
Empowering Change: Navigating Civic Engagement Across Government Levels

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Civic Engagement in a Partisan Era

Civic Engagement defined

civ·ic en·gage·ment

noun

1. the process of helping people be active participants in building and strengthening their communities, whether defined as a place or a shared identity or interest.

What Civic Engagement looks like:



Advocacy & Public Policy:

Actions that inform legislation or policy, such as nonpartisan awareness building issue and/or 501c4 support



Voting and Local Elections:

Programs that help more people vote, such as nonpartisan voter registration and increasing engagement in electoral processes



Civic Infrastructure:

Efforts that build tools for engagement, such as building nonprofit or philanthropic capacity for problem solving, open data/transparency, information/journalism



Service:

Programs that create paths for people to serve their communities, such as service years, volunteering, and neighboring



Civic Learning:

Programs that ensure youth gain knowledge and experience, such as school-based civic education, service learning, youth development



Political Participation:

Efforts that involve more people in political processes, such as public meeting engagement and participatory budgeting

Civic Engagement in Democracy

“Civic engagement: broad set of practices and attitudes of involvement in social and political life that converge to increase the health of a democratic society.”

- *Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc.*

“Civic engagement means working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and non-political processes.”

- *Civic Responsibility and Higher Education*

Civic Infrastructure creates opportunities for Civic Participation



Civic Spaces to Connect, Learn & Collectively Act



Governance & Resources



Social Networks & Shared Culture





Separating Civic Engagement from the noise of 'POLITICS'

Civic Engagement is NOT partisan politics

Our federal tax code states 501(c)(3) organizations are:

“prohibited from directly or indirectly participating in - or intervening in - any political campaign on behalf of or in opposition to any candidate for elective public office.”

**But nonpartisan
does not mean
apolitical.**

Civic Engagement Values

<https://www.pacefunders.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Civic-Engagement-Definition.pdf>



Trusting and respecting how a community wants to take action for itself



Creating agency and power in people, particularly those most affected in a community or by an issue



Nurturing or fostering, healthier, stronger, happier places to live



Engaging community members in a process



Promoting transparency and participation

Differentiating



**Education
Advocacy
Lobbying**

Education vs. Advocacy

Education: Education focuses on sharing research or raising public awareness about a subject. This can include educating public officials about an issue.

Advocacy: The act of expressing support for a cause, idea, or policy. Advocacy includes:

- Communicating about how government can better support the issue area or how policy decisions can affect the issue area.
 - Establishing relationships with elected officials, to let them know that you have arts expertise to offer should it become useful to their policy deliberations.
-

But what about lobbying?

Lobbying: is an attempt to **influence elected officials' votes** on pending legislation

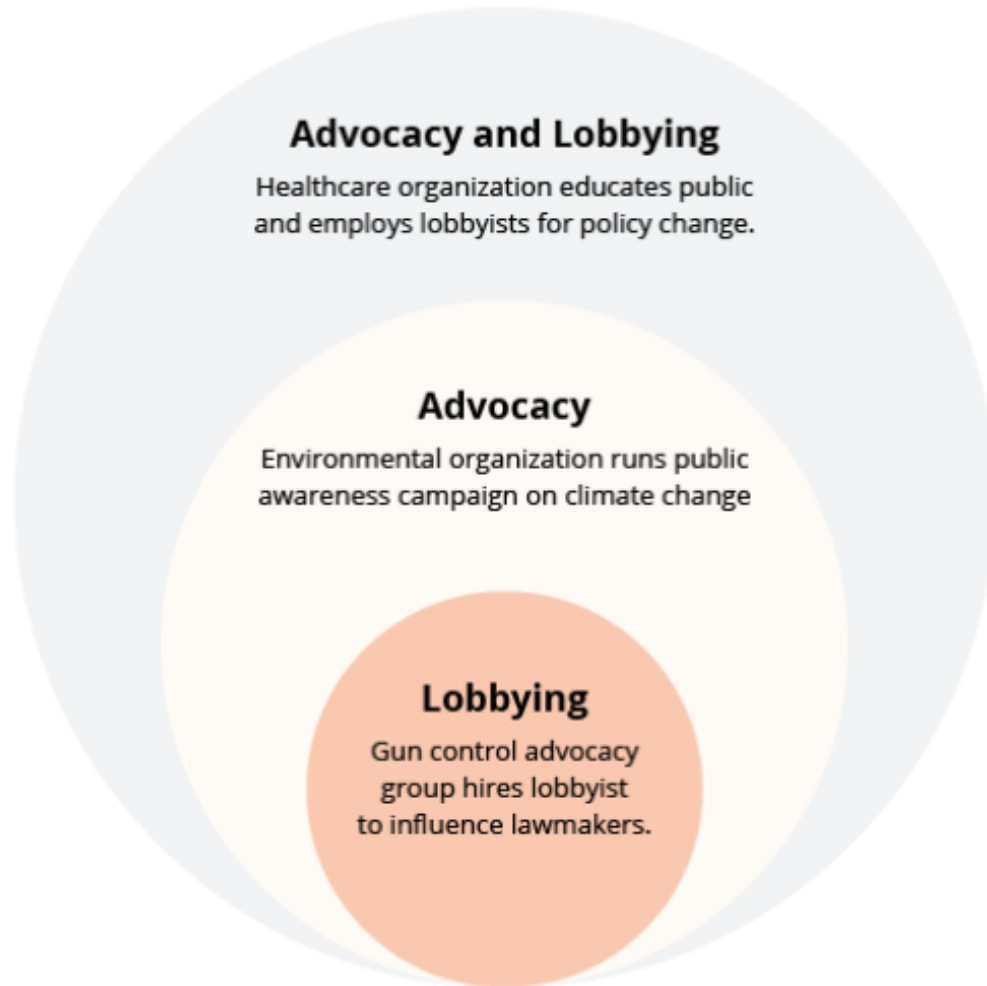
Lobbying involves:

- a communication (in person or in writing)
- with a policymaker (an elected official or government officer)
- in which that official is asked to favor or oppose specific legislation (a bill, resolution, appointment confirmation or ballot initiative).

There are two kinds of lobbying:

- **Direct lobbying:** communications directed to policymakers that ask them to vote for or against specific legislation
 - **Grassroots lobbying:** communications that mobilize the general public to contact elected officials and urge them to vote for or against specific legislation
-

Some examples



What's Legal

Federal - YES, nonprofits CAN lobby

Nonprofits must be **nonpartisan** in their approach and observe certain financial limits. Within those limits, nonprofits can weigh in on important legislation and can encourage their allies and audiences to do likewise.

The IRS follows the principle that **lobbying cannot comprise a "substantial part"** of a nonprofit organization's activities. Many tax practitioners advise nonprofits that they can safely devote 3-5% of their overall time and expenses to lobbying (based on a federal court ruling that 5% of a nonprofit organization's time and effort was an insubstantial part of its activities).

To avoid this ambiguity, nonprofits can choose a lobbying "election" under Section 501(h) of the Internal Revenue Code.

What's Legal

Connecticut - YES, nonprofits CAN lobby

Nonprofits must register as lobbyists if they **expend \$3,000 or more** for direct or grassroots lobbying in a calendar year OR **receive \$3,000** or more specifically for CT lobbying in a calendar year.

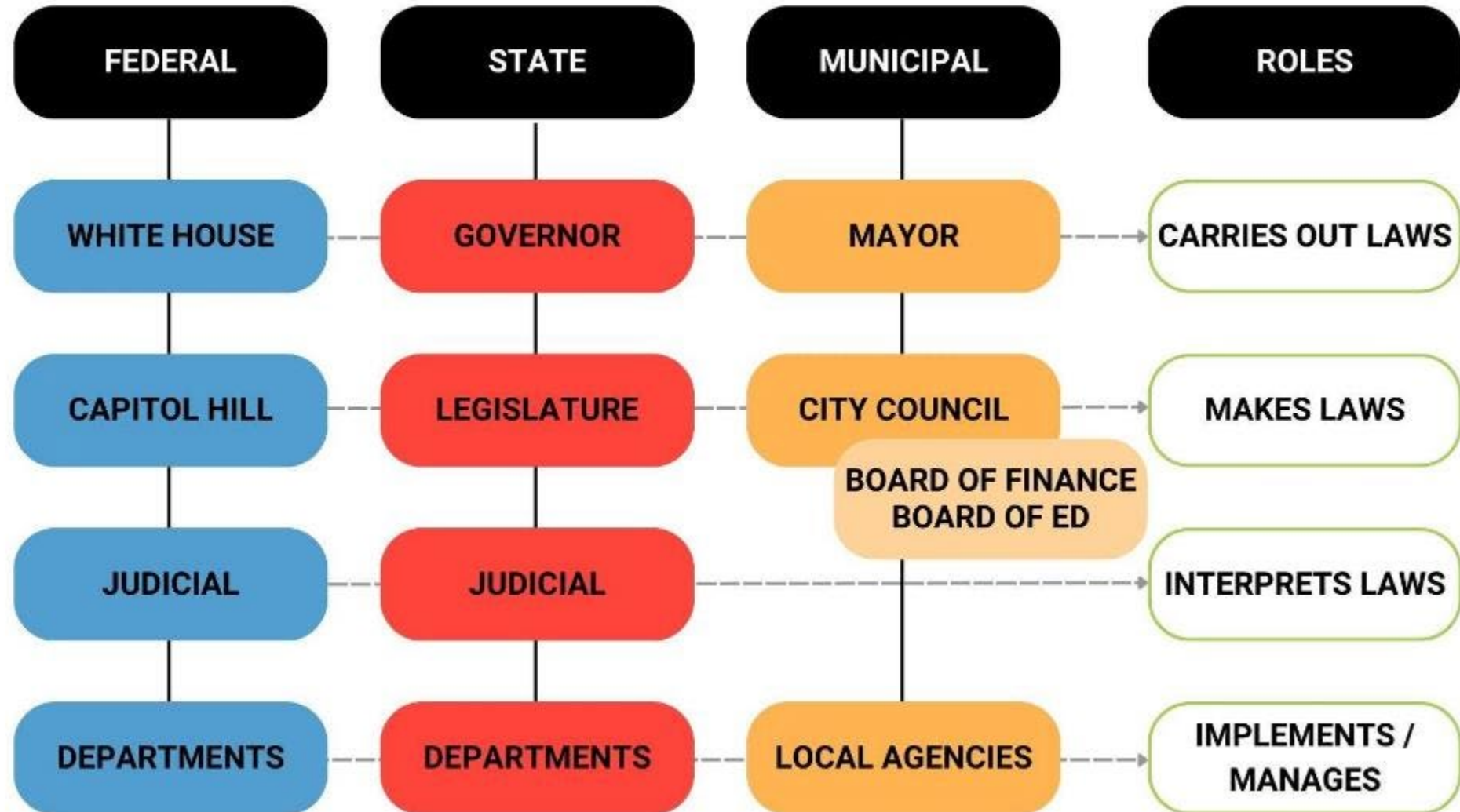
Exceptions to nonprofit lobbying in CT:

- Haven't met the trigger threshold of \$3,000
- Public testimony: Formal appearances to give testimony before public sessions of committees of the general assembly or state agencies
- Expert witnesses: A person who provides legislative or administrative testimony at a public hearing, based on the individual's "specialized or technical expertise, beyond the ken of the average layman, obtained through knowledge, skill, experience, training, or education.

DIRECT OR GRASSROOTS LOBBYING OF:	CAN THIS TRIGGER?	TRIGGER
State Legislators	Yes	<p>An individual or organization must register if they expend (or agree to expend) \$3,000 or more for direct or grassroots lobbying (including prep time, staff comp, and goodwill) in a calendar year OR if they receive (or agree to receive) \$3,000 or more specifically for Connecticut lobbying in a calendar year.</p> <p>These are separate thresholds, so spending an aggregate of \$3,000 across both categories does not trigger registration unless that dollar amount is met in one of the categories alone.</p>
State Executive Branch Officials	Yes	<p>Same as above, with the triggers being cumulative over both legislative and executive kinds of lobbying.</p>
Local Legislators or Local Executive Branch Officials	Maybe	<p>The state lobbying law does not apply to local jurisdictions, but some local governments have their own lobbying ordinances.</p>

Government 101

Government Structures

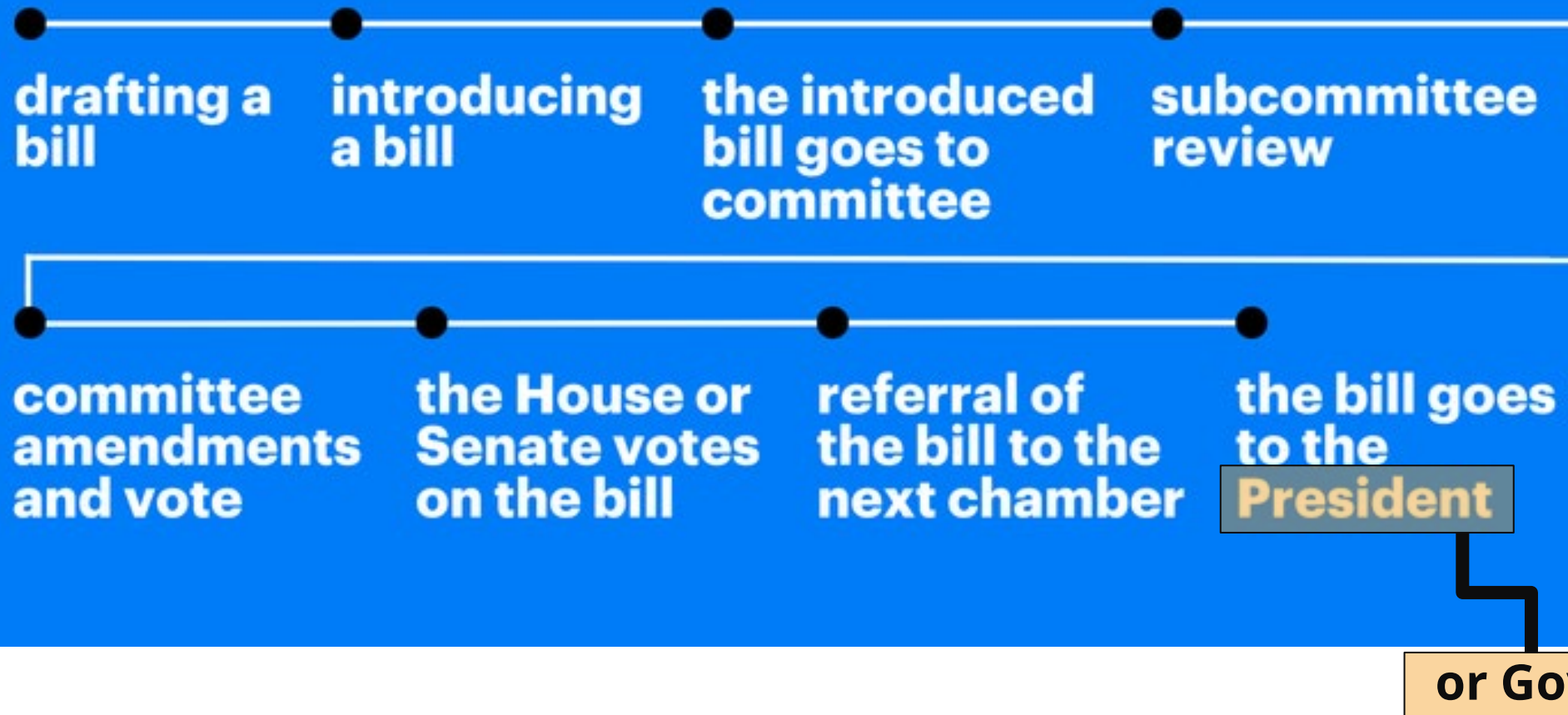


CT General Assembly 2-year Legislative Session

All 187 General Assembly members elected to serve 2-year terms
Term is broken down into two different sessions:

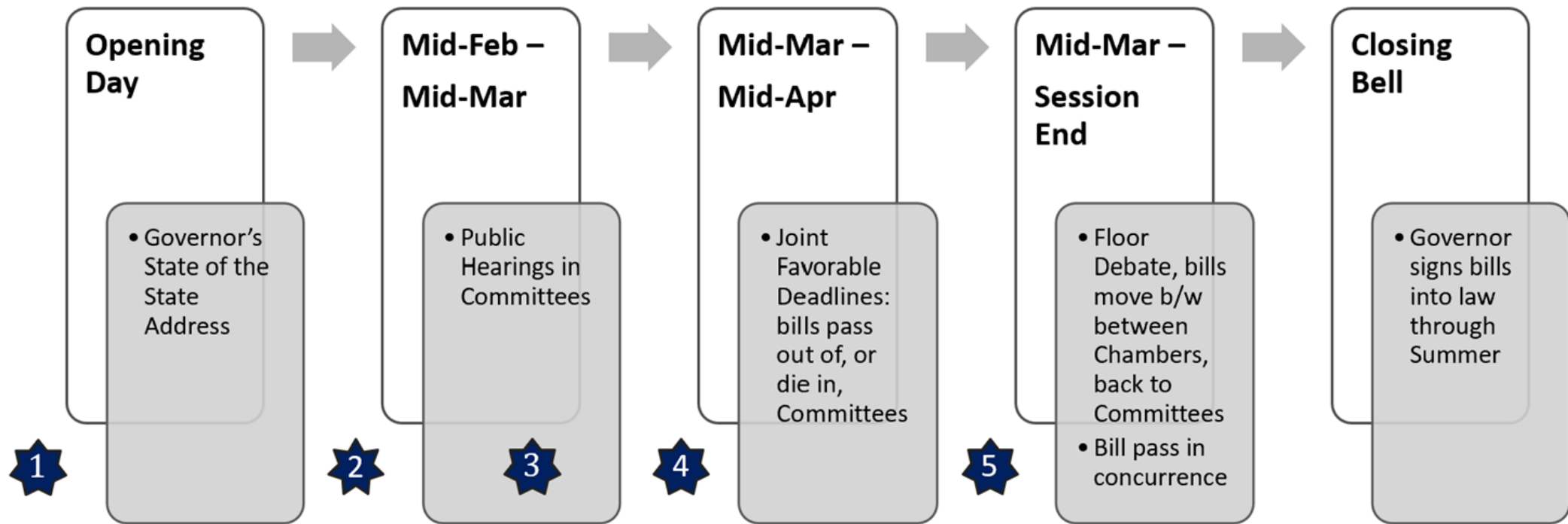
- LONG session – odd years, after statewide election, Jan – Jun
Budget created for following 2 years
Individual legislators can introduce bills on any subject
Working session
- **SHORT session** – even years, before statewide election, Feb – May
Budget adjustments
New bills or tweaks to older laws, related to budget
(Chair of) Committee of cognizance raises bills
NOTE: 2022 had 996 bills proposed and 147 became law

from bill to law



CT General Assembly Timeline, Influence Opportunities*

*short session dates, long session same process



Find Your Representation

Find Your Legislators

Town

Please Select First

Street Name

Please Select Second

Number

 Find

 Districts by Town

 Congressional Districts

<https://www.cga.ct.gov/asp/menu/cgafindleg.asp>

Boards & Commissions

[View all Boards & Commissions](#)

[Board of Representatives](#)

[Board of Finance](#)

[Board of Education](#)

[Planning Board](#)

[Zoning Board](#)

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**CITY OF
STAMFORD**
innovating since 1641

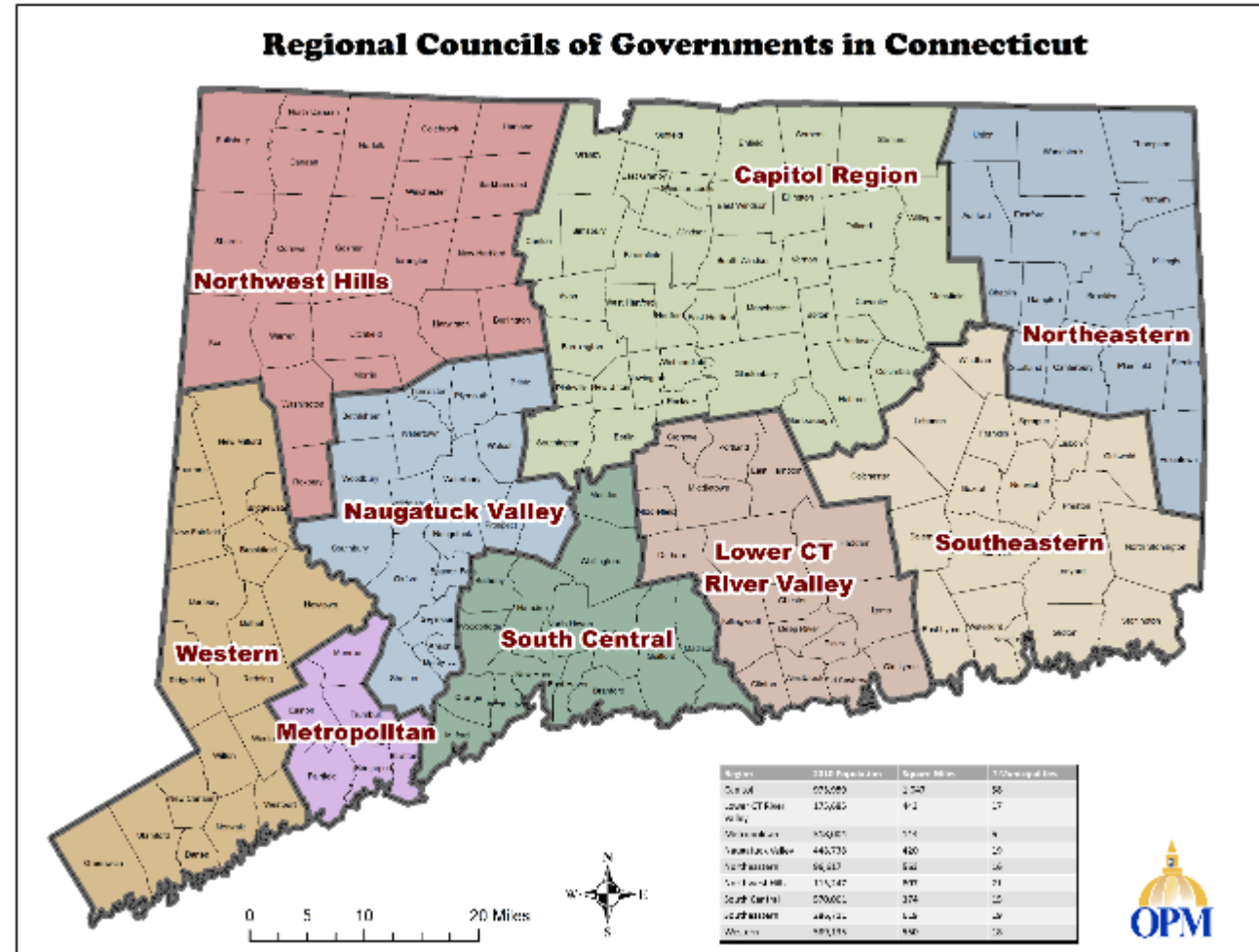
<https://www.stamfordct.gov/government>

How State & Local Government Interacts

Local Government Structure

The State of Connecticut is divided into 169 municipalities. Each municipality may operate under the state's statutes or may adopt its own local charter, as provided for in the Home Rule Act.

- A town charter specifies the form of government under which the municipality intends to operate.
 - The three basic forms of municipal government are
 - Selectman—Town Meeting
 - Mayor—Council
 - Manager—Council
 - All may operate with a Board of Finance
- A municipality may exercise only those powers that the State of Connecticut has delegated to it.
- The General Assembly also imposes many mandates that have a broad impact upon the powers, scope, and financial obligations of local governments.



Interplay between State and Local

School Districts

State: Provides requirements/mandates; allocates funding (ex: Educational Cost Sharing \$\$)

Local: Board of Education / School administration seeks funding; determines how to allocate dollars; implements curriculum

Housing Services

State: Execute public policy surrounding housing per the state budget and legislation passed

Local: Grants sent down to counties and municipal governments where many housing departments actually do most of the work.

Nonprofits: A local housing authority might have the power to buy, build, and operate property, but they might also work with nonprofits to help people facing difficulties in keeping shelter.

Getting Started with Your Advocacy Efforts

Where to Begin - SMART Advocacy

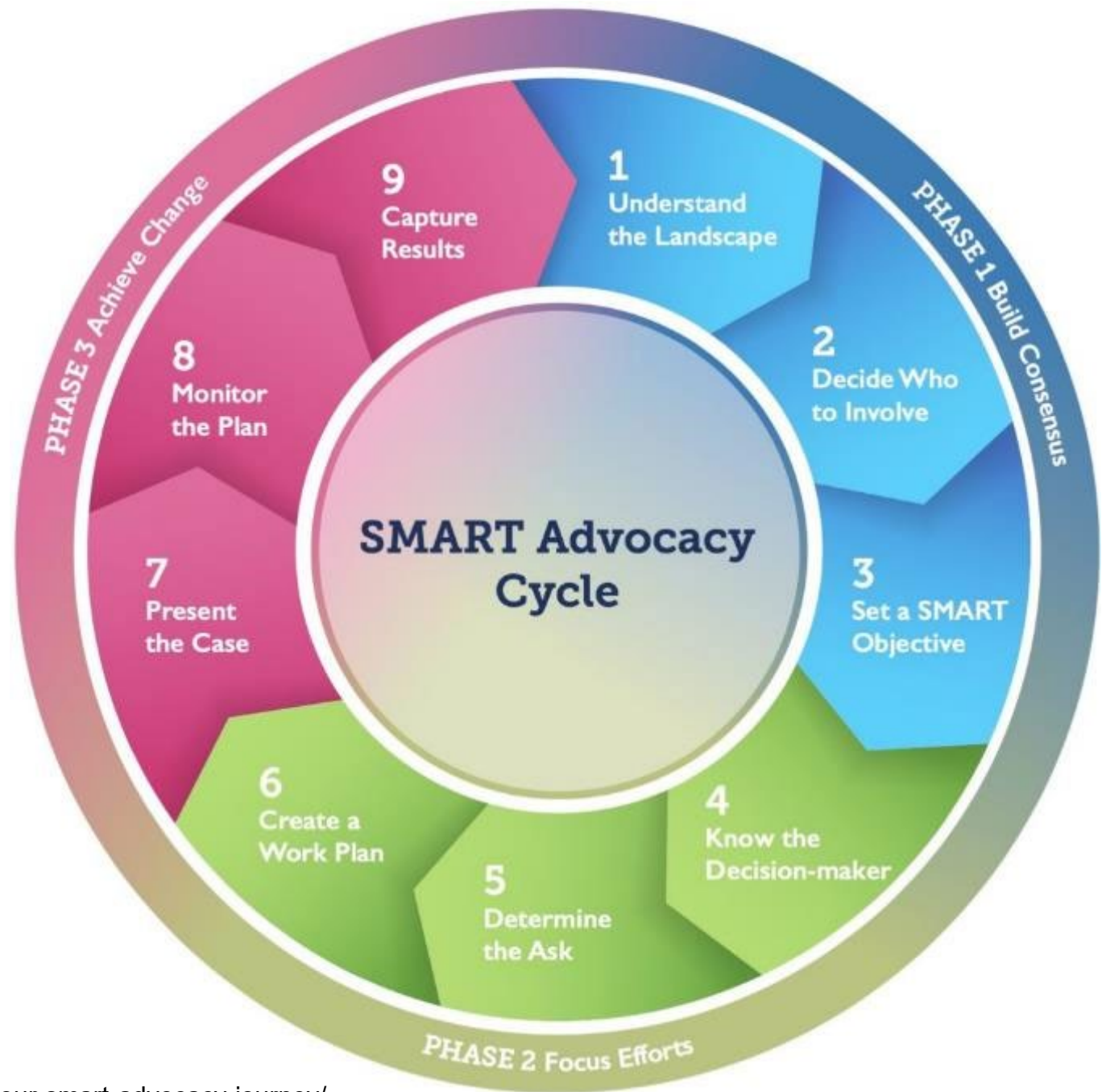
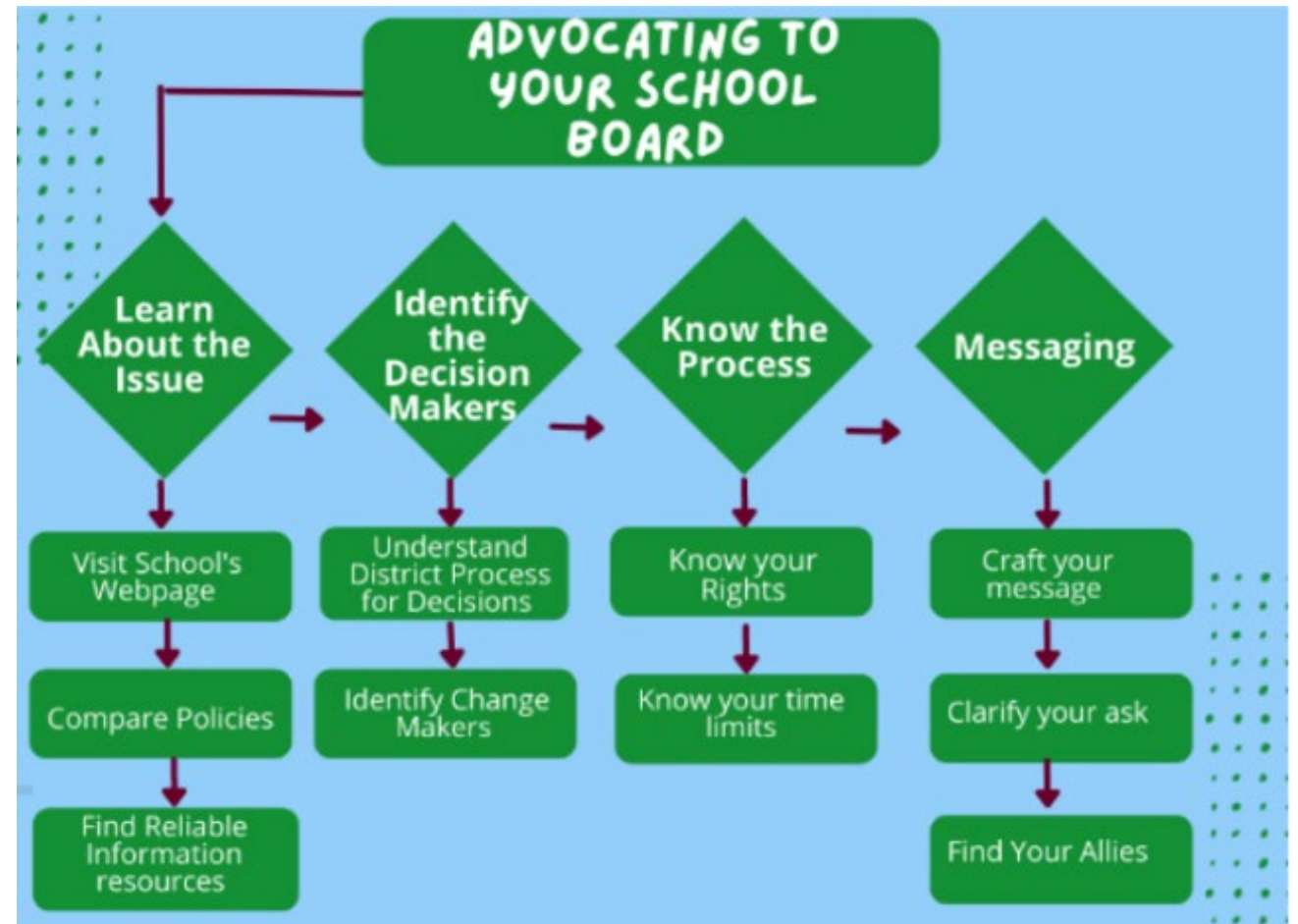
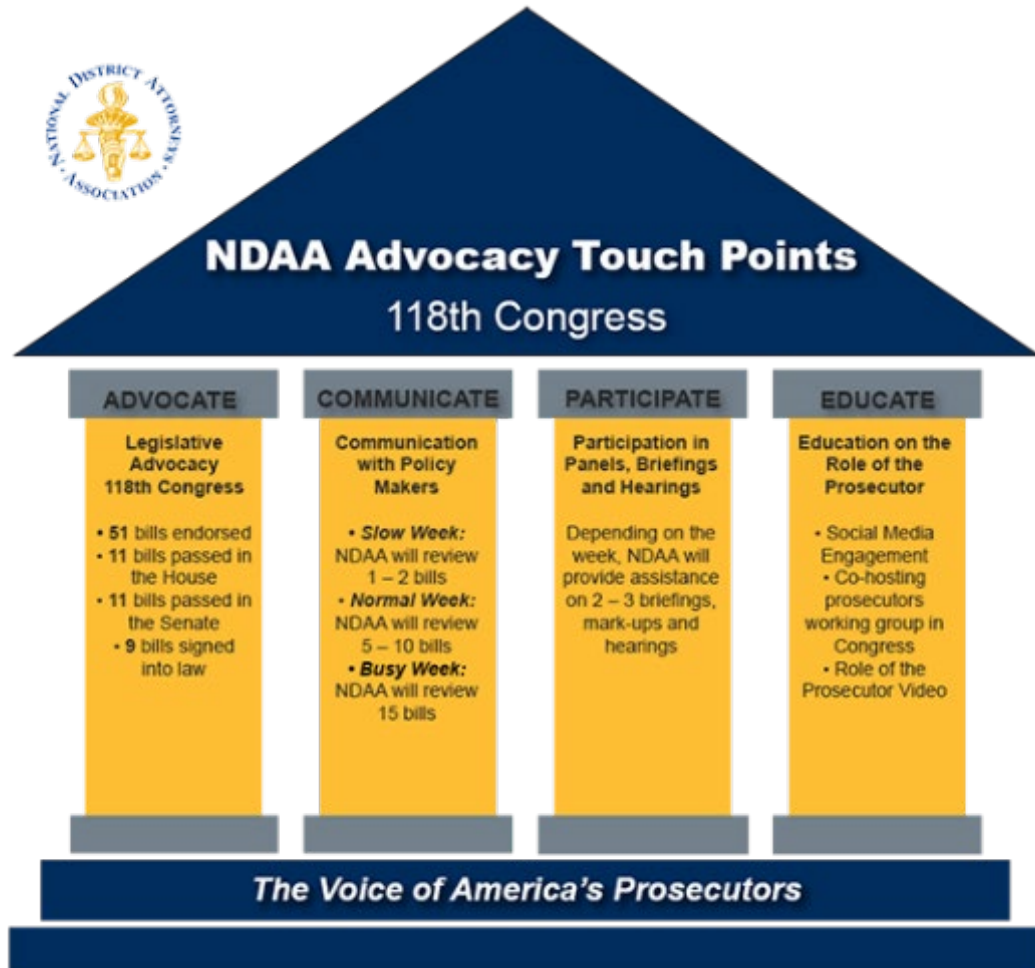


Figure out your process



Identify your strategy(ies)

PUBLIC TESTIMONY

GRASSROOTS ORGANIZING

MEET WITH ELECTED

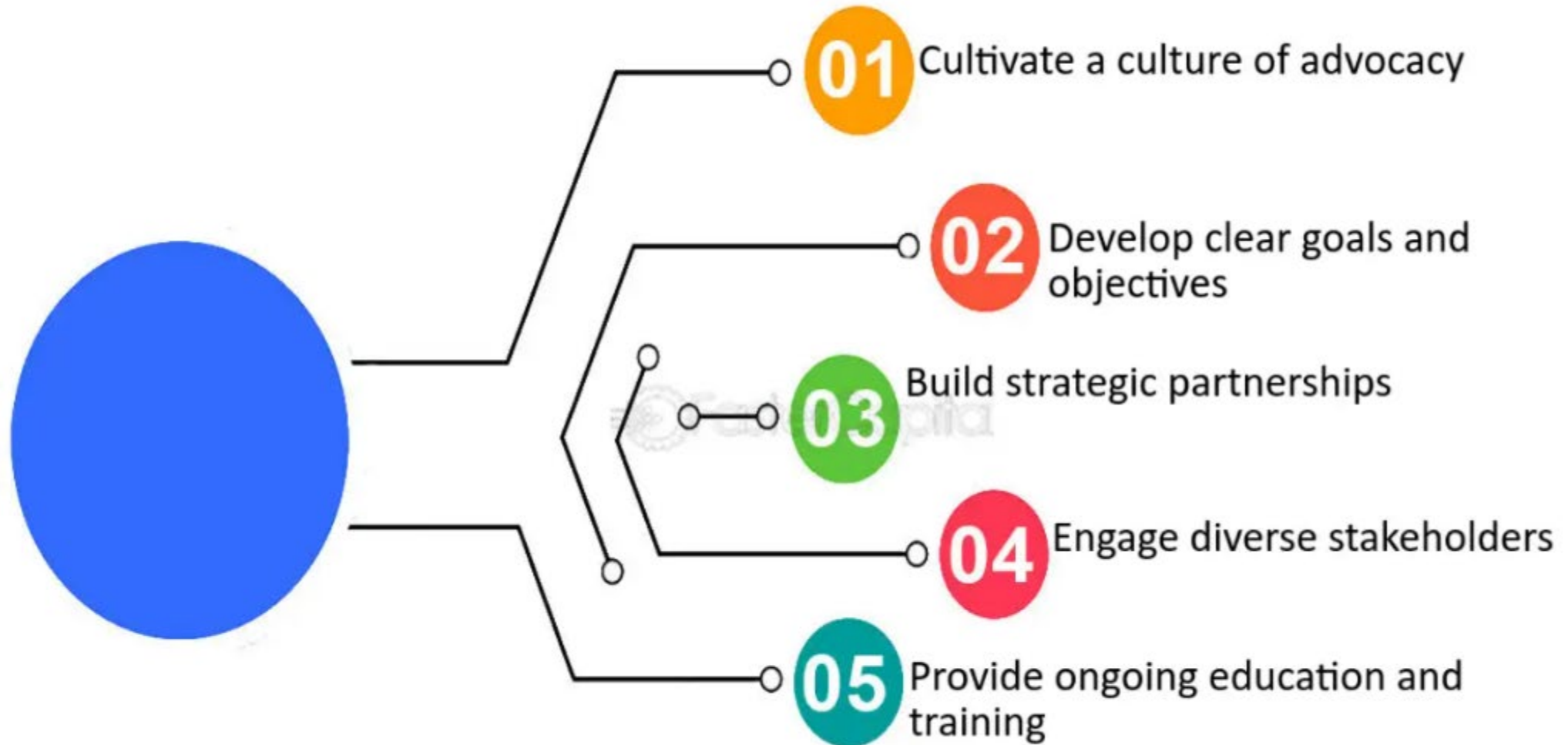


OP-EDS

WRITTEN TESTIMONY

COALITION BUILDING

Ensure Long-Term Org Commitment to Advocacy



Examples of Effective Advocacy Strategies

State level



CT Baby Bonds is a **FIRST-IN-THE-NATION**

initiative that invests money for every baby born in Connecticut whose birth is covered by HUSKY.

The funds are invested in a trust managed by the Office of the Treasurer. Between the ages of 18 and 30, the young person can make a claim for the funds to be used for:

- **Buying a home in Connecticut**
- **Saving for retirement**
- **Paying for post-secondary education or training**
- **Starting or investing in a Connecticut business**



A LONG TERM INVESTMENT IN CONNECTICUT

An estimated 15,600 children are born into poverty each year in CT – nearly half of all births. CT Baby Bonds will give young people a reason to stay in the state, promote homeownership and new business creation, and provide wealth-building resources to residents from every city and town.



132K

Approved Applications



\$640M

Benefits Paid



\$536.4M

Trust Fund Balance



139k

Registered Employers



3188

Registered Sole
Proprietors/Self-
Employed Individuals

All data as of February 29, 2024

Local level



HOW TO SUPPORT B1C @ THE ZONING MEETING 4/8

We are fighting to stop a recreational and medical cannabis store from opening on Shippan Avenue in the building that is home to Building One Community (B1C). We believe a cannabis store should not be located where children come to learn and play every day. In our building and within 1,000 feet, multiple organizations serve children year-round, and playing fields are directly across the street. Join us as we ask the Stamford Zoning Board to deny the application at its online Zoom hearing at 6:30 p.m. on Monday, April 8!

Attached are 1. Key Messages, 2. FAQs, and 3. Zoning Board Agenda. Below are easy step-by-step instructions.

Your testimony matters and could help convince the Zoning Board to deny the permit. It is critical for the community's voice to be felt at the hearing, which will be online. Thank you!

Pre-registration is Required to be Heard! The Steps:

- 1 PRE-REGISTER** - Use this link- [CLICK HERE!](#) (pre-register preferably by 5 pm on 4/8)
- 2 POST-REGISTRATION** - You will receive a confirmation email with information and a link to join on 4/8.
- 3 JOIN THE MEETING 4/8**—The meeting begins at 6:30 p.m., so join shortly before then and listen for instructions on when to raise your hand. Use the link you received in the confirmation email. (NOTE: Please be patient, as we expect many speakers.)
- 4 RAISE YOUR HAND BUTTON** - Once you are in the meeting, click the "raise your hand" button to sign up to speak. Listen carefully for any instructions. Again, please be patient. Thank you.
Listen carefully for any instructions.
If needed: Webinar ID: 884 7208 8417 and Password: 157175
- 5 WHAT TO SAY?** There's a 3-minute time limit! Some suggestions:
 - Here are some things you might want to say at the hearing:
 - Hello, my name is _____
 - This is my relationship with B1C: _____
 - This is why B1C is important to me: _____
 - This is why I'm concerned about having a cannabis store right in B1C's building: _____(See our attached key messages & FAQ sheet for information about the proposal and why we oppose it.)
 - I therefore request that the Zoning Board deny this application.

Challenges of the Long Game, During this Critical Moment

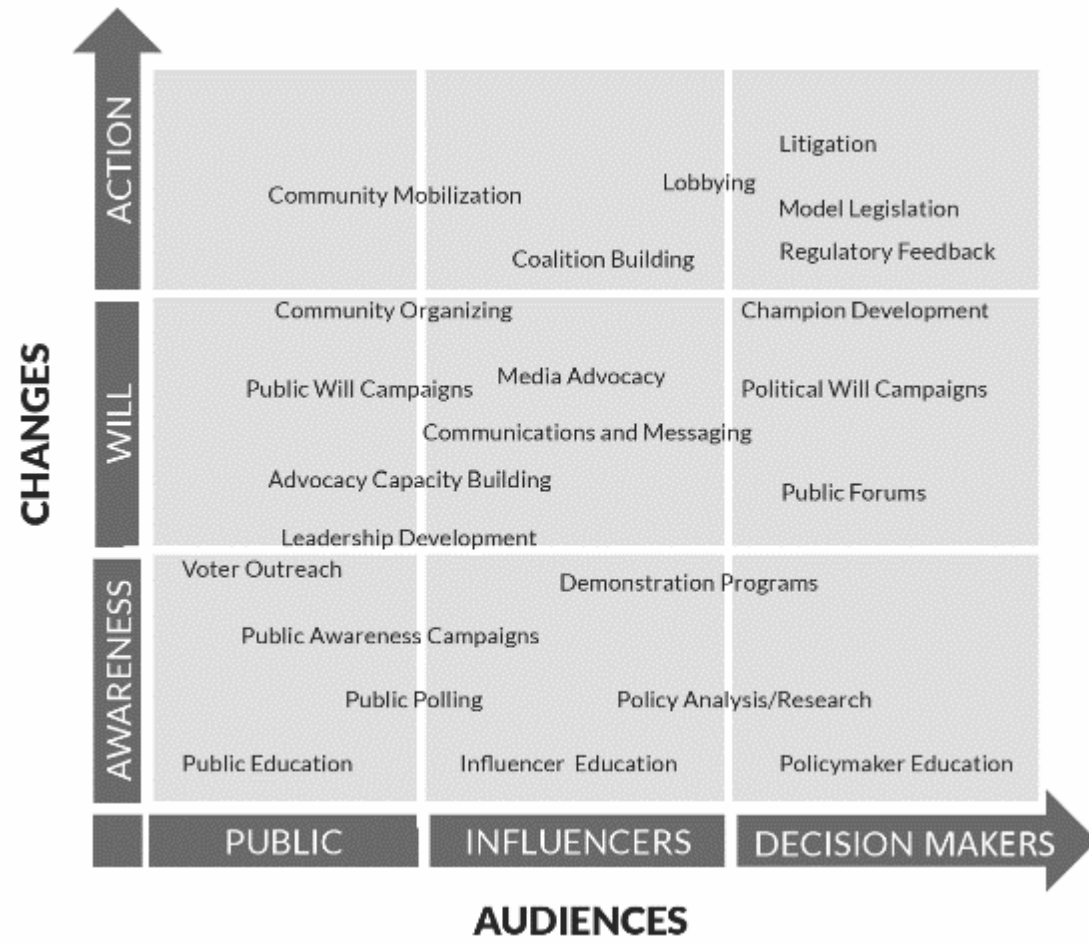
American Democracy

Crisis or Opportunity?

It is up to us.



The Advocacy Strategic Framework



Understanding “Will”

Public and/or political will is the stage between issue awareness and action when opportunity arises.

- **Opinion:** Belief or Judgement about an issue
- **Intensity:** Strength of opinion
- **Salience:** Importance and Relevance of an issue
- **Capacity** to act: Skills and confidence to take the desired action when called upon
- **Willingness** to act despite Risks and Tradeoffs associated with that action

**Legislation is decided
by those who show up.**

Unknown

Building Sustainability into Your Advocacy Efforts

Getting your BOARD on Board

Key questions to engage the board around:

- Are there policy changes that would dramatically improve (or threaten) our ability to fulfill our mission and vision? If we could advance our mission more effectively by changing one law, public policy, or public attitude, what would that change be?
- Are we actively engaged in conversations with decision-makers about the policies or decisions that affect our work? If not, why not?
- Do we have goals for our advocacy work that enable us to assess how well we are doing?
- Is a degree of advocacy a part of every board member's job description?
- Are we — as an organization — actively participating in coalitions and organizations that are helping to advance our advocacy strategy?

<https://standforyourmission.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Discussion-Guide.pdf>



Take the Secretary of the State's CEO Pledge



WE TOOK THE **PLEDGE!**



Office of the
Connecticut Secretary of the State

To stay engaged, visit
Civics101.ct.gov



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