Follow-up: Mention that you are available for questions or further discussion.

## 11. Contact Information

- Your Information: Make your contact details easy to find and encourage follow-up.
- Organization Information: If applicable, include your organization's name, logo, and any relevant links.





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## 12. Final Tips

- **Keep It Concise & Focused:** Limit your one-pager to the most essential information—brevity is key.
- **Proofread:** Ensure clarity and accuracy by reviewing for errors.
- **PDF Format:** Send the one-pager as a PDF to ensure formatting remains consistent.

## 13. Beyond the One-Pager

- **Follow-Up:** Keep in touch with legislators through emails, phone calls, and meetings to reinforce your message.
- **Stay Engaged:** Keep the issue on their radar and regularly provide updates on the progress of the programs you are advocating for.

One-Pager Title Examples: Here are a few general examples of how you might title and subtitle your one-pager. Feel free to adapt them to fit your personal story and tell them the specific needs you want to highlight:

| Title                                | Subtitle                                                                 |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Building Stronger Communities        | Supporting local solutions that help families thrive.                    |
| Expanding Opportunities for Families | Opening doors to education, jobs, and community resources.               |
| Strengthening Family Well-Being      | Ensuring families have what they need to succeed.                        |
| Increasing Access to Nutritious Food | Helping families stay healthy and strong through food security.          |
| Investing in Future Generations      | Empowering children and families through stable, supportive communities. |

### Easy One-Pager Structure Checklist

- ☒ Title & Subtitle
- ☒ Who You Are
- ☒ The Problem
- ☒ The Solution
- ☒ The Ask
- ☒ Contact Info
- ☒ Visuals





# Sample Letters, Emails, Phone Scripts, and Thank-You Messages



You don’t have to be an expert to speak up. Here are a few templates you can use to start a conversation with your elected officials—whether by email, letter, or phone.



### Sample Email or Letter

**Subject: Supporting Families in [Your Community]**

Dear [Representative's Name],  
My name is [Your Name], and I live in [Your County or Town]. I'm writing as someone who cares deeply about our community and the well-being of families like mine.  
One of the biggest challenges I face is [briefly describe the issue]. I believe that with the right support, families in our area can thrive.  
I’m asking you to support policies and programs that make a real difference—like those that improve access to [insert what the solution or resource you think will help]. These kinds of resources help families build stability and opportunity.

Thank you for taking the time to hear from your constituents. I’d be happy to speak more or answer questions.

Sincerely,  
[Your Full Name]  
[Your Address or ZIP Code]  
[Your Email or Phone (optional)]



### Sample Phone Script

Hello, my name is [Your Name], and I live in [Your County or ZIP Code]. I’m calling to ask [Legislator’s Name] to support policies that help families in our community thrive.

For example, many of us are struggling with [briefly describe the issue], and we need strong programs [or insert what the solution or resource you think will help] that provide real solutions.

Thank you for listening and for your service to our community.



### Sample Thank-You Message

Dear [Representative's Name],  
Thank you for taking the time to hear from your constituents. I appreciate your service and your attention to the needs of our community. I’m grateful for any opportunity to share how important it is that families have access to resources like [insert what the solution or resource you think will help].

Please let me know if you need any more information or would like to follow up.

Sincerely,  
[Your Full Name]  
[Your Address or ZIP Code]  
[Your Email or Phone (optional)]

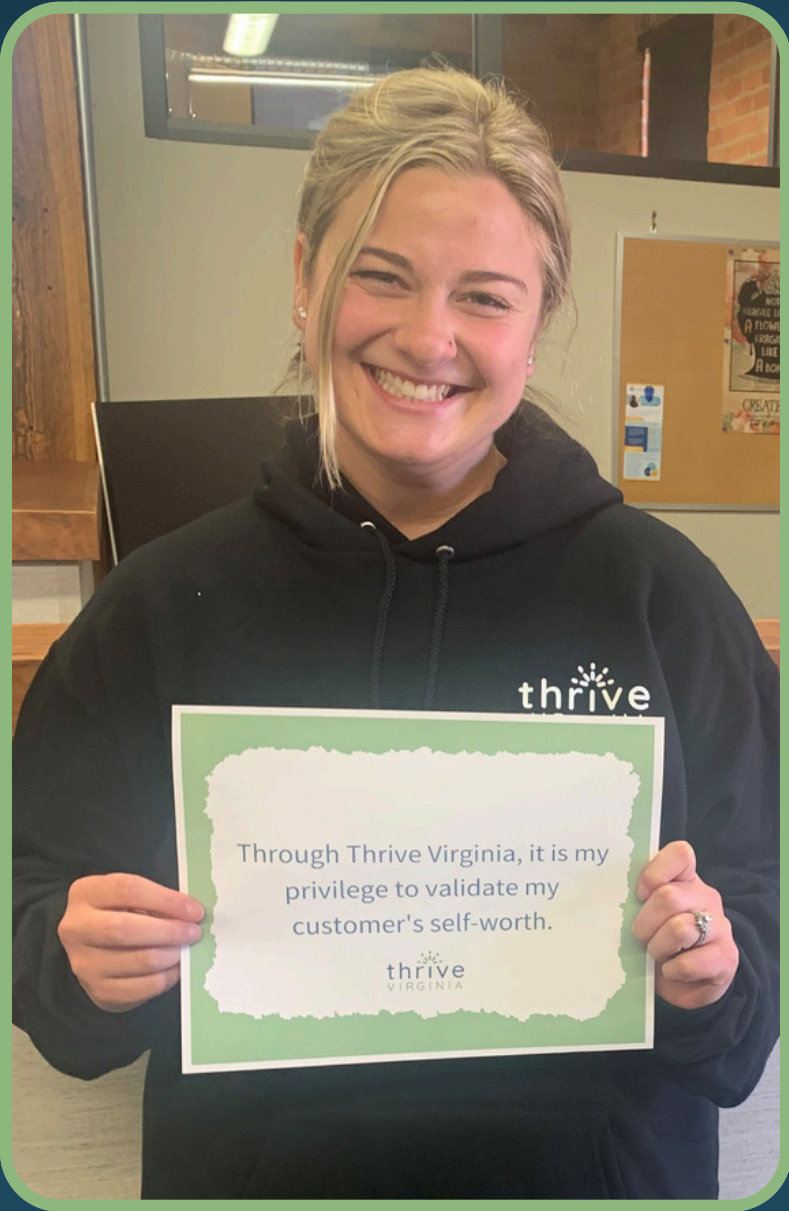


# Advocacy Terms You Should Know



| Term            | Meaning                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|-----------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Advocate        | Someone who speaks up for others                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| Advocacy        | The act of supporting, promoting, and defending a particular cause or issue                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| Bill            | A proposed new law                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Call to Action  | Advocacy often involves a specific “ask” or call to action, such as encouraging a leader or group to support a cause                                                                                                                                                            |
| Constituent     | Refers to community members represented by elected officials residing in a specific electoral district                                                                                                                                                                          |
| Legislator      | A person elected to make laws                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Outreach        | Refers to the act of reaching out or extending efforts to connect, engage, and provide information or support to a particular audience or community                                                                                                                             |
| Policy          | A government rule                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| Positive Change | The goal of advocacy is to create positive change, and it can take many forms                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Public Support  | Advocacy sometimes involves publicly supporting the interests of an individual, group, or cause. Examples include School Board Meetings, Board of Supervisor Meetings, Town Hall Meetings, committees, and other community meetings where public input is allowed or encouraged |
| Testimony       | A story shared to help leaders understand an issue                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |

**Note:** When visiting a community or government meeting to show public support, check their website or call beforehand to see if you must register or sign up to speak. This helps ensure that you will be allowed to speak at the meeting.





# Helpful Links and Resources



Here are some resources to help you find information, connect with local leaders, and stay informed:



Click the links below to learn more!

- **The Federal Legislative Process:** <https://www.house.gov/the-house-explained/the-legislative-process>
- **Virginia Department of Education Parent Resources:** <https://www.doe.virginia.gov/families>
- **State of Virginia Government Info:** <https://www.virginia.gov/state-government/>
- **Elected Federal, State, and Local Officials:** <https://www.usa.gov/elected-officials>
- **Find Your Local Board of Supervisors, Town/City Council, and School Boards:**
  - **Caroline County Board of Supervisors:** [Board of Supervisors](#) | [Caroline County VA](#)
  - **Caroline County School Board:** [School Board - Caroline County Public School](#)
  - **Charles City County Board of Supervisors:** [Board of Supervisors](#) | [Charles City County, VA](#)
  - **Charles City County School Board:** [Home](#) | [Charles City County Public Schools](#)
  - **Fredericksburg City Council:** [City Council](#) | [Fredericksburg, VA - Official Website](#)
  - **Fredericksburg City School Board:** [School Board](#) | [Fredericksburg City Public Schools](#)
  - **Hanover County Board of Supervisors:** [Board of Supervisors](#) | [Hanover County, VA](#)
  - **Hanover County School Board:** [School Board - Hanover County Public Schools](#)
  - **King George County Board of Supervisors:** [Board of Supervisors](#) | [King George County, VA](#)
  - **King George County School Board:** [School Board - King George County Schools](#)
  - **King William County Board of Supervisors:** [Board of Supervisors](#) | [King William County, VA](#)
  - **King William County School Board:** [School Board](#) | [King William County Public Schools](#)
  - **King & Queen County Board of Supervisors:** [Board of Supervisors - King and Queen County](#)
  - **King & Queen County School Board:** [King and Queen County School Board](#) | [King and Queen County Public Schools](#)
  - **New Kent County Board of Supervisors:** [Board of Supervisors](#) | [New Kent County, VA - Official Website](#)
  - **New Kent County School Board:** [School Board - New Kent County Public Schools](#)
  - **Spotsylvania County Board of Supervisors:** [Board of Supervisors](#) | [Spotsylvania County, VA](#)
  - **Spotsylvania County School Board:** [Members](#) | [Spotsylvania County Public Schools](#)
  - **Stafford County Board of Supervisors:** [Stafford County, VA](#)
  - **Stafford County School Board:** [School Board - Stafford County Public Schools](#)
  - **West Point Town Council:** [Welcome to West Point, VA](#)
  - **West Point School Board:** [Our School Board](#) | [West Point Public Schools](#)





# Thank you for sharing your story!

At Thrive Virginia, we believe every voice matters—especially yours.



At Thrive Virginia, advocacy means standing behind the voices of families who know their communities best. We believe that real solutions begin with the people who live and lead in their neighborhoods every day.

Our role isn't to speak for you—but to help create space where your voice is heard, your priorities are respected, and your leadership is honored.

We are proud to encourage you as you invest in your family's future and help strengthen your community, one voice at a time.

## Contact Us

We'd love to hear from you



**Main Phone:**  
804-362-6835



**Domestic and  
Sexual Violence Hotline:**  
877-966-4357



P.O. Box 529  
Sandston, VA 23150



[thriveva.org](http://thriveva.org)



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