

Advocacy

What is “advocacy”?

1. Recommending, pleading, or arguing in favour of something, such as a cause, idea, or policy.
2. Active support for a cause, an idea, or a policy.

Advocacy is the *art of persuasion*. It is the process of encouraging a decision-maker to make a particular choice or decision that you believe is right and justified. It involves:

- Providing information *and/or*
- Working to change attitudes and perceptions *and/or*
- Partisan political action

Who are the decision-makers?

Anyone who has the authority and ability to make the decision that you want is a decision-maker.

One of the first and most essential steps in advocacy is to determine who has the authority to make the decision you want, under what conditions, and within what constraints and when:

“Never doubt that a small, group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has”.

Margaret Mead

- Is it the school principal? The school division superintendent? The Trustees?
- What are this person’s legal obligations? What are the policies under which s/he must operate?
- What other conditions might enhance or limit this person’s ability to make the decision?

Advocacy by CPF

The strength of our network

The strength of CPF is in its network. When the national President meets with a federal cabinet Minister or the President of another national organization, it's not just the size of CPF's membership that supports his/her recommendations, but also the information, statistics, and anecdotes provided by chapters in every corner of the country that illustrate and underline their message. If the CPF members in those communities also reinforce the recommendations through letters and phone calls to the Minister and to their Members of Parliament, the chances of success are further enhanced. The same applies at the branch and chapter levels.

However, what happens when one organization argues for one kind of decision, at the same time that another speaks for another? Both can lose!

Working together gives us strength. If the individual(s) who have the authority to make the decision have another chapter within his/their jurisdiction, it's essential that you consult and work with your fellow CPF members. At the very least, you must avoid any conflict of interest. At best, a coordinated effort has a far greater chance of success.

Who speaks for CPF?

The National President (or his/her designate) is the chief spokesperson for CPF National.

The National President (or her/his designate) handles everything to do with issues, opinions, and policies of the National association.

The National Executive Director, as designated, handles queries relating to the substance of FSL education in Canada and factual matters relating to CPF.

The National President and Executive Director must be aware at all times of any advocacy activities undertaken at the National level.

Branch and chapter responsibilities follow suit. The chapter President is the chief spokesperson for the chapter, but the President from time to time as appropriate can delegate that task. The chapter President must be aware at all times of any advocacy activities and any significant speeches, presentations, etc. undertaken on behalf of the chapter.

Jurisdiction

- All activities undertaken at the National level must concern topics that are national in scope (of interest or concern to more than one branch or relating to another national organization or medium)
- Likewise, activities undertaken at the provincial level concern topics that are provincial in scope (of interest or concern to a number of chapters or relating to another provincial organization or medium)
- Chapter advocacy activities must concern topics that relate to the jurisdiction of that chapter

Partisan political action

“Partisan” in this context means, “relating to political parties and/or candidates”

CPF, from the National level to the smallest chapter, does not engage in partisan political activities – directly or indirectly supporting or opposing a political party or candidate. Our charitable status does not permit CPF to be involved in these activities.

However, this does not prevent a CPF group from providing information to its members from all of the candidates in a particular election provided there is fair and impartial treatment of all candidates and no preferences are expressed. Nor does it preclude an individual member from involvement in partisan activities, provided s/he does not present him/herself as a representative of CPF or receive support from a CPF group.

Be informed

Information is frequently not enough, but it's always an essential ingredient in any advocacy effort.

Gather the information you need. Statistics/demographics? School division and Saskatchewan learning policies? Research results? Costs/funding? Anecdotes? Amount of support in the community?

Analyse the information. To what extent does it support your case? Does your objective need to be altered? What further information do you need? How will you deal with conflicting or inadequate information?

Determine how and when to present the information

- Who needs to receive the information? Obviously, the decision-makers(s) you're targeting, but who else? Do your members need it so that they can actively support your efforts? The media? The branch? Other key people?
- How can you organize the information so that it's comprehensive, understandable, yet succinct? Remember that decision-makers (and everyone else you want to know this!) are very busy people, and that they are constantly receiving a great deal of information to review and digest. Point form, charts and graphs, and appendices can help. Does it need to be "packaged" differently for different audiences?
- What's the best time to present the information? When does the decision have to be made? What else is coming up that might support your efforts? Detract from your efforts?
- What's the best way to present the information? Briefs aren't the only technique! Others include: displays, panel presentations, videos, PowerPoint presentations, debates (not with your audience, but in front of them), speeches/lectures, and workshops/conferences. You might need to use more than one method.
- Who's the best person to present the information? Your President? Another well-respected, articulate member? An expert in the field?

Decide how you will follow up.

- Will you send an email, make a phone call, and send further information on topics that you have discussed? A note of appreciation for time spent at the meeting is appropriate.

Changing attitudes and perceptions

Information often isn't enough. You can be shown proof that a program will be effective, but it won't necessarily persuade you! Your own experiences, the experiences of your acquaintances, and the opinions of those you respect all influence your decisions, sometimes despite the preponderance of factual evidence.

These same influences need to be harnessed to change attitudes and perceptions. And, since everyone's experiences and spheres of influence are different, your strategies will need to be tailored to the individuals you hope to persuade.

Based on your analysis of the need (if any) to change attitudes or perceptions, you'll want to consider:

- How can you expose the individual to a positive experience with this particular aspect of French-second-language education (e.g. tours, simulations, skits, demonstrations, field trips)?
- Are there others in the community whom this person respects who can help to carry or reinforce your message? (e.g., business leaders, other politicians, students)
- How can you present your cause as the "safer" option to choose? (e.g., there is broad community support)
- And, again, how will you follow up? (see *"Some advocacy tools" in this section*)

Taking a position

What is a position?

A "position" or a "position paper" is a statement with supporting evidence that explains, justifies, or recommends a particular course of action. It is used as a basis for discussion with both potential partners (what we would like them to support) and with decision-makers (what we want them to do).

A "resolution" is simply a name for a motion on a particularly important or complex question – normally one that has been prepared in advance of the meeting and put into writing before being offered. The wording comes from the usual form of such a motion: "I move the adoption of the following resolution: Resolved, That..."

Once passed, a resolution on an issue becomes the organization's "position" on that issue. (Another example of a resolution would be a motion proposing changes to bylaws.)

The strength of a "position" rests not just in the clarity of the language and the strength of the evidence but also in the degree to which it has the support of the organization's membership.

Some advocacy tools

The following is far from a complete list of advocacy tools, nor is it a comprehensive explanation of the methods given. It is offered to illustrate the basic principles involved and to help your chapter begin to plan.

The brief

Keep it short and to the point.

Include all the factual material necessary, using clear, straightforward language.

Make statistics understandable (e.g., round off decimals, use graphs charts, diagrams for complex information).

A sample outline:

- Preamble (background and subject matter)
- Statement of the problem
- Expected results
- Summary of the recommendations
- Bibliography (footnote statistics and direct quotes)
- Appendices

If the brief is to be presented at a meeting (such as a meeting of your school board), understand the usual format of such a meeting, including how to get on the agenda, the deadline for submitting your brief for prereading, and whether or not a decision will be made at that meeting. Be clear about how much time you are requesting, and how much you will be given.

Anticipate the questions that might be asked, and prepare yourself to answer them (e.g., hold a brainstorming and/or role-playing practice session).

Have copies of the brief to leave with your listener(s) (bring some extras for the media and/or other interested parties even if the document has been submitted in advance)

Presenting the brief:

- Briefly introduce yourself and the members of your group who are in attendance
- Explain whom and how many you represent
- Deliver the brief with assurance and confidence in the importance of your message
- Thank the listener(s) for the time and for considering your proposal
- Offer to answer questions

After presenting the brief:

- Be clear about what will happen next (e.g., arrange for a follow-up meeting, ask for a report on actions taken, find out when the topic will be back on the agenda for a decision)
- If a commitment has been made or implied, as soon as possible after the meeting send a follow-up letter again thanking the listener(s) and reiterating your understanding of what was said

- Keep in touch by letter or telephone; don't let your brief be "filed"
- Report to the chapter

Letter and/or phone campaign

The letter and/or phone and/or e-mail campaign supports other efforts (such as a brief). The purpose is to illustrate the breadth of support for a cause and to ensure that it remains "on the table". Done well, it is far more effective than a petition – taking the time to call or write is worth a hundred quickly scrawled signatures.

The message needs to be:

- Brief (busy people do not appreciate long phone calls and rambling letters)
- Supportive of the cause (no need to repeat the chapter's request or proposal, but be sure to reference it either directly or indirectly)
- Positive (comment on something you've appreciated in the past, mention a potential positive result of the proposed decision, etc.)
- Polite (no late-night calls; always end with thanks for taking the call or reading the letter)

If you want your members to undertake such a campaign, make it easy for them

Provide sample letters or a sample outline (but not a form letter to just be signed)

Don't make them look it up: provide the full name and correct title as well as the mailing address, email address, or telephone number as appropriate

Consider holding a letter-writing bee, with refreshments, pre-addressed stamped envelopes, writing paper, and pens on hand

The media

See Section 11: Visibility and Media Relations

School Division elections

Once every three years, Saskatchewanians choose the leaders of their school divisions. The main tasks of your Trustees are to set policies (e.g., to offer French immersion), to plan for future needs, and to establish priorities (which includes setting the annual budget).

Your chapter might use these elections as an opportunity to support quality, accessible FSL programs by providing information so that electors can make informed decisions. Strategies include:

- Raising awareness among your members of the importance of these elections to future directions for education within their community
- Having a representative(s) attend public meetings at which school board candidates will participate in Question and Answer sessions, posing a question(s) to all candidates
- Organizing or cosponsoring (perhaps with one or two other education-related organizations) an all-candidates' forum

- Giving a brief questionnaire to all candidates, collating the results, and circulating the answers to your members

Important considerations:

Contact your local city clerk's office for names and contact information for the candidates. Choose your questions carefully, and ask no more than three or four. The CPF-SK office can provide examples, but you know the local issues, needs, and opportunities best.

Do not edit what a candidate says or writes. If the answers are from meetings, ensure they are taken down verbatim; you might wish to confirm with each candidate what was said before they're circulated. If questions are submitted in writing, be sure that the candidates know in advance what you will do with the responses, and give them a maximum length for their answers.

After the elections, your chapter will want to congratulate the winners and acquaint (or re-acquaint) them with CPF. This is an opportunity to let them know who you are, how to reach you, how you can help them, what issues you wish to deal with during their term of office, and so on. However, remember that they will be inundated with information – and paper – at this time, so keep your letter brief and the information use-friendly (for example, a small ring binder or a two-pocket folder with relevant reference materials, with a cover or large label that makes it easy to identify).

Send information (your newsletters, media releases etc) on a regular basis.

It would also be appropriate to contact the losing candidates to thank them for their views as expressed in their responses to your questions.