



Preparing to Tell Your Story During the Legislative Session

STEP ONE – Developing Your Case Statement

You will need to describe your organization and the impact of your work during the legislative session. Plan it now; share it with your staff, board, and partners; and use it consistently. If you are a member of a coalition, consortium or collaboration and are working together during the legislative session, share your information. (If you employ a lobbyist and public relations counselor, they will automatically be involved in this preparation with you.) Below are some questions to use as a guide.

Questions to answer in the case statement:

- What does your organization do? (Avoid using abbreviations or acronyms unless you have previously spelled them out.) How many people do you employ? Who are your clients? What geographical area(s) do you serve?
- What makes your organization unique? What is its niche? What sets it apart? Is your organization involved in trend-setting programs or services?
- What is the impact of your work? (Show the value of taxpayers dollars invested in you and by you.) Develop key messages here that you can use consistently. Be specific about the number of people served for example. If you change lives, describe the change. If you have researched the opportunity cost – that is the cost of investing early rather than paying much higher costs in consequences later – state that. For example, the average annual cost to treat a youth in the Youth Intervention Program is \$207 – compared to \$49,000 a year to hold a youth in a juvenile correctional facility. Show how you are integrated with other providers in creating family stability and health communities.
- What are the sources of your operating budget? Prepare a pie chart to show funding sources. Divide the government funding into federal, state, and county as appropriate. If you have experienced a downturn in funding, be prepared to explain it. Define key funding partnerships, those that leverage other dollars. Do any of your funds trigger federal funds? Do you face cuts in federal funding? Do you have one-time funding? If applicable, also describe how you use state government funding to leverage other support from private donors, foundations, corporate sponsors, and volunteers.
- Describe the partnerships you have with government, other nonprofits, and for-profit organizations in programs and services.

Tips for writing the case statement:

- Make it a one-page document (two pages at most) printed on your stationery. Keep it short!
- Make sure contact names, phone numbers, e-mail addresses, and website are clearly listed.
- Work hard on your key messages. Everyone who tells your story should use these same key messages. Use consistent numbers, consistent facts, leading to a consistent thesis. Three or so key messages with supporting detail generally work best.
- In building supporting detail, make your case in terms that people will understand. Put a face on your case. Humanize it while providing facts.

STEP TWO – Delivering your Messages

- Select a spokesperson for your organization who is articulate, well-informed, and comfortable telling your story. That person represents your organization, your brand, and your reputation. It may be a staff person or it may be a board member. Make sure to include that person's contact information on your case statement so legislators and the media know who to get in touch with.
- Select clients who can tell their story, are willing to tell it publicly, and reflect your client base. These are the "real people" legislators and the media want to know about. Their story should reflect the impact of your work as you describe it in your case statement. Prepare those clients to tell their story concisely for a hearing, to participate in a meeting with a legislator or legislative staff, to answer a reporter's questions, etc. Make certain those clients can get off work, have transportation, child care, etc., when you need them to tell their story.
- Use the same key messages and same language in everything – speeches, your website, newsletters, letters to donor and clients and volunteers, conversations with the media, letters to the editor, op-ed and commentary articles, etc. You are building a consistent message.

Once you have prepared your case statement, please contact the Minnesota Council of Nonprofits to tell us you are available to talk to the media, meet with legislators, or testify at a hearing. Contact: Elena Doucet-B  er, Legislative Assistant, 651-642-1904 x250, 800-289-1904 x250, elena@mncn.org.