

Project MOVE: 2015 Advocacy Toolkit

# ADVOCACY AND YOU



## Project MOVE: 2015 Advocacy Toolkit

# ADVOCACY AND YOU

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***I'm not an advocate for disability issues.  
Human issues are what interest me.***

- Aimee Mullins

Project MOVE: Advocacy Toolkit

# HOW TO BE AN ADVOCATE

(Part 1 of 4)

## **PART 1: HOW TO BE AN ADVOCATE**

- **Being an Advocate**
- **The Importance of Advocacy -  
Finding Your Voice in Four Steps**

# How to Be an Advocate

**Are You an Advocate?** Think you don't have what it takes? Think again! You don't need formal training to become an advocate. There are just a few basic things you need to know to be effective with your advocacy. The only "special skills" needed by successful advocates are:

- Knowledge of the system in which you are going to advocate
- Knowledge of the issue(s)
- Personal commitment to the issue(s)
- Knowing when, why and how to communicate with the people who make things happen

But how does advocacy work? There are four main ways that advocacy happens. It happens when people:

## Communicate

When advocates communicate with each other about what they care about, and then with the person or persons who can make that issue a reality, progress starts to happen. It all starts with communication of what we want, why we want it, and what we want to happen because of the issue.

## Collaborate

Working together makes things easier to move forward. We can't do everything alone, and none of us has all the answers. But when we collaborate, or work with others, we share the work and increase the impact of our advocacy. There is strength in numbers. Decision makers have many issues and people to respond to, so the more people who focus on the same issue, the more likely a decision maker is to listen to YOUR ISSUE.

## Influence

The whole point of advocacy is to influence someone to make a change. When we advocate, we work to influence a person or persons to help us win our issue, and fix problems we see in our communities. We influence decision makers by having "power". Power in politics can be money, votes, or other things that make the decision maker side with you instead of the opposition. It is typically not enough to be "right". If we only had to be "right", we would not need to learn how to advocate.

## Impact

None of those things matter if advocacy doesn't have an impact. And we mean a positive impact—one that will help people live better lives in the ways that mean something to them, their families, friends, and ultimately whole communities.

**Are You Ready?** Are YOU an advocate?

Your turn! Take the following steps to begin your advocacy journey.

**Communicate!** Contact 3 of your friends, family or other community members and tell them what you care about. Find out if they care about it, too.

**Collaborate!** Meet with 3 people who you know also care about your issue. Find out if they have worked to make a positive change in that area, or if they want to work together on making a change. Talk to them about making a plan to get more people involved.

*I learned a long time ago  
the wisest thing I can do  
is be on my own side, be  
an advocate for myself  
and others like me.*

- Maya Angelou

**Influence!** Who can make the change to the issue you care about? With your collaboration of advocates, contact that person and ask them to help make a change. Work with others who also care about the issue to convince that person to help make a positive change. Advocates do not generally have the money and resources to “win” in politics. Votes are just as important as power, if not more important. That is where your influence as advocates is key.

**Impact!** Tell your community about the impact this issue can have for everyone involved. Help neighbors, friends, community members, and others understand the impact of this issue on them as well. Show what that impact looks like through going through these steps again—communicate about the issue, collaborate with others to make a change, influence those who can make a change happen, and continue to show the positive impact the issue can have on communities.

# The Importance of Advocacy

## Find Your Voice in Four Steps

The importance of advocacy and all of the great things it can accomplish cannot be stated enough. People know that it’s important, but are not sure how to get started when they have something that they care about and want to make a change.

To find your voice, begin with these four steps!

### Caring

What do you care about? In advocacy, it’s about focusing those things you care about into things you can impact alone or with others; things you can change now or in the future.

Once you know WHAT you care about, tell others WHY you care about it. Be specific about what it is you care about and why.

Then, do you want this issue to change for the better? Of course you do! Then you have to say so; advocacy is you having a say-so in whether these things happen.

List here the things that you care about:

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- \_\_\_\_\_

## Sharing

Now that you've decided what you care about, why you care about it, and what you want to change about it, tell others about it! Sharing your story with those who also care about your issue is an important step toward making a positive change. This builds your power and increases your chance of "winning".

Some ways you can find others who care about your issue may include at community meetings, through emails with friends and family, using social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram), at your work place, or in your faith communities.

Tell your story in one short paragraph here:

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## Acting

Acting means speaking up as a group, and working to get things done.

This is the time to work together to create a plan of action. This plan of action, otherwise known as an advocacy strategy, allows you to turn your advocacy from "me" to "we".

Your job as an advocate is to not only use personal experience to help make your point, but to get others to care enough to do something about it, too. Your issue needs to be able to be communicated in a way that someone NOT connected to the disability community would care about the issue. Remember, your issues compete with thousands of other issues from immigration to highways. Help others want to act on your issue as well.

What are the first 3 things you plan to do to help win your issue:

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

## Impacting

Where do you want your issue to have the most impact? Only in your community, or in other parts of the state and country, too?

Connect with others to create impact across the state. Look at what other states are doing about the issue. Stay connected to other groups who care about your issue, too, and commit to work together to make change happen.

Who will you connect with to get them to support and act on your issue?

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Now that you've taken the first steps toward advocacy, where will you go next?

To **Putting Advocacy into Action**, of course!

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# PUTTING ADVOCACY INTO ACTION

(Part 2 of 4)

## **PART 2: PUTTING ADVOCACY INTO ACTION**

- **Who's in Charge Here?**  
**The Texas Legislative Structure**
- **How Does A Bill Become A Law in Texas?**

# Who's in Charge Here?

## Texas Legislative Structure

**Who can say "YES"?** How do advocates know who is in charge of making the issue happen? These people who have the power to say "yes" to our issues are known as "decision makers".

To impact change here in Texas, many times we focus our advocacy efforts on state legislative leaders. Knowing the legislative leadership structure in the state is key to making things happen in this important system.

### 3 Branches of Texas State Government

In order to be effective advocates in Texas, knowing how the system is structured is important. This knowledge can help advocates understand who, how, and when to act in trying to make change happen for issues they care about.

The 3 branches of government include:

#### 1. Legislative

The legislative branch is the arm of government that makes laws. This branch is made up of elected officials, all of whom are accountable to the citizens who elect them. Their job is to listen to people in their district and work to pass and maintain laws that benefit the citizens in their part of the state, as well as all citizens in Texas.

Do you know who your elected officials are? Check [www.capitol.state.tx.us](http://www.capitol.state.tx.us) to find out!

#### 2. Executive

The Governor is the head of the Executive branch of state government. The Governor is elected by voters in the state, and is also accountable to the people who elected him/her. Advocates can have an impact by understanding the Governor's efforts and working with the office to move issues forward.

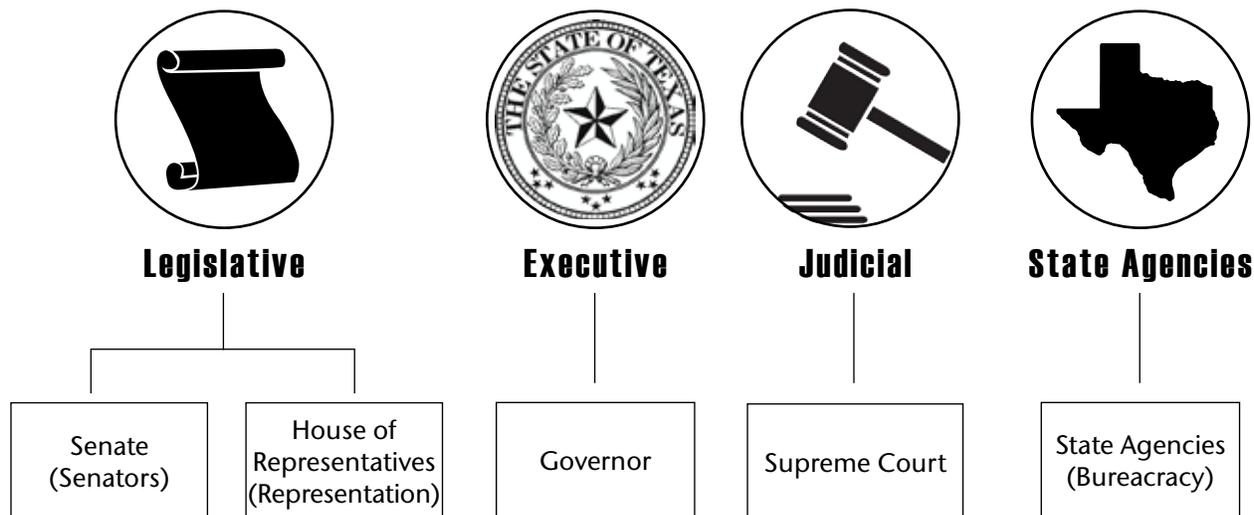
Do you know how to contact the Governor about why your issue is important?

Check [www.gov.texas.gov/contact](http://www.gov.texas.gov/contact) to find out how to contact the Governor!

#### 3. Judicial

The Judicial branch of government is made up of different courts, with the Texas Supreme Court being the highest court. This branch is important when working to ensure that laws in place or that are passed do what they are intended to do. Advocates can work to make sure that others know about these efforts, and to support efforts to make sure that laws are being interpreted in the way they were intended to be put into action.

#### "Unofficial" 4th Branch



To see how an issue can be turned into laws that improve the lives of people with disabilities, check out the diagram below. What would YOUR issue look like in this situation?

## ADVOCACY PLAN OF ACTION



### 1. Goals

- Long Term
- Intermediate
- Short Term



### 2. Your Organization

- Resources
- Building Leadership
- Problems to Consider



### 3. Constituency

- Who else cares?
- How are they organized?
- What power do they have?
- Who will challenge you?



### 4. Decision Makers

- Primary: Who has the power to say “yes”?
- Secondary: Who has power over the decision maker?
- How can you influence both decision makers?



### 5. Actions

- What will you do to get the Primary Decision Maker’s attention?
- What will you do to get the community’s attention and get them to act?



### 6. Timelines and Leaders

- When will each action need to happen?
- Who will be responsible for making that action happen?

PUTTING ADVOCACY INTO ACTION

***Remember! Changes can happen at any point during the plan!***

Begin to fill out this blank diagram with your issue. This can help you decide what to do next to get your issue moving with the Texas legislative process.

## ADVOCACY PLAN OF ACTION



PUTTING ADVOCACY INTO ACTION

### 1. Goals

### 2. Your Organization

### 3. Constituency



### 4. Decision Makers

### 5. Actions

### 6. Timelines and Leaders

Advocate power comes from understanding the process, who can give us what we want, and how to impact change in our issues!

**Ideas!** There are so many out there. And those ideas have potential to make a difference for more than just one advocate, or one family. Those ideas, if made into a law, can impact so many more in the state. Your ideas are one of the keys to change in your state!

The ideas for new or improved laws come from 3 primary sources:

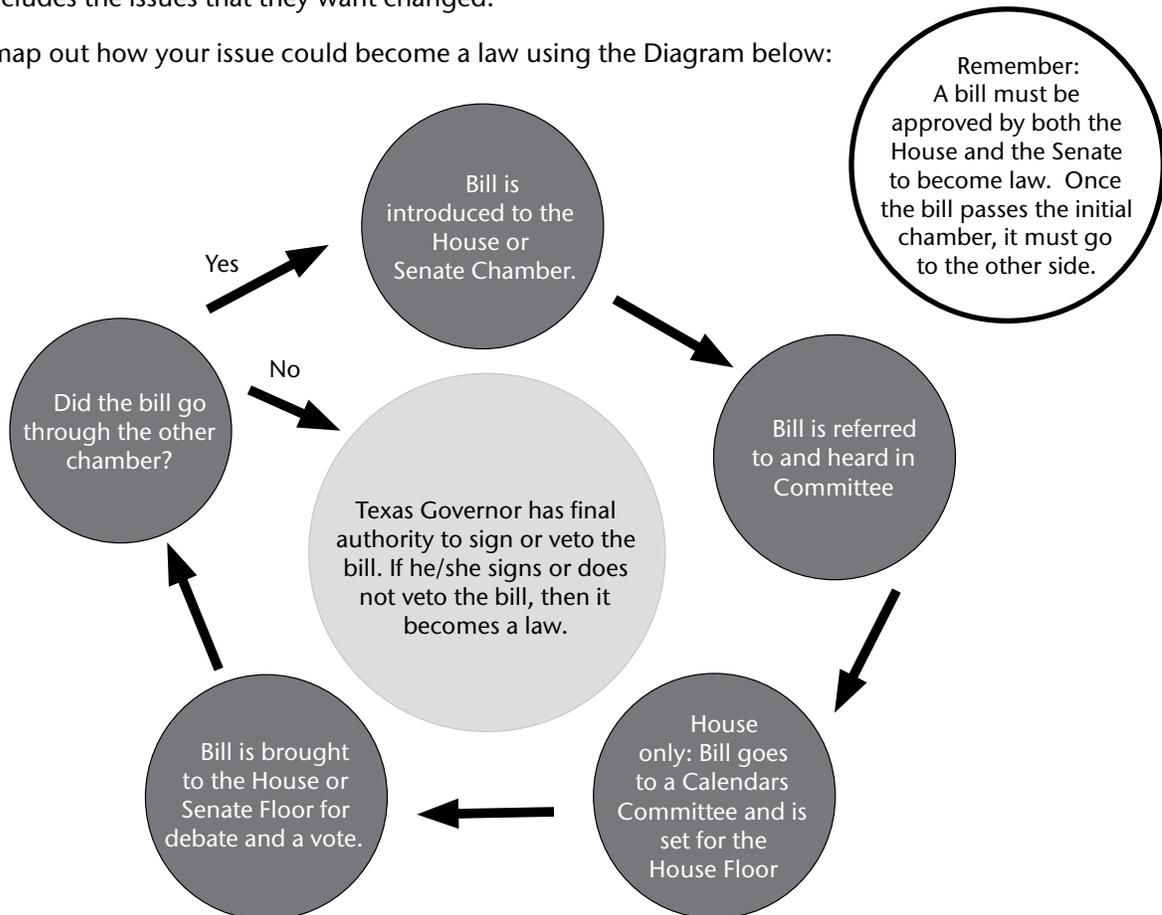
**1. Constituents** People who vote for the legislators have ideas for laws. That means you! Your ideas and issues, when presented to the right decision-making body like the legislature, helps define what Bills are introduced, voted on, and hopefully become laws.

**2. Legislators** They care about issues, too! Advocates work with legislators and their staff to craft Bills, and help them gain support from other sources to make those Bills become laws. Go to [capitol.state.tx.us](http://capitol.state.tx.us) to find your state legislator.

**3. Other states** Legislators pay attention to issues in other states, and sometimes take examples from them. They may see something on the news, or read about a law from another state in the newspaper or online. If they like the ideas behind those bills and laws, they work with legislators in other states to replicate similar Bills in their state. Check [ncsl.org/research/telecommunications-and-information-technology/ncsl-50-state-searchable-bill-tracking-databases.aspx](http://ncsl.org/research/telecommunications-and-information-technology/ncsl-50-state-searchable-bill-tracking-databases.aspx) to search for bills in other states that have to do with health care, disability, education, and other issues you may care about.

When advocates have an idea for a new Bill, they work with legislators and their staff to build a relationship that helps ensure that the legislator supports the same thing that advocates support. (see Tool Kit on Getting Decision Makers to Act) Once that relationship is created, advocates work to help write the Bill in a way that includes the issues that they want changed.

Start to map out how your issue could become a law using the Diagram below:



**A bill can be modified from the time it is filed until the bill becomes law.**

For more detailed information on the legislative process, visit the Texas Legislature Online at [www.legis.state.tx.us](http://www.legis.state.tx.us)

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# BUILDING POWER THROUGH ADVOCACY

(Part 3 of 4)

BUILDING POWER THROUGH ADVOCACY

## **PART 3: BUILDING POWER THROUGH ADVOCACY**

- **Planning a Winning Strategy**
- **Ready Aim Fire! Planning for Your Advocacy**
- **Increasing Your Voice Working in Coalitions**
- **Making Your Voice Heard**

# Planning a Winning Strategy

**Acting** with a clear path toward clear goals can be the key to winning real improvement in people's lives. Like planning for any activity, planning an advocacy strategy requires some important pieces. Those pieces need to follow a path to ensure success. These steps, to be planned in order, include:

**STEP 1:** Goal—what is it you want to accomplish? Be clear. Be sure you define your issue well so that you and other advocates know what it looks like when you have won the issue (see *How To Be An Advocate* Part 1).

**STEP 2:** Resource Check—what resources do you have to get to your goals? Do you have enough money, or volunteers, or other tools at your disposal to get you where you want to go? If not, do you have a plan on how you will gain those things during your effort to win your issue? Be specific. If you have 10 volunteers willing to work toward winning the issue, how will you increase the number of advocates dedicated to the issue by the end of the effort?

**STEP 3:** Partners—who else cares about the issue? Are there other groups who will also want to support your issue and devote resources to helping you win?

**STEP 4:** Decision Makers—as has been stated in earlier tool kits, be sure to know who can say “yes” at each step of your efforts. Knowing who can help you win the issue is critical in making sure that the next steps are aimed properly.

**STEP 5:** Actions—these are the things you and other advocates are going to do to get the attention—and support—of the decision maker. It may be establishing a Facebook page for the issue, building the number of people who support the page (and the issue), and using it to get advocates to act (like send a letter, make a phone call, or show up for a community event).

**STEP 6:** Timeline & Leaders—this is the set of deadlines you and other advocates will assign to making sure the actions happen in the right order, toward the right decision makers, with the right partners, with the known resources, to win the issue. It also determines who in your group of advocates will take the lead in making those actions happen. It's all connected.

This strategy plan includes can be found following page

Use the example plan to start to develop your strategy to win your issue. If you started your plan in the last section, continue here. If not, begin now!

*Progress is impossible without change...*

- George Bernard Shaw

# ADVOCACY PLAN OF ACTION



## 1. Goals

- What's your goal? *(i.e. Increase special education funding by 25% next year.)*
- Are there intermediate "wins" to be had? *(i.e. 10% next year, and the other 15% the following year?)*
- What short term goals do you have? *(i.e. gain support of teacher's union)*



## 2. Your Organization

- What can you bring to the fight? *(i.e. dedicated project staff, number of members, budget for plan)*
- How will you grow during efforts? *(i.e. gain # of new members, create new partners)*
- Problems to Consider *(i.e. project staff leaving in 4 months, budget plan being cut, teacher's union president stepping down)*



## 3. Constituency

- Who else cares?
- How are they organized?
- What power do they have?
- Who will challenge you?



## 4. Decision Makers

- Primary: Who has the power to say "yes"?
- Secondary: Who has power over the decision maker?
- How can you influence both



## 5. Actions

- What will you do to get the Primary Decision Maker's attention?
- What will you do to get the community's attention and get them to act?



## 6. Timelines and Leaders

- When will each action need to happen?
- Who will be responsible for making that action happen?

## Notes

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# Ready Aim Fire

## Texas Legislative Structure

**Having a plan is key in your advocacy success.** Think of it like the old phrase “Ready, Aim, Fire”. Those three steps are important in plans for any action in life, and particularly so in advocacy. Advocates need a clear picture of what you want, whether you think you can hit the mark, and whether it’s the right mark. These important steps—in this order—are all key in ensuring progress, and hopefully advocacy success.

### READY

**Getting ready means knowing your issue.** When advocates get together and decide that change is needed, it’s important to know how to define the issue so that everyone involved in making it happen understands it, but also makes it easy for others outside of the effort can understand. The issue is measurable. It means defining it in a way that you will know when you’ve won it.

How do advocates do that? It’s a simple equation. **The issue is defined as the gap between the problem and the solution.** For instance, a group of parents got together and determined that their kids needed more one-on-one support to be successful in regular education classrooms. The **PROBLEM** is that the kids aren’t getting the support they need. The **SOLUTION** is that the school district needs to provide more one-on-one aides for kids in classrooms.

But the **ISSUE** is what advocates are asking for to get to the solution. These advocates find out, through their research (getting READY), that the school district doesn’t have enough money budgeted for the one-on-one classrooms aides the kids need.

In this important preparation phase, advocates also find out that the classroom aides, who are in short supply, also agree with parents that there need to be more one-on-one supports available to students. These aides are part of a teacher’s union, which has an effort to increase funding to support classrooms supports for ALL students—not just those in special education. **That means that their efforts may also include what parent advocates want.** They contact the local union representative, and the groups agree to work together, sharing resources and volunteers to get what they want.

### AIM

As the advocates determine that they need to advocate to the school superintendent, who works to create a proposed budget, they **AIM** to ask the superintendent to increase funding for one-on-one aides in each school in the district to meet the needs spelled out in student Individualized Education Programs. **This is the ISSUE.** It’s measurable, it’s easy to understand, and it has a clear target.

Now is the time in the plan to get specific about when advocates want the issue solved, how they want it fixed, and what they are going to do to make the issue heard and addressed.

In this advocacy example, the parent advocates want the school superintendent to include an increase in the budget for the next school year earmarked for one-on-one aides for kids in special education in the district. Advocates want the increase to be 20% above the current level, which they have determined would solve the problem being seen by families right now.

Advocates know from their work in the “READY” phase that the superintendent has to present a budget to the school board in two months’ time. That means that advocates are “AIMING” to get their message to the superintendent in the next six weeks. These advocates are now ready to act—or move to the “FIRE” phase.

### FIRE!

Advocates have readied themselves with information about the current lack of classroom support for their kids, and know that the superintendent is the person who can help move their issue toward a solution by budgeting for more funds to hire additional classroom support. Now, they need to take their message to the superintendent.

Working with the teacher’s union, and the parents of other kids who would benefit from this increase in school funding, the **advocates have a great shot** at getting the attention of the superintendent—and winning the issue they worked so hard to define and win.

# Increasing Your Voice

## Working In Coalitions

It's turning your advocacy from "me" to "we. If your efforts to win your issue are strong, imagine what working with others can accomplish. Working together to have a bigger impact is called working in coalition.

A coalition is a group of people, or more specifically a group of groups, who work together to affect change on issues of importance. Working in coalition is about increasing the impact of your voice. It adds to your advocacy by giving you the chance to:

- Share the workload
- Share resources
- Share leadership

But how do you find others who also care about your issue? Look around your community. When you consider your issue, ask yourself these questions:

**1.** Are there other groups working on the same or similar issues? Are they willing to work with you and your group of advocates? List those potential partner groups here:

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**2.** Do you know anything about those groups already, or do you need to introduce yourself to them? If you already know them, then approach them to share resources to win the issue. If you don't know them yet, you can use your issue as a way to help them become familiar with you and what you want. List here how you will approach these groups (email, phone call, attending one of their community meetings):

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**3.** How are they organized? Do they have a specific way to become a member of the group (for instance, a teacher's union), or can anyone join them? If they have limited membership, in what ways do they work with other groups, and can you work with those groups? List here how these potential coalition partners are organized and how you might be able to access their group's resources:

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**4.** How many people do they have in their group who also care about what your issue? When you are working with groups that have large numbers, those numbers can work in your favor, too. Numbers mean things to decision makers. They need to know that making a change like the one you may be asking for with your issue will make a difference to more than one person. Basically, how deep is your issue going to impact your community, and how many more people will be helped when it is won? List the potential impact your issue can have, as well as the number of people that can be reached in your potential coalition partner's group:

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**5.** Do they have power that your group doesn't? Other groups, like your group of advocates, all have something to bring to the table. It's about sharing those resources, power, and influence so that everyone comes out with a "win" at the end of your efforts. Do other groups already have power over the decision maker or issue that you don't have yet? Are there skills that your group brings that the others don't have? List the power and/or skills that your potential coalition partner group may have that you need to win your issue:

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Working in coalition gives you the chance to win something that you may not otherwise be able to win alone. Look back at your answers to these questions and begin to see your path to working with other groups, and forming a coalition to impact your issue. This is the next step in planning for your advocacy actions!

***Do you want to know who you are?  
Don't ask. Act!  
Action will...define you.***

- Thomas Jefferson

# Making Your Voice Heard

## Targeting & Messaging

Advocates can talk about change all day long, but unless they are using their message and efforts to change the minds of the people in power, it's all for nothing. It's not enough to be right, but about being convincing in your argument for why your issue needs to be changed. It's about making sure that the person who has the power to say "yes" not only hears you, but listens, understands, and then ACTS to help make that change happen.

**1.** Know who can help you win your issue. If we are talking about an issue that can be won at the state level, and can be won through the state legislative process, then know who can give you what you want within that process.

**2.** Know when the decision maker may change. At different times in your advocacy actions, the "win" you may be working toward can change.

**3.** Know the process, and where your issue stands in that process. Once you and your fellow advocates know that, then you can direct your message to the right people at the right times.

**4.** Know your target audience. If you want to get someone to vote for a bill that is in the education committee, don't ask for the support of someone who is not on that committee. You need to target your message to people who have the power to give you what you want, when you want it. (Click here for a list of committees in the Texas House, and here for a list of committees in the Texas Senate)

When targeting a certain decision maker, consider finding out the answers to questions such as:

- Which legislative district do they represent?
- Do you know advocates in that district?
- Do you know other advocate partners in that district?
- Can you find out whether that person also has family members who would be impacted by the issue?
- Can you find out who the largest donors were to their last campaign? Do you know any of those donors who may help you get messages to the decision maker?

## Get Their Attention

There are many ways that advocates can get the attention of a decision maker. The possible ways to get their attention and tell them what you want them to do about your issue can include direct communications like:

- Phone calls
- Emails
- Letters
- Face-to-Face Meetings
- Offering testimony in front of a legislative committee

There are also indirect ways to get their attention. Those communications can include:

- Press coverage (television, radio, newspaper)
- Social media (Facebook, Twitter, online news, blogs)
- Community events (press conferences, rallies, town meetings)

## Get Them to “YES”

If we don't ASK the decision maker to do something to help us win the issue, it's all for nothing. That's why it's so important to make sure that any communication, whether in person, online, or through community efforts, ends with asking the decision maker to DO something to win the issue.

Answer these questions to take the next steps in activating your advocacy:

- What is your issue?

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- Who is the decision maker?

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- Who do you know who can help you get your message to the decision maker?

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- What are you going to ask them to do about your issue?

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- How are you going to ask for their support?

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Once you have these questions answered, take a look at the great planning you've done with these toolkits. You are now ready to get out there and advocate!

Project MOVE: Advocacy Toolkit

# ADDENDUMS

(Part 4 of 4)

## **PART 4: ADDENDUMS**

- **Finding Your Issue - A Worksheet**
- **Writing to Legislators**
- **Examples of Public Communications**
- **Contact Your Legislator or Relevant State Agency**

# Finding Your Issue

## A Worksheet

**Issues** are defined as the gap between the problem and the desired solution. An example of this is that an advocate determines that the problem they see is that their child isn't getting the support they need in the classroom. The solution, of course, is that the school provides more in-classroom support to make sure kids are successful in their education. The problem is identified to be that there is not enough money in the budget to get to the solution.

The gap—or issue—is that the schools need more funding to support kids in the classroom. The issue is: Advocates want the school superintendent to budget an additional \$500,000 for in-room supports for kids who get special education services. Advocates will know exactly when they have “won” the issue when the money is budgeted and the kids get the support they need. It's specific, and easy to understand not only to the decision maker, but to other advocates who may also care about the issue.

Sharing this information will help inform your legislators and the public about the issues individuals with disabilities face. You can write about anything you like. Here are some ideas to get you started.

- The problem I see is:

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- The solution to that problem is:

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- The issue is:

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- This issue affects me in this way:

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- Having the issue won could change my life by:

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- My struggles when this issue isn't fixed are:

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- I want to share this experience with you because:

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- My hopes for the future are:

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Use this information as your road map to how you talk to decision makers about your issue!

# How to Be an Advocate

**When writing to your legislator**, whether it's in a letter or an email, follow these simple steps to help you make your point easily and clearly.

1. Identify yourself, and mention you are a constituent, if you are one.
2. Identify the issue/bill you are concerned about. Add any reason(s) you may have for a special interest in the issue/bill, such as how many people are impacted by the issue.
3. Try to be specific about what you would like the legislator to do. Refer to or include information about specific bills or legislation if you know about it.
4. Thank the legislator for her/his time and interest.
5. Include your name and address, and your phone number if you want them to contact you or follow up.

If you are sending printed letters to legislators, be sure to address the letters correctly to ensure your message reaches them. When addressing letters to legislators, use the following formats:

**Governor:**

The Honorable (Full Name)  
Governor of Texas  
State Capitol  
P.O. Box 12428  
Austin, Texas 78711-2428

Dear Governor \_\_\_\_\_:

**Lieutenant Governor:**

The Honorable (Full Name)  
Lieutenant Governor of Texas  
State Capitol  
P.O. Box 12428  
Austin, Texas 78711-2428

Dear Lieutenant Governor \_\_\_\_\_:

**Speaker of the House:**

The Honorable (Full Name)  
Speaker of the House  
Texas House of Representatives  
P.O. Box 2910  
Austin, TX 78768-2910

Dear Speaker \_\_\_\_\_:

**Senator:**

The Honorable (Full Name)  
Texas Senate  
P.O. Box 12068, Capitol Station  
Austin, TX 78711

Dear Senator \_\_\_\_\_:

**State Representative:**

The Honorable (Full Name)  
Texas House of Representatives  
P.O. Box 2910  
Austin, TX 78768-2910

Dear Representative \_\_\_\_\_:

[District addresses for each state legislator can be found at <http://www.fyi.legis.state.tx.us/Home.asp>]

# Sample Letter to Legislator

March 25, 2015

The Honorable Hubert Harris  
Texas Senate  
P.O. Box 12068, Capitol Station  
Austin, TX 78711

Dear Senator Harris:

Where do you live? Do you live in a home in your local community? Are you near friends and family, work and place of worship? What would you do if you were told that you had to leave the security of your home, and live in a large building with people you didn't know? What if this place was hundreds of miles away from your family and community? Would you fight for the chance to live where you wanted?

That's what ### of Texans are faced with every day. No choice in where they will live; no choice in how they will be involved with people they love; no choice in how their lives will be managed by others.

I am a voter in your district, and my family lives with this heartbreaking choice every day. I have a 27 year old daughter with disabilities, and she lives with us right now. But because she has to wait years for the support she needs to continue living in the community that you and I live in, she and our family may be forced to make an unthinkable choice; she may have no choice but to move far away and live in an institutional setting just to get the support she needs to subsist.

Texas is a great state with a great history of embracing liberty and promoting choice for those lucky enough to live here. But not in this area. Texas falls far behind so many other states in giving citizens a choice, and it's time to change that. It's time for you and other state leaders to give Texans the choice to live in the community and not be forced into institutional settings hundreds of miles away from their homes. This can happen if you vote to increase state funding for Medicaid Waiver programs, and reduce the decade-long waiting list for people who want the choice to live in the community.

For decades, The Arc of Texas has worked actively with state agencies and the Legislature to increase state funding for these Medicaid Waiver programs to reduce the massive Waiting Lists. We ask you to support Senate Bill 000 TODAY to give all Texans the chance to live in local community settings.

I stand ready to talk with you more about the importance of this critical issue. I look forward to knowing your position on SB 000, and will follow up with you and your staff in the coming week. Thank you for your continued service to our district.

Sincerely,

Mrs. Susie Brown  
89 North Boundary Road  
Temple, TX 12345  
(254) 555-0000  
Susie.brown@internetprovider.tx

## Sample Testimony (Example 1)

Senate Health and Human Services Committee Support for SB 1881:  
Supported Decision-Making Agreements  
Jessaca Bond, The Arc of Texas  
April 8, 2015

Dear Senators,

My name is Jessaca Bond and I live in San Antonio, Texas. I am a self-advocate. I serve as a Project Advisory Committee member for The Arc of Texas. I am with the San Antonio League of Self-Advocates and the Texas Advocates. We are people with intellectual disabilities. I am also a Board Member of the Down Syndrome Association of South Texas.

I am my own guardian. People with disabilities have the right to make their own decisions just as much as the next person. My parents support me to make my own choices. They help me make decisions on things like my medical care, where to live, what purchases to make, transportation, and working and volunteering in my community. They help me, but they do not make the decisions for me.

I have the ability and the right to make my own decisions, with support from people I trust. Please support this bill.

Thank you,

Jessaca Bond

## Sample Testimony (Example 2)

Senate Business and Commerce Committee  
Written Testimony on SB 1664 (Sen. Perry) to Establish the Texas ABLÉ Program  
Amy Mizcles, The Arc of Texas  
Executive Director  
April 1, 2015

My name is Amy Mizcles, and I am Executive Director of The Arc of Texas. The Arc of Texas has been advocating for and with individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) for over sixty (60) years. The Arc of Texas advocates for including people with intellectual and developmental disabilities in all aspects of society.

I am writing to express The Arc of Texas's support for the philosophy behind the Achieving a Better Life Experience, or ABLÉ, program. The ABLÉ program would allow many individuals with disabilities to save money in tax-free savings accounts as a supplement to other forms of income. We support the increased independence and self-direction of people with disabilities that can come through their ability to save money for their futures.

We have been working with Senator Perry over the last several weeks and sincerely appreciate his willingness to listen to all stakeholders on this important issue. As we shared with Senator Perry, The Arc of Texas believes that it is crucial that sufficient safeguards are put in place during implementation of the Texas ABLÉ program to protect individuals with disabilities and their benefits. One way to achieve this goal is to develop and ensure a strong role for the ABLÉ Account Advisory Committee in program implementation. It is also vital that this Committee has representation from the disability community, including individuals with disabilities, their family members, and professional advocates. We also appreciate Senator Perry's willingness to make technical changes to ensure the ABLÉ program and benefit programs work toward their intended effect.

The Arc of Texas supports SB 1664 with the changes discussed with Senator Perry's office.

If you have any questions or need additional information, do not hesitate to contact me at your convenience.

Amy Mizcles, LMSW  
Executive Director  
amizcles@thearcoftexas.org  
512-454-6694 ext. 7736

# Examples of Public Communication

## Sample Press Release

The Arc of Texas, Diana Jimenez, (555) 444-1234

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Governor signs landmark law to redesign health care and Long Term Services & Supports for people with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities.

Governor Rick Perry signed SB 7, authored by Senator Jane Nelson, June 14, 2013. The new law means there will be sweeping changes to the system that provides health care and long-term services and supports (LTSS) to thousands of Texans with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD).

The main goal of SB 7 is to give more people health care and LTSS suited to their personal needs in a cost-efficient way through managed care. It changes how the state manages and pays for services for people with I/DD who have Medicaid in multiple waiver programs.

“The Arc of Texas was instrumental in designing current LTSS for Texans with I/DD and was pleased to be at the table to help shape the system of the future” said Amy Mizcles, Executive Director, The Arc of Texas. “We worked to develop legislative leaders to establish significant safeguards for people with I/DD in the redesigned system. Our input was based on The Arc of Texas’ long-held values and principles.”

Throughout the legislative process, The Arc of Texas worked closely with Senator Nelson and other legislative and agency leaders to strengthen safeguards for people with I/DD in the redesigned system. The rollout of this important legislation will occur in 3 phases, with the first beginning in September, 2013.

For further information, contact The Arc of Texas at [www.thearcoftexas.org](http://www.thearcoftexas.org) or at (512) 444-1234.

The Arc of Texas creates opportunities for all people with intellectual and developmental disabilities to actively participate in their communities and make the choices that affect their lives in a positive manner. Note: The Arc is not an acronym. In writing, use The Arc, not The ARC and not ARC.

## Sample Social Media Messages

Sharing your thoughts with legislators and other decision makers on a regular basis can keep your issue at the front of their minds. By using social media advocacy as a tool in our advocacy planning, we can influence the legislature to learn about—and hopefully support—the issues we care about as advocates.

Social media advocacy is a simple and fast way to get your message legislators, the press, other advocates, and the general community at large. You can share your stories and why your issue is important with many people in a short period of time. You can even use photos to make your point.

Some guidelines for social media channels to remember are:

- **Twitter:** Share your story in 140 characters or less, and be sure to include hashtag to help your story connect to a larger campaign.
- **Facebook:** Tell your story on your legislator’s Facebook wall. You can also post it on your own wall/status, and ask your friends and followers to share it with their network.
- **Blog:** If you have a blog, be sure to share your story about the issue on your blog and send a link to the local press and to your legislators.
- **Video:** Create a video about your issue, post it to YouTube and share it through Twitter or Facebook and other social media channels you may use.

Examples of messages for Twitter and Facebook follow on the following page.

## Sample Tweet

Key message to Congress: Preserve Medicaid, Medicare, and Social Security for people with disabilities.  
#DPS2015

## Sample Facebook Post

Falling off the cliff – that’s what turning 21 can mean for a person with autism and their family. Daunting waiting lists, disconnected services, and endless red tape – that’s the reality for far too many people with autism. It’s unacceptable. People with disabilities, their families, and anyone that knows someone affected by this national crisis must wake up and demand solutions.

# Contact Your Legislator Or Relevant State Agency

## Texas Legislature

- State Senators  
<http://www.senate.state.tx.us>
- State Representatives  
<http://www.house.state.tx.us>
- Legislative Committees  
<http://www.capitol.state.tx.us/Committees/Committees.aspx?Chamber=H>

## Texas Agencies

- Texas Affordable Housing Corporation  
<http://www.tsahc.org>
- Department of Aging & Disability Services (DADS)  
[www.dads.state.tx.us/](http://www.dads.state.tx.us/)
- Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS)  
<http://www.dars.state.tx.us>
- Texas Education Agency (TEA)  
<http://tea.texas.gov>
- Department of Family and Protective Services (DPS)  
<http://www.dfps.state.tx.us>
- Health & Human Services Commission (HHSC)  
<http://www.hhsc.state.tx.us>
- Department of State Health Services (DSHS)  
<https://www.dshs.state.tx.us>
- Department of Housing and Community Affairs  
<https://www.tdhca.state.tx.us>
- Department of Public Safety  
<https://www.dps.texas.gov>
- Council on Purchasing from Persons with Disabilities  
<http://www.tcppd.state.tx.us>
- Department of Transportation  
<https://www.txdot.gov>
- Workforce Commission  
<http://www.twc.state.tx.us>

\*Special Message. Call out to the MOVE grant etc.

## **The Arc of Texas**

8001 Centre Park Drive, Suite 100  
Austin, TX 78754

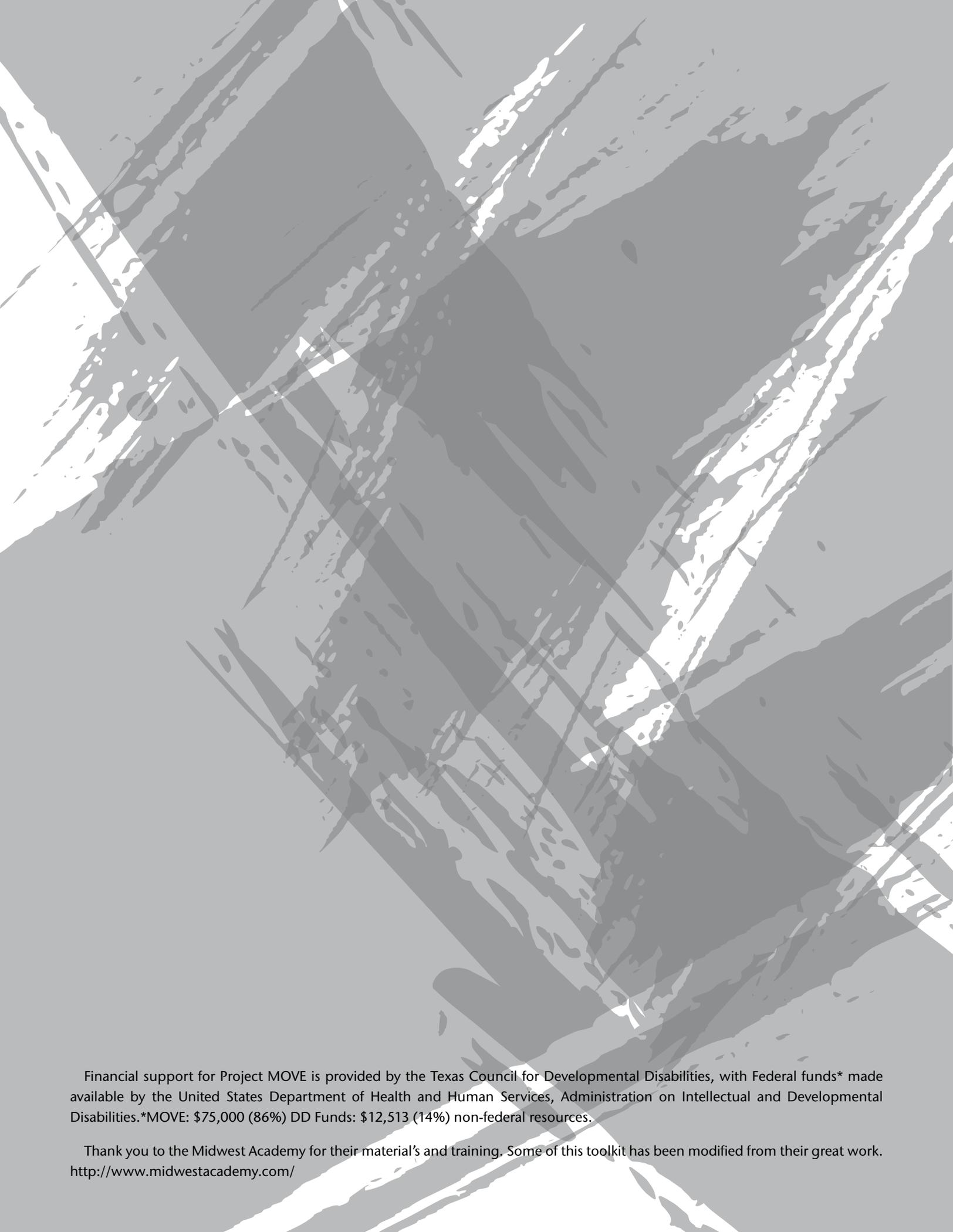
Phone: 1-800-252-9729

Fax: 512-454-4956

email: [info@thearcoftexas.org](mailto:info@thearcoftexas.org)

**Mission:** The Arc of Texas creates opportunities for all people with intellectual and developmental disabilities to actively participate in their communities and make the choices that affect their lives in a positive manner.

The Arc of Texas is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt, nonprofit organization. The Arc of Texas is an accredited charity by the Better Business Bureau and complies with their high standards for ethical business behavior.



Financial support for Project MOVE is provided by the Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities, with Federal funds\* made available by the United States Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities.\*MOVE: \$75,000 (86%) DD Funds: \$12,513 (14%) non-federal resources.

Thank you to the Midwest Academy for their material's and training. Some of this toolkit has been modified from their great work.  
<http://www.midwestacademy.com/>