

The Megaphone

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meg·a·phone [meg-uh-fohn] –noun

1. a cone-shaped device for magnifying or directing the voice, chiefly used in addressing a large audience out of doors or in calling to someone at a distance.

www.dictionary.com

Hello everyone! I hope you all had a wonderful holiday weekend, full of fun, food, friends and family!

In this week's *Megaphone*, we thought it would be timely to share some advocacy ideas and opportunities with you. You probably know that municipal elections will be held in Saskatchewan's towns, villages and cities on October 28 – this is a great opportunity to flex your advocacy muscles and take the first strides toward advocacy for your museum, and heritage issues!

Advocacy is an important issue for museums for many reasons. It has many benefits, both in the short and long term, but also some potential risks, so we have been working on two resources to help you through the process.

In the longer term, we are working on the final edits to the *Advocacy Guide: Tools & Tips*, which we plan to complete this fall so you can have it in your hands in January 2010. Those of you who were able to attend our AGM and Mini-Conference in May were able to take a look at the work in progress.

Once it is completed, we will be providing it **free of charge** on request to all of our members on CD (though you will have to pay the mailing costs); others who are interested but not members will be able to purchase a copy from us. Once we have a members-only section on our website, we will post it there as well for our members to use.

The guide has nine modules and provides everything from basic information about advocacy, to tips on forming your advocacy strategies and further resources you can access to assist your efforts. We think it's going to be a very valuable resource, and we greatly thank Gloria DeSantis, a Justice Studies lecturer at the University of Regina, who worked with us as a consultant to create this guide, for her contributions to the project. Gloria is using a version of the guide – called the *Advocacy Technical Guide* —as the textbook for her Social Justice course this fall. We are very interested to hear how it is received by her students!

In the shorter-term, we have recently posted to our website and mailed to all of our members a Municipal Elections Advocacy Guide. This three-page guide provides some advocacy tips, sample questions for candidates for council and school board, and some idea of the type of questions you might face, as an advocate for museums and heritage issues in your community. You can access this guide on our website by clicking here <http://www.saskmuseums.org/online-resources>

So some of you may be wondering what the benefits of advocacy are – or perhaps, even, what exactly it is!

Advocacy is a collaborative process. A group of people or museums come together in this process to identify, define, plan, and implement a plan, in order to bring about a specific change in funding, community awareness or government policy. Advocacy is intended to influence individual behaviour or opinion, or public policy or law.

The results of advocacy efforts could be a funding increase, increased community awareness and understanding of museum programs, and/or having influence on government policies, in a way that is beneficial to your museum.

In our Municipal Elections Advocacy Guide, for example, we suggest that you attend all-candidates meetings, and ask the candidates questions about museums, arts, heritage and culture. The goal is to educate candidates about your issues, through providing contacts, backgrounders, and face-to-face discussions. Media action may also be appropriate for your community during this election period, so you could consider sending out a news release, or writing a letter to the editor, to get your issues on the agenda of the decision-makers in your community.

Some other benefits of advocacy are:

- museum staff and volunteers can offer their own knowledge to help solve local issues;
- government policies can become more effective, as a result of a larger diversity of views and people involved in forming those policies;
- advocacy can bring people together and create more active communities; and
- you have the opportunity to enhance democracy through participation!

There are also some risks to keep in mind, though, in crafting your advocacy strategies. Because advocacy is a long-term activity, your members need to have the time and energy to commit to seeing your strategies through. In addition, it is important not to alienate your funders or community by being seen as too “pushy”.

And, if any of your group members are registered charities, they must follow the Canada Revenue Agency guidelines for doing advocacy, to ensure they do not lose their charitable number. These guidelines are available through the Canada Revenue Agency’s website at <http://www.cra-arc.gc.ca/menu-e.html> You can also contact the Canada Revenue Agency’s Charities Directorate toll-free at 1-800-267-2384 with any questions or for clarification on your planned activities.

Advocacy efforts here at the MAS Office are led by Wendy Fitch, so if you have any questions, or need additional information, you can give her a call at 780-9280 or email wendy.fitch@saskmuseums.org

Good luck with your advocacy efforts! We’ll talk to you again October 28, when we have a great member feature to share with you!

- Lisa