

# Summary of Coalition Member Advocacy Activities

**Two-thirds** of coalition members participated in funded advocacy activities in 2009, with 14 groups hosting site visits, 6 participating in advocacy events, 6 mobilizing constituents, and 1 preparing to host a board retreat around advocacy. An additional 5 groups incorporated advocacy into current programming, and 30% of participating groups performed more than one activity.

Coalition members met with **27 policy makers, representing 13 city- and state-wide districts.** **Senator Sonia Chang-Diaz** and **Boston City Councilor John Tobin** were cultivated by the most coalition members.

Coalition members met with representatives at related **public and private entities** including:

- \* Boston Office of Jobs and Community Services
- \* Boston Public Schools
- \* Commonwealth Corporation
- \* MA Department of Youth Services
- \* MA Senate Committee of Ways and Means
- \* Mayor's Office of Neighborhood Services, South End and Bay Village

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The **top measures of success** to which coalition members aspired in advocacy activities were:

1. Increased public funding for youth arts
2. Politicians' greater awareness of each organization's individual programs
3. Having the ability to mobilize a broader constituency about policy issues

*"Success of our advocacy looks like sustainability of our art, our funding, and, our ability to elevate the voices of young people and the communities they represent. Through taking an active role in engaging our constituents and key stakeholders, we are creating a culture of collaboration. This culture represents what the arts are about – building bridges, challenging divides, and of course elevating the success of generations to come."*

**Boston Children's Chorus**

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There were many **surprises**:

1. Public officials were **accessible** and helpful...
2. The site visit was relatively **easy to organize**...
3. Even during a recession, policymakers still view the **arts as valuable**...
4. **Youth embraced the advocacy messages** more than we expected...
5. Even those working in the political system **didn't feel completely empowered** by it...
6. Public officials were **excited and willing** to be engaged...
7. Boston City Councilor John Tobin is a part-time **stand-up comedian!**

*"Oftentimes when you hear advocacy and you deal with youth arts program, you think well that's not us. This initiative helps us to see that advocacy is about us and helps us to find ways to fit it meaningfully into our programs while of course not supplanting them."*

**Books of Hope**

# Suggestions for Future Coalition Advocacy

From organizing site visits to mobilizing coalition members' communities to write letters, participants gave the following **expert advice**:

## Preparing for advocacy

1. Get on a politicians schedule as soon as possible!
2. Organize press to attend or write a follow-up story
3. Invite only one politician at a time for more intimate cultivation
4. Follow-up an invitation with calls to encourage and confirm attendance
5. Coach youth in advocacy messaging and interacting with politicians

*"My advice would be: Just Do It. Making connections with public officials can be relatively simple, whether the relationships are started in office meetings or site visits."* Conservatory Lab Charter School

## While advocating

1. Have flexible expectations about outcomes
2. Let youth be the ambassadors to the public official
3. Request actions from the politicians that clearly benefit them as well as your organization
4. Provide opportunities for youth to interact or perform
5. Invite the politician to practice the art itself
6. Hand the politician information for them to reference after the visit
7. Take pictures!

*"It is extremely difficult for nonprofits, particularly small organizations, to go beyond their everyday programming to engage new supporters. But it is very important: every new person who sees a program in action becomes a new friend who is able to carry the organization's message to his or her friends."*

**Urban Improv**

## After you advocate

1. If you hit a barrier with one politician, continue to look for new opportunities
2. Continue to cultivate the politician over time: it will pay off when you or she needs something in the future
3. Join forces with other like-organizations to coordinate an even larger advocacy presence

*"Building and sustaining positive relationships is an important aspect in successful advocacy. Our long-term relationships with our elected representatives. . . make it much easier to work with these individuals on the often-quick and high-pressured time frame surrounding many legislative decisions."*

**Hyde Square Task Force**