



The Arc of Texas: Getting to the “Heart of the Matter”

Advocate Monthly To-Do List

Month 1 –Meet with other disability community groups and seek opportunities for collaboration. Identify local issues, build consensus, and strategize!

Action: Contact your local Mayor's Committee on Persons with Disabilities and attend a meeting to find out what issues are being discussed or addressed.

Tips: This is a great opportunity to volunteer and/or to organize a committee around disability issues if one is not already formed.

Month 2 –Visit local legislative office(s)!

Action: Call to set up an appointment. Introduce yourself and group of advocates. Invite them to a community meeting and ask them to speak about how to communicate with legislators.

Tips: Be prepared for a short meeting, possibly with the legislator's staff/aide. Be polite and respectful, but be clear and direct on why you are there. **Tips:** Maintain good eye contact, give a firm handshake, and dress professional but comfortable.

Month 3 –Contact one media outlet (television station, newspaper, local community magazine).

Action: Introduce yourself and your group. Ask how stories are developed for their medium. Get to know the editor and reporters and maintain good communication.

Tips: Invite them to one of your group's community meetings that a representative from a local legislative office is attending. **Tips:** Offer to write an article about successes/concerns in your community. Agree to an interview with local television, and ask for free public announcement in the newspaper about scheduled meetings.

Month 4 –Join local, state, and federal disability organizations' listservs!

Action: Google search on the internet for “disability organizations”.

Tips: Participate in action alerts. Review what types of advocacy tools the listservs discuss or suggest. Poll other advocates to see how many have internet access or e-mail accounts. Discuss how your advocate group can better use email and the internet to communicate between advocates and with decision makers on issues of importance.

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Month 5 -Host an Informal Chat!

Action: Invite a small group of advocates to your home and provide light refreshments. Identify issues of importance at hand and get feedback from group.

Tips: Rotate meeting locations; keep it informal but on topic and informative. Provide writing materials and designate an advocate to take notes or develop a problem solving chart with an action plan. Everyone loves a party, so keep the atmosphere light and respectful to encourage on going group participation.

Month 6 -Visit an institution (State School, Nursing Home, Etc.).

Action: Contact superintendent/supervisor in charge of facility to inquire about visitor rules. Invite facility staff to participate and learn about self-advocacy. Invite self advocates to participate.

Tips: Maintain respect for the facility and its members/residents, while encouraging a 'safe' environment for participation. Support the self-advocate by volunteering to be their advocate. Discuss the importance of perseverance while trying to make systemic changes.

Month 7 -Organize a voter registration drive!

Action: Contact the League of Women Voters/County Clerk's Office to find out about the voting process. Volunteer to work at election polls. Begin a campaign to help people with disabilities exercise their right to vote!

Tips: Work with other disability groups to organize "Get Out The Vote" campaign. Register people with disabilities, as well as students that may have reached voting age. Sponsor community trainings to inform people with disabilities about their voting rights.

Month 8 -Start a self-advocacy group.

Action: Meet with your local MHMR Center to identify possible participants and/or Community Providers. Attend provider meetings or a Provider Fair to discuss goals of self-advocacy. Coordinate face to face meetings with participants.

Tips: Once your self-advocacy group is formed, hold meetings in centrally located places such as libraries that also have access to buildings and to public transportation. Encourage self-advocates to lead the group and ask for their input on issues that affect their lives. Encourage self-advocates to visit with their legislators and to attend other community meetings or hearings.

Month 9 -Host a letter writing campaign on issues important to your advocate group!

Action: Use samples provided by organization handbooks, such as The Arc of Texas <http://www.thearcoftexas.org/advocacy/publications.asp#handbook>. Write your own letter! Be sure to include a bill number and sponsor if writing about legislation. Make copies of letters and any responses and keep in correspondence file for you your group!

Tips: Familiarize yourself with the timing of the communications. Be sure they are timed in relation to the decision maker's timeline (i.e. not after a decision has already been made). Most decision makers will remember an influx of letters and respond accordingly to their constituent's request.

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Month 10 -Attend community/public hearings.

Action: Volunteer to speak/serve on panel and/or sign up to provide public comment. Be sure to keep your remarks short.

Tips: Be prepared! Holding a 'mock hearing' beforehand to practice your message is a great idea, especially for people who don't usually speak at hearings. Arrive early to familiarize yourself with the meeting room, agenda, and also to discuss any last minute ideas with your group.

Month 11 -Attend and monitor community meetings.

Action: Monitor School Board meetings for special education issues. Observe city council meetings for issues like housing, transportation, employment. Check the web for state meetings (i.e. DARS, DADS) to learn about issues like budgets, program rules and legislative action.

Tips: Contact organizations or agencies for dates, location, and time of meetings. Keep an updated calendar for the group and send out reminders. There is power in numbers so attend meetings in groups to bring attention to your mission.

Month 12 -Participate in focus groups!

Action: Volunteer to help moderate the discussion.

Tips: Know and understand the issues at hand and ask open ended questions. Recruit participants with different view-points and don't pre-judge. A good moderator will keep the group focused by asking how the group feels about an issue. Keep the group small but invest time in the planning process in order to get the right people to participate.

OTHER RESOURCES: To find your legislators, go to <http://www.capitol.state.tx.us/fyi/fyi.htm>.
For Texas Government resources, go to www.txdirectory.com.

*If you have any questions or need additional information, visit The Arc of Texas Website
(www.thearcoftexas.org) or contact
Pat Alvarez, Local Advocacy Grant Coordinator, The Arc of Texas
1-800-252-9729 or palvarez@thearcoftexas.org.*