



Strengthening Communities Through Volunteer Program Development

Volunteering to Support Advocacy

- Toolkit for Volunteers

July 2018

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How to navigate the Canadian government system

When you are advocating on an issue, it can sometimes be confusing trying to access the right elected official who can help you. This section is designed to demystify the political system, so your messages reach the right person.

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Canadian government is divided into three levels: federal, provincial and municipal. Many areas of responsibility are duplicated (such as transport), so it is important to consider if the issue you are advocating on affects people with sight loss nationally, provincially or locally.

Federal government

The federal parliament in Ottawa is divided into two chambers: The House of Commons and the Senate. The House of Commons is made up of Members of Parliament (MPs), who are elected by constituents in the 338 constituencies or ridings across Canada. MPs introduce, debate and vote on bills that will become legislation. They also represent the views of their constituents on a national level. MPs are members of political parties. After a general election, the party with the most elected MPs usually forms the government. The head of government is the Prime Minister.

The Senate is made up of Senators, who are nominated by the Governor General of Canada under the advice of the Prime Minister. Senators play a vital role in the legislative process and introduce debate and vote on bills. Bills must pass through both the House of Commons and the Senate before they become law.

MPs from the party in power can also be Cabinet Ministers who lead and set priorities for government departments and agencies, lead government policy and set priorities for the government. Some MPs from the party in power become Parliamentary Secretaries who help a specific Cabinet Minister. MPs from the opposition party can serve as Opposition critics in a 'shadow' role that is equivalent to being a Cabinet Minister, but within their own party. Their job is to be the lead person on specific files for their party and push for their own party's priorities and goals.

Some areas the federal government is responsible for include:

- Banking
- Health
- Intergovernmental affairs
- Justice
- Labour
- Public Safety
- Public Works and Government Services
- Post Office
- Transport
- Infrastructure
- Veterans Affairs

To find who your MP is, you can search by your postal code at elections.ca or parl.gc.ca. Please

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keep in mind that it's not an effective strategy to 'go to the top' and approach a federal MP if the issue is not a national one.

Provincial government

Like the federal government, Members of the Provincial House of Assembly are elected in their electoral district or riding as representatives in the provincial legislative assembly. Their titles in Newfoundland and Labrador are known as Members of the House of Assembly. (MHA's)

As with federal MPs, Members of the House of Assembly introduce, debate and vote on bills, and represent their constituents' views at the provincial level. Provincial governments also mirror the federal government in that they have a Cabinet, Opposition Critics, and Ministers are appointed as leaders of provincial government departments. There is no Senate in Canadian provincial governments. Some areas provincial governments are responsible for include:

- Culture
- Education
- Health (including hospitals)
- Intergovernmental relations
- Social services
- Tourism, Parks, and Recreation

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- Transportation

To find out who your Member of Provincial Parliament is, you can search on your provincial legislature's website:

Newfoundland & Labrador

elections.gov.nl.ca to find your riding and
assembly.nl.ca to find your MHA.

Municipal government

Municipal government officials are called councilors. As in federal and provincial government, they are elected collectively in the whole municipality or by ward/riding in the municipality. Councilors represent their constituents at the municipal level, pass by-laws, develop policies and deliver programs and services. The elected head of the council is the Mayor.

Some relevant areas municipal governments are responsible for include:

- Airports
- Animal Control
- Business licenses
- By law enforcement
- Community accessibility
- Community support services
- Museums, libraries, and other cultural centres

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- Parks and pathways
- Police services
- Public lighting
- Public transit
- Recreation programs and facilities
- Roads and streets
- Social Services

There are 276 incorporated municipalities in Newfoundland and Labrador. To find who represents you, please refer to your municipality's website.

How to write a winning campaign strategy

The key to success for any campaign is to have a winning strategy in place before you start. If you don't, then you could miss out on key opportunities to speak to the right people, at the right place, at the right time. This template with six easy steps is designed to help you use the fundamentals of campaigning to get started on your plan. Good luck!

Contact advocacynl@cnib.ca to gather any fact sheets or information you think you might need to support your message.

Step 1 – What exactly is the issue?

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As advocates who are keen for change, we often want to break down barriers all at once. But it is important for you to pinpoint exactly what needs to be changed. For example, “My local neighborhood is inaccessible” is too general a problem to tackle successfully. Exactly what is inaccessible in your neighborhood? If there are too many examples to choose from, then pin it down to one problem: “My neighborhood is inaccessible because local shop owners put out advertising boards on the street.”

Make sure you have clearly defined your goal or goals, so you know what you are shooting for and will know when you are successful. Your goal should be **SMART** (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Timely).

Your turn

Write a one-sentence summary of the issue.

Write a SMART goal for your campaign.

Step 2 – What are your key messages and what is the evidence to support you?

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For your campaign to be successful, you need to identify the facts that will convince people of your argument. It may take some effort, but you need to determine how best to present your argument in a simple and effective manner.

It is crucial to have information the media, decision-makers and the public want, and to have it in a form that is easy to distribute and understand. Having some good facts and figures at hand will also make you feel more confident about approaching decision makers.

Now that you have identified the problem, it is important to gather evidence to support your campaign. This could be finding current statistics, photos, case studies, best practice examples, and more. The information needs to be clear, concise, and presented in a way that is easily understandable to motivate others to act.

Finally, you need to put all the information into a compelling argument. Try to think of what people need to hear to act in the way you want. What can you say to persuade them that acting in your favour is good for them, too? How can you position your issue in a way that everyone wins?

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Ideally, you will develop three or four key messages that crystallize your thoughts. Please see **How to Write Key Messages** on page 11.

Your turn

What types of evidence already exist that I could use?

What evidence do I need to gather myself?

What steps do I need to take to gather this evidence?

Step 3: Know your target and create your call list

As you gather evidence, you need to determine the target for the campaign. For example, if you want to change a dangerous street crossing in your city, this is dealt with municipally rather than federally, so your primary target would be on a local rather than national level. Once you know the level of government, you need to figure out who is the decision maker (the person who has the power to bring about the change) and who has influence over the decision maker.

In government, there are politicians (people who are elected and represent a political party), political

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staff (people who belong to the political party and work for the politician) and bureaucrats (staff who work for the government and do not represent a political party, but who often have a lot of influence). You need to do some homework to decide who to target. See **How to Meet with a Politician and/or Staff** on page 16.

Once you have done your homework, you should create a call list. This will be a list of all the people you think you should be meeting with, phoning or sending letters to during your campaign. It should also mention how you will be communicating with each person, when, what information you will be providing to them, and how and when you will be following up.

Your turn

What decision maker can bring about the change needed?

Are there any other key players?

Who influences the decision makers?

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How do you reach these people?

Step 4 – Build relationships with other stakeholders

Relationship building is a crucial skill for any campaign to succeed, because it means you can have many people working towards the same goal. It is also more likely to grab the attention of decision makers and the media if a large group of people or multiple organizations are working on one issue. A good place to start is to think about what groups are affected by the issue. For example, clutter on streets doesn't just affect blind and partially sighted people, but also wheelchair users and parents with strollers. Local disability groups can often provide a wealth of knowledge and support, as well as larger organizations like CNIB. It is essential that whoever joins the campaign understands the objectives and messages. Reach out to different organizations that can come together united under a common goal. Go over your key messages together to make sure you are all asking for the same thing. Review your call list and figure out who is the best person to contact your targets.

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Your turn

What people, groups and organizations can I connect with who might be affected by this issue and want to help?

Step 5 – Timing

As with any plan, timing is key for when you want to launch your campaign. You should think about what milestone events on the timeline are important for your campaign (such as legislation dates, awareness days, local meetings) and what needs to be done to prepare for each deadline (for example, you don't want to meet with a decision maker and find they already voted on the issue the week before!). Having deadlines for different phases of the campaign will help shape your campaign and keep it on track for success.

Your turn

What are the important dates coming up in the future for this campaign?

Step 6 - Monitoring success

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At the beginning of the campaign you would have set clear goals for what you wanted to achieve. You had a clear idea of what success would look like, and how you would know when you achieved it. Now you can measure the impact the campaign has made. Celebrate what you have achieved (what worked and why?) and think about what you would do differently next time.

Your turn

Look at the objectives of the campaign – which ones did you meet?

What is the evidence that you achieved this?

Were there any you didn't meet, and if so, why?

What would you do differently?

What stakeholders do you need to share the outcomes with?

How to Write Compelling Key Messages – Sample Format

If your argument is to resonate with and persuade your audiences to act, it needs to be simply and concisely expressed. It is best to break it down into three or four components – key messages – that

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follow a basic formula (as shown below). By doing this, you will be sure to put your most persuasive information forward – and you will be able to remember what you want to say!

Key Message #1

- What is the issue? Or what is wrong that needs to be fixed/changed?

Example:

Canadian employers are doing themselves a disservice by routinely dismissing the idea of hiring a person with sight loss. This means employers are often not getting the best person for the job and are missing out on working with people who are highly innovative out of necessity.

Evidence:

A new survey commissioned by CNIB reveals that 70 per cent of Canadians, if tasked with choosing between two fully qualified job candidates, would hire a sighted person over a blind one. Based on two equal candidates, the person with sight loss is left behind the majority of time.

Key Message #2

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- Why does it matter? What is the impact? Who is being hurt by the current situation and how are they being hurt? What is the cost to society of this situation?

Example:

People in the vision loss community who could be supporting themselves and contributing to society are either unemployed or are under-employed. This places a needless burden on society and forces otherwise bright, healthy, able people to live in poverty. We are short-changing ourselves.

Evidence:

- 62% of working aged people with vision loss don't have jobs, compared to 27% of the sighted population.
- We can't even accurately estimate the unemployment rate (which means the number of people who are actively looking for work and can't find it – 7% in Canada) because so many people with vision loss have given up trying to find work.

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- About half of Canadians with vision loss live on low incomes, making \$20,000 a year or less.

Message #3

- What do we need to know about this to fix this?

Example:

Canadians should understand that people with vision loss can do almost any kind of job, working independently – they just do them a bit differently with the help of inexpensive technologies and minor practices in the workplace that cost nothing.

Evidence:

- Canadians with vision loss include scientists, engineers, machinists, computer technologists, teachers – almost anything you can think of.
- Except for some minor accommodations, they work 100 per cent independently.
- Often, the job accommodations they need are simply practical things like keeping hallways clear and saying your name before you start speaking in a meeting.

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- The employee will tell you what technologies they need. These might be desk lamps, large monitors or braille keyboards.
- ZoomText, a screen magnification software, is around \$600 and JAWS, an audio screen reader, is around \$1,500.

Message #4

- What should be done about it?

Example:

Next time you are hiring, make your workplace inclusive and do yourself a favour by adding someone with vision loss to your team.

Employers can educate themselves by going to [cnib.ca/employability](https://www.cnib.ca/employability) or by contacting CNIB directly.

CNIB would welcome an opportunity to meet with any employer to answer questions and provide recommendations for easily, inexpensively and comfortably working with employees with vision loss.

How to write a great advocacy letter

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Writing a great letter may be your best chance to tell a decision maker about an issue and how they can help. CNIB can provide you with a template letter if needed, but the most impactful letters (and most likely to be read and get a response) are unique letters written by **you**, the constituent.

Letters don't have to be long or fancy; it is best to keep it no longer than a page. The key is to have your facts right and insert your personal story into it, so the human side of the argument is being expressed. You could also send a fact sheet as an attachment if there are too many facts or too much evidence to include in the letter.

- **To/From**

- Your own address and date
- The name (using correct salutation), title and address of the person you are writing to.

- **Introduction paragraph:**

- Personal introduction and the purpose of the letter

Example: My name is Sarah Snow and I am writing to you as a constituent who is blind and my day to day life is impacted by the lack of accessible

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pedestrian signals on a crossing in your constituency.

- **Issue summary paragraph:**

- A summary of the situation or history, including one or two pieces of data or evidence.

Example: I need to use this crossing on Peter St/Jones Ave every day to get to work. This crossing is inaccessible and dangerous to me as I cannot see when to cross. There are X amount of people living with vision loss in your constituency, who might also be affected by this.

- **Proposed outcome paragraph:**

- What you would like done about the issue (including a request for a follow up meeting)

Example: I would like to meet with you to discuss an audio signal being placed at this crossing. Please would you contact me to tell me when you are available?

- **Closing:**

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- Yours truly” or “Yours sincerely
- Your signature
- Your typewritten name and telephone number

How to have successful meetings with politicians

CNIB is not affiliated with any political party, and it is our mandate to work with all parties to achieve the best outcomes for blind and partially sighted people. When advocating (particularly if you are acting in an official CNIB capacity) it is important to put your political beliefs aside and use a collaborative approach with all parties to get the best result. Please see **Building Relationships** later in this toolkit.

Meetings with a politician and/or political staff can have a significant impact. Often when meeting with a politician and their staff you are bringing forward solutions to problems or issues they are not fully aware of. It shows them that you care about the cause. Meeting with an elected official may appear daunting, but if you follow the four steps below, you will be well prepared for a successful meeting.

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Step 1 – Find which elected official to meet with

You want to make sure you are targeting your message to the right person, so it's important to know who that is. For federal representatives you can search via postal code on the Parliament of Canada website: www.parl.gc.ca. You can also search via Elections Canada: www.elections.ca. Each provincial and municipal legislature will also have its own list of elected politicians on its website. For more information, please see the section of this toolkit called

How to navigate the Canadian government system.

Sometimes you might have to meet with a Cabinet Minister, their staff or departmental staff. A list of Federal Cabinet Ministers can also be found on www.parl.gc.ca. Provincial governments are set up in a similar way to the federal government and a list of provincial House of Assembly Members can be found [here](#).

Municipal governments are largely made up of individual councillors and a Mayor however sometimes larger cities have Executive Councils

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where councillors oversee committees or policy files.

Step 2 – Contact your elected official

Once you have the correct contact details for the official, call their office to set up a meeting. Elected officials will have staff who should answer your call. Treat them the same as you would the legislator. Introduce yourself and give a summary of the issue you would like to discuss with the legislator. Elected officials have very busy schedules and would not be able to meet immediately, so don't leave your appointment to the last minute if your campaign is time sensitive.

You can also email the politician, but this also runs the risk of your email getting lost among the hundreds of emails that they receive every week. If you do not hear back from your first request after a week, then it's okay to send a polite follow-up email.

If your elected official is unavailable to meet, then their staff may also become an important ally. You can arrange a meeting with them as an initial step and then schedule a meeting with your representative later.

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Step 3 – Prepare for the meeting

Legislators have multiple meetings per day. It is best to have a specific policy concern you want to talk about during your meeting and not a general discussion about vision loss. Practice your key messages so you will be clear and concise. You do not need to be word-for-word perfect, but you do need to feel confident and comfortable. While preparing, choose a portion of your personal story as a way into the conversation about the wider issue. You don't need to be an expert on everything to do with the subject, but you might want to email CNIB at advocacynl@cnib.ca to gather any fact sheets or information to support your message to leave with the official. If you are meeting an official on behalf of CNIB, it is also vital that you get in touch with us prior to the meeting.

If you're not familiar with your official's background before you meet, then do as much research on them as you can before your meeting (on their website, social media accounts, local press and constituency communications from their office). If you know their biography, their priorities and the issues they are working on, you will better understand how to approach your discussion. It is

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also worth finding out if they have any previous experience or knowledge of vision loss issues.

Most importantly, don't forget to double check the date, time, location of the meeting and how you are going to get there in advance. Most government buildings will need to see your government-issued photo ID to gain entrance. Staff in the elected official's office should alert you when you set up your meeting of any procedures for entering government buildings.

Step 4 – The meeting

Arrive 15 minutes early and let the front desk know you've arrived. While the meetings may start late, end early or be rescheduled altogether, it is important to be early, flexible and courteous.

- Your clothing for any meeting should be neat and professional.
- When attending a meeting at a provincial or federal legislature, the dress code will always be business attire, a jacket or suit.
- A meeting in a government official's riding office may be less formal and casual business attire may be enough.

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The meeting may be divided into four parts:

- Introduce yourself, including why you are an advocate. You want to get your unique story across within a concise amount of time.
- Be clear on the objective of the meeting – why you're there and what you're asking for. Briefly outline the issue and include the impact to the community and some facts/figures that support what you're saying. Contact CNIB to provide you with any evidence to support your argument.
- Listen carefully during their response; you ideally want to be able to tell what part of your message resonated with them. Answer questions briefly or commit to sending answers after the meeting if you're not sure. Do not get into an argument if they do not agree with you on an issue but bring the conversation back to your key points and any personal experience of the issue. Try and find some common ground.
- Sum it up with next steps. Leave any fact sheets and contact information, should they have any further questions.
- Many decision makers now have social media accounts. If the meeting went well, ask the decision maker if you can take a photo with them to put up on social media to thank them for the meeting. Decision makers, particularly

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MPs, are keen to visibly show on social media who they are meeting with and what they are doing in the local community.

- Once you get home, send a thank you/follow-up letter. This is more than just a courtesy, but helps summarize and reinforce your message. Send a copy of the letter, as well as your debrief information to CNIB.

How to write a great follow-up letter

So now you've met with an official who has the power to help you achieve your campaign goal. This is a person you want to keep on your side, and a great follow-up letter can help you achieve this. The follow-up letter is important for two reasons: to thank the official for the meeting, and to underline the important points and next steps agreed to in the meeting. Here's a template letter to get you started.

Sample email:

Dear [insert name of official, using correct salutation],

Thank you for meeting me on [insert date] to discuss [topic of discussion].

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[Write 2-3 sentences summarizing the key points of what you discussed with the official, and then 2-3 sentences about what next steps were agreed to in the meeting].

For your reference I have also attached some fact sheets created by CNIB with more information about [topic of campaign]. I hope these are useful to you.

If you have any questions or require further information, please feel free to email me at [insert email] or call me at [telephone number].

Thank you for your time, and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Yours sincerely,

[Insert your name here]

Checklist before you hit send:

- Did you explain any technical terms, or spell out acronyms?
- Is the tone positive, polite and collaborative?
- Did you run the spell and grammar check?

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- Is the font and format consistent, especially if parts have been cut and pasted?
- All attachments are attached and accessible?
- Do you need someone to proofread it and give feedback?
- Did you save a copy for yourself and the date you sent it for a follow-up action if needed?
- Have you copied the people you want to include?

How to Prepare Yourself to Speak Effectively and Comfortably

When advocating for an issue, it's likely that you'll have an opportunity to speak to or meet with the person or group that will be able to help make the changes you would like to see. Whether you are addressing a single person or a larger audience, the thought of speaking in public can be nerve wracking, but the more prepared you are, the more confident you will feel.

Remember that CNIB staff can answer your questions or provide you with the materials you need as you prepare, no matter what the question may be.

Preparing your spoken advocacy message

- Know your audience, their interests, concerns, biases, personal experience or sphere of influence, if possible.
- Clarify the positive outcome you want in developing the core message.
- Decide on the supporting messages, stating them in a few sentences, making sure they are relevant to the audience and are simply and clearly explained.

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- Start from the most important reason to less important ones.
- Supporting evidence, provided by CNIB, may include principles, legislation, causes and effects, statistics, anecdotes, quotes from authorities, comparisons or examples.
- Be prepared to address common questions or objections, such as costs, expertise, legality, capacity, myths. If needed, offer to provide answers later with "I don't know the answer, but will look into it and get back to you." Please see **How to handle unexpected situations**, also in this toolkit.
- End with a call to action or a clear request appropriate for the audience.

Tips for speaking at a meeting

- Use proper titles (e.g., Minister) and correct pronunciation of names.
- Create contact by facing the person's voice; if more than one person, ask where everyone is and turn to look at each one individually.
- Remember to smile, and to be open and approachable.
- If you are speaking as part of a team, decide who will say what and when.
- Be polite, respectful, and confident.
- After brief introductions, go right into your request or issue statement, followed by the most

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important reason to less important ones. This will ensure your most important messages are heard if the meeting is cut short.

- Speak from your heart and experience. Share your personal story to allow your audience to see the personal side of your call to action.
- Use simple, clear language as you let your audience see and feel your enthusiasm and passion. Avoid long anecdotes and potentially controversial words.
- Have a clear message and call to action. Tell them why your message is important to them and what it is exactly you want them to do. Direct the conversation back to the key message if you or the audience is drifting.
- Be aware of time limitations and remember to leave time for questions.
- Thank the audience for listening, the opportunity to speak and for their support.
- Be prepared to answer frequent questions or objections; answer the best you can or offer to provide the answers later.
- Prepare for a range of possible responses, whether positive or negative.
- Leave a written copy of your key messages and your contact details for any follow-up information.

Tips for speaking at networking events

- Consider having a sighted guide to assist with getting around a large venue or in identifying people to talk to.
- Circulate the room, talking with as many 'key' contacts as you can. Remember, people are there to network, so don't be afraid to approach someone!
- Join groups talking together, interjecting with a comment or self-introduction.
- Be aware that with politicians and decision makers, you may have a brief time for your messaging (1 – 2 minutes).
- You may also need to politely extract yourself from a long-winded conversation with another person. If you are there for a reason, you don't want to miss your chance to speak to the right person.
- Ask for the person's title, department or organization and name (spelling) and get his/her business card so you can follow up.
- Follow up with an email thanking the person, reiterating your key messages or presenting your request (CNIB staff can assist you with messaging).

How to conduct social media for advocacy

Social media is not something that should be a stand-out piece on its own but should be incorporated into your overall advocacy strategy. Social media can be a great way to extend the reach of your campaign online and get people fired up about your cause. But for you to achieve your goal, here are some tips to make your social media campaign effective.

Choose your platform(s) wisely

Nowadays there are so many social media platforms to choose from; Facebook, twitter, Google+ LinkedIn, Instagram and WordPress to name a few. It is important to know off the bat what you hope to get out the platform:

- Do you want to gather a group of people together and have a more interactive platform?
- Do you want to be able to post pictures or mostly words?
- Are your posts going to be long or short?
- You also need to consider where your audience is, as the community you're trying to reach might favour a particular platform.

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Many decision makers and organizations have official Twitter and Facebook accounts, if they are your main target. If you want to rally people with vision loss together, you need to consider the accessibility of the platform you're sending your message from.

Have a clear and concise message

Some platforms like twitter will have a limited number of characters you can use per post, and other platforms like blogs will let you create much longer posts. Either way, social media is so fast paced that no one is going to read a long rambling post that doesn't have clear points and aims.

Build your follower base

Like any good relationship, social media is a two-way dialogue between you and your followers. To build up your own follower base, start following or adding other people and groups online who are interested in the same or similar causes to you. Not only will you be informed about the latest news on these issues, but people will start to follow you back and show mutual support for your campaign. As well as posting your own content, repost other peoples' content when relevant to your cause, to

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show support and potentially gain new followers in the process.

Maximize visibility

To direct more online traffic to your pages, it is much more effective to piggyback on other tags that people are already looking for than creating your own. One example of this is using the universal accessibility hashtag #a11y to replace the word 'accessibility' in a sentence. If your advocacy work relates to a time specific hashtag like #VisionHealthMonth', then use these at the correct times to help the theme trend and make yourself more visible online.

If you want to get another user's attention such as a decision maker or organization then you can tag them in posts. Please note: on twitter if you start your tweet with a tag (i.e. '@CNIB is celebrating #VisionHealthMonth') then the person tagged will see it, but it won't appear on your feed for others to see. So, it's better to embed the tag (i.e. 'it's #VisionHealthMonth and @CNIB are celebrating') so everyone can see it.

If you have a positive meeting with a decision maker or organization then it's perfectly acceptable

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to ask them if you can take a photo with them to put on social media. Don't forget to ask them their official account name so you can tag them and they can repost the message to their own followers.

Be friendly, be credible

It is a natural part of any advocacy campaign cycle to meet frustrations and roadblocks to success. But as in a face-to-face meeting, no one will want to partner with someone online who is incoherent, angry or offensive. Even if you come across someone who is being negative or unhelpful to your campaign, try and bring them to your side by sticking to the facts and backing them up with links to external evidence, if applicable.

If you appear to be bullying or 'trolling' someone online, then you will alienate potential supporters and destroy any credibility, even if your advocacy campaign is valid. And if possible, try and take any escalating arguments to a private message as soon as possible. A public slanging match doesn't make anyone look good.

Quality over quantity

No one enjoys being spammed with a flood of messages and most people will unfollow those who do this. Think carefully about any upcoming milestones (i.e., an important meeting or legislation that is going to the next stage in parliament) and build your timelines around this. Only increase the frequency of posts during this time. If you need extra help, then there are programs like Hootsuite and Tweetdeck on twitter that can auto-time posts for you to make the most impact.

How to work with the traditional media

Media coverage is a great way to let the public know about an advocacy issue. Although e-mail and the internet can reach thousands, even millions of people, having local and national coverage in the media draws attention to an issue and adds credibility and perspective. Sometimes the pressure of public exposure is all that is necessary to get decision-makers to solve a problem. Elected officials read the news too!

Remember: never claim to speak to the media on behalf of CNIB without getting in touch with our

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communications team first. If you need help or advice on contacting the media about an issue relating to vision loss, contact us at advocacynl@cnib.ca.

Credibility and perspective

It is one thing for you to post your opinion on Facebook or to send out a tweet, but it is entirely another when a respected journalist picks up your message to create a news story. Most members of the media have the public's respect. When they cover a story, they're expected to research the issue, talk to people on both sides of the issue and check the facts. Media coverage is particularly valuable for an advocacy campaign. The media often add perspective because they attempt to provide balance. It is part of their job to interview different spokespeople to validate what you told them. Part of your job is to anticipate who they might speak to and what those people might say. That's why it's so important to work with stakeholders in advocacy.

Contacting the media

Journalists may become interested in the situation of a person who is blind or partially sighted because:

- The person who is blind or partially sighted tells them about it.
- They hear about the situation and want more information.
- CNIB reaches out to the media.

In smaller communities, it is easy to get to know the people who cover the news. The same journalists may cover Night Steps, Dining in the Dark, your volunteer appreciation celebration or other CNIB events. Don't be shy to talk to journalists and help them get information for their stories. Like any other relationship, trust develops over time. Journalists appreciate people who return their calls promptly, as they often work to a tight deadline, and they appreciate people who provide them with accurate, reliable information. If you email them about a story, follow it up with a phone call. Journalists are very busy, so you have to be prepared with your key messages ready before you contact them.

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In larger communities, it may be harder to get to know all the journalists who cover community events. However, some journalists have a “beat” such as city council or disability issues. Even if you have not met journalists before, you can learn a bit about them ahead of time by following their coverage of local events.

Checklist

- **Why will the media care** about the story? Is it genuinely something that will be of interest to their audience? Why?
 - **Does the story/issue directly involve anyone else except you?** Have you contacted them for their consent to contact the media?
 - **What is the key thing you want the media to report,** and can you summarize this in one sentence? What is the solution to the problem that you want the media to put forward?
 - **What is the deadline?** Check when the deadline for submissions is, if you want your story in the next edition, or if your campaign is time sensitive.
 - **How can CNIB staff help?** This could be providing you with key statistics and information, a media release, or prepping you
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with tips on how to talk to the media. Reach out to us at advocacynl@cnib.ca.

Speaking with the media

- Be clear about whether you represent yourself and/or your organization. Never represent CNIB without speaking to your CNIB contact.
- For television, keep your eyes on whoever is talking – whether you know you are on camera or not. It is rare to see a spokesperson look directly at the camera (usually just in telethons). The rules of polite conversation apply. When it is your turn to talk, look at the interviewer. If you are on a panel with multiple people, just keep looking at the person who is speaking so you appear polite.
- For radio interviews, use your voice to portray your enthusiasm and keep a smile on your face so it is in your voice (unless the topic is a distressing one – in that case, your natural emotions will direct you).
- Never get openly angry or be rude.
- Body language matters. Try to look confident and relaxed. It's important to come across as friendly and likeable, as well as professional.

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- Be proactive by respectfully launching into your key messages after introductions with "Thank you for taking the time to meet with me. I would like to speak to you about..."
- This is your interview, so make sure your message gets across even if you have to politely say, "I would like to finish answering your earlier question" and if you need to correct factual errors by the interviewer.
- Never give inaccurate information. If you are unsure, simply say, "I'm sorry I don't know that. I'll be glad to check and get back to you."
- Do not repeat a negative about CNIB. Keep your answers positive. "Actually, did you know..." or "In point of fact, our organization..." or "the real issue is..."
- Avoid one-word answers like "yes" and "no" by adding in part of your key message "yes, and..."
- Never say "No comment." Maintain an open, positive attitude. If you are waiting for direction from other people or need time to study the issue, say so.
- When there is opportunity to give additional comments (usually the interviewer's last

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question), restate your core message or summarize your key messages.

Checklist

- **Arrive 15 minutes early** and let the front desk know you've arrived. Be friendly and courteous. Try to be flexible, as the meeting may start late, end early or be shifted altogether. Remember: they are helping you get your important message out to the public.
- **Bring materials** to help the audience understand, like fact sheets and other background materials. Bring contact information for anyone else who is willing to talk to the media (remember to ask them first!).
- **Dressing instructions** often come with media interview requests such as staying away from green (media projection screens are green) outfits. Typical dress differs from show to show.

Ideas of how to work with media

- Write a letter to the editor. This may be in response to a relevant article that has recently been published. Your letter should be around 200-300 words.

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- Write a proactive letter to a newspaper to inform the readership about a proposed change (national/provincial legislation, modifications to local built environment) that might affect people who are blind or partially sighted. Be sure of your facts.
- Call in to a "phone in" part of a radio show when they mention an issue relevant to people with sight loss.
- Make yourself available as a source to the media in case they need a comment from a person with vision loss for their story.
- Become a CNIB Champion who is trained to be a spokesperson for CNIB on certain issues.
- Write an op-ed, which is a guest newspaper editorial, written by experts or members of the community on a particular issue.

How to build strong relationships

Why work with others?

No person is an island. Making connections, finding allies and building supports are all part of advocacy. Although some problems may be solved on an individual, case-by-case basis, many advocacy issues are often part of a wider systemic problem.

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A solution to an individual issue may inadvertently result in positive changes for other blind or partially sighted people. Even if the problem is personal to an individual with sight loss, other groups may want to offer support because of their concern for disability issues or their interests in fairness and equality.

There are so many benefits to working with others, such as learning from their experience and gaining more attention through many supporters. There is strength in numbers, and the momentum from others can help keep a campaign going when all seems lost.

Who could I partner with?

The answer to this question relies heavily on what the issue is. Potential allies to consider are:

- Consumer groups (if a consumer issue like transportation or access to information)
- Local groups for people with sight loss
- CNIB advocates across Canada (either locally or nationally)
- Your elected officials
- Municipal accessibility advisory committees

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- Medical professionals like optometrists and ophthalmologists (if eye health related)
- Members of the wider disability community (for example, accessible information can affect people with hearing loss, dyslexic people and those with learning difficulties etc.)
- Journalists or media contacts (if you think you have an 'exclusive' story their readership will be genuinely interested in)

Remember: If you are advocating on behalf of another person who has sight loss, it is their decision if they want to involve other people. Due to privacy regulations, you require this person's permission to advocate on their behalf, and especially if the media is involved, to use their name publicly.

How do I get started?

You never know if someone is able or willing to help unless you ask. Keep your request for support simple, just a few sentences outlining what the issue is, and how you think the group might be able to help or why they'd be interested (try and be as specific as you can about what you'd like them to do, i.e., sign a petition, attend an event). If

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someone responds to you to say that they cannot help, don't be afraid to ask if they have any ideas of other groups that can assist. If they are interested, at this point you can send more detailed information on the issue.

Remember: Relationships are a two-way street and need to be nurtured. Keep in mind that your allies might want your support on their own issues in the future. You also never know when you might need to call on them again for a shared issue. Relationships once built, need to be maintained.

Initial points to consider:

- Does the person with vision loss (if it's not you) want to involve others in the issue? If so, who?
- Who else might be experiencing the same problem? Other CNIB people who are blind or partially sighted? Other people in the community? CNIB advocates who are blind or partially sighted in other parts of the country? For example, the installation of an accessible pedestrian signal is relevant to people who use the crossing. Does it make sense to try to find other people with the same problem to work together on a solution?
- Are there other local organizations that might have an interest in or be able to help with this

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situation? For example, if a person who is blind or partially sighted is having trouble with the landlord of geared-to-income housing unit, a group that represents low-income tenants might be interested and offer assistance. Or, a group advocating for more support for special needs children in the school system might be helpful if a student with vision loss is receiving inadequate classroom support.

- Does this issue relate to an issue of national concern? For example, getting a tax break for talking books is not only relevant to people who are blind or partially sighted, but also to people with learning disabilities. Changes to the federal *Income Tax Act* would affect many people across the country. Working together with other groups is more effective than working alone.
- What is the best way to approach each organization or individual? Is it in person at a public meeting, on social media, or direct contact via phone or email?
- Why should they care about the issue and how does it affect them? How can I summarize the issue in a few sentences and be specific about how they can help me? Do they know of anyone else I haven't already considered?
- What is my plan to keep them informed as the advocacy issue progresses, and how will I follow

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up to ensure that I maintain a good relationship with them?

How to handle unexpected situations

Even with the most detailed preparations, unexpected situations happen. We have gathered together some examples below of different reactions that your audience might have to your advocacy work, or common obstacles to achieving your goal. Expect the unexpected!

Range of reactions

Positive

- Show appreciation and confirm actions to be taken (who will do what, when and how).
- Offer to give credit for the support promised or given.

Neutral

- Use the inquiry approach - ask if they are aware of the significance of the barriers and the impact.
- Reiterate your supporting messages to emphasize the importance of the issue.

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Unsupportive

- Ask why they are unsupportive.
- Reiterate, calmly and pleasantly, your personal story about the issue and the impact of the issue on your life.
- Refer to facts, comparisons or economic and social consequences, showing the issue is relevant and important.
- Show how the issue affects them, even if it is indirectly.

No Response or Disinterest

- If you haven't heard back from the person or organization in a reasonable time, find out if the previous email/letter/phone call has been received, referring to your record or copy; ask what is happening.
- Reiterate your key messages.
- Urge a response by a certain date and offer a 'carrot or stick' (provide further information or benefits, or escalate this to higher levels, or the media).

The location information you were given is incorrect and you cannot find the person or place

- Always have a good description of the person or place, or a backup plan. Have the exact address

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and name of the place, or a contact name and phone number to call on the day.

- Give yourself lots of time to get to the venue or meeting.

The context or questions asked are different from what you expected

- Do a quick mental adjustment and deliver a modified message.
- If your prepared message is not appropriate for the questions asked, speak to what you can in the question and refer them to CNIB for further information.
- Give your prepared message with a short bridge, such as "That's an interesting topic/question. I would like to say though..."

The person you are talking to or others are dominating the conversation

- Be proactive by launching into your key messages right after brief introductions with "Thank you for taking the time to meet with me. I would like to speak to you about..."
- Be prepared to jump in, use polite bridging phrases, such as "Yes, you're right and...", "I see. Well, I'd like to say that...", "As I was saying...", "May I add that..."

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The conversation/meeting suddenly ends

- Quickly arrange for follow up: who to contact, when and how.

The microphone, PowerPoint presentation or other devices are not working, or resource materials are missing

- Be prepared to go on with the key messages.
- Don't refer to the mistakes or mishaps; focus on the audience and go on with your message.

You cannot make the event at last minute

- Arrange for a back-up person, providing that person in advance with the key messages and materials they need

Recap:

1. How can you ensure your written or spoken message is effective?
2. How can you best prepare for different responses and scenarios?
3. How can you make sure you either follow up with key people, or receive information required?

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How to advocate for accessible apps

With more people using smartphones and tablets, many companies also develop apps to connect with their customers. From banking to gaming, no matter what you are looking for, there is normally an app for that!

Yet sometimes the way that apps have been built means that they are not accessible to people using access technology on their device. Many small issues can be fixed with a short email to the app developer, but sometimes you might have to take it one step further. This guide includes some effective suggestions to do this.

How to contact the developer

It may sound obvious, but the first step should always be to get in touch with the app developer (please note, the developer and the vending company aren't always the same). To avoid calling someone out for an honest mistake, this should first be done privately. It's likely that the developer has made their app inaccessible out of ignorance rather than malice, so it's important to give them a chance to correct the mistake. Normally, the contact details

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of the developer are on the page where you purchased your app in your device's app store. This might be the developer's email or sometimes their social media account.

What to say to the developer

Just like when you advocate to governments, collaboration and education should always be the first approach when trying to resolve the issue.

While app developers may be whizzes at technology, they don't always have a thorough or practical understanding of accessibility. Your initial email should be a brief outline of the issue (no more than a paragraph), and should include:

- An introduction of yourself. Briefly say who you are and the name of the app you're trying to use (as they may have developed more than one app).
- Mention what access technology you're using; the name and version of the software.
- A description of what the issue is. Walk the developer through the process, as you're experiencing it as the app user. For example, "When I try and pay for my in-app purchase,

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the 'Buy Now' button isn't labelled correctly and my screen reader just says 'Blank'."

- If you have a tech background or know a solution, don't be afraid to propose what they can do to fix the problem. Or you may not know the technical reason, but you know as an accessible tech user what should normally happen when you do a certain action, so describe this process for them.
- Provide information to them on where they can find further information about accessible apps. See **Resource List** later in this section.
- If you're interested, you can also offer yourself as a resource for further (beta) testing of the app using accessibility technology.

Follow up approaches

If you kept the tone of your initial contact positive, you're more likely to receive a positive response, or any response at all! Remember that responses and fixes take time; they are not instant. But if you don't hear back over the next few days, there are a few different routes you can take.

- Move on. Particularly if the inaccessible app is free and/or there are other options available. As

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a customer, 'voting with your feet' can be powerful!

- Apps normally go through an update process to fix small bugs and improve the app. Every time the developer releases a new update of the app you can contact them again to remind them that the accessibility issue still remains. This can be a risky strategy because there's the possibility your emails will continue be ignored.
- Post the information on an accessible technology mailing list. This makes other people aware of the issue and you can join together to contact the developer. See **Resource List** later in this section.
- Take a more public route, posting more openly on social media platforms, tagging the organization and using any common hashtags like #a11y. The pressure of maintaining their reputation may spur on the developer into responding to avoid further public criticism. Keep in mind that your posts could be seen and saved by thousands of people, so be sure you're happy with your message before you press Enter!

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Getting past the diplomatic response

A common answer you might receive from a developer is a neutral response. They might point out that you are first user to bring this to their attention and have other priorities before fixing this issue. This is not necessarily a lost cause. Try and encourage them as much as you can, often they imagine the problem is much more complex than it actually is. For example, if you know that one of their competitors who has an accessible app, you could point to them as a good example. Or there are other resources that can give them some information on making apps accessible. See **Resource List** later in this section. Start a positive dialogue, so you can reach out to them in future if you need to.

Please note, the person who develops an app may not have the authority to decide what gets fixed. If it's a different person, ask for their email, or ask them to pass along your email.

Accessible apps and the law

As a rule, there is no Canadian legislation that requires developers to make websites and apps accessible. The notable exception to this is the

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Government of Canada's '**Standard on Web Accessibility**' (<http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/pol/doc-eng.aspx?id=23601>) which requires government departments' websites and applications to be accessible. For a full list of which government institutions this applies to, please refer to Schedule I, I.1 and 2 of the **Financial Administration Act** (<http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/F-11/>).

Despite a lack of legal responsibility to make apps and websites accessible in Canada, companies are starting to take accessibility more seriously.

Businesses are now reaching out to experts and users online to learn how to make their apps accessible and involve the community in testing.

Remember: Although it is your choice to report app accessibility issues to the developer, giving feedback on an app's accessibility is an opportunity to help other users as well.

Resource List

This guide is based on a seminar "Apple Vis and Advocating for Accessible Apps", by the Hadley Institute for the Blind and Visually Impaired. You can listen to the seminar in full by selecting the link below:

hwcdn.net/k4w2w6y8/cds/seminars/AppleVis_Advocating.mp3

Apple Vis: a community driven website for Apple product access technology users:

www.applevis.com/

Inclusive Android: a community website for disabled Android users: www.inclusiveandroid.com/

Eyes Free: A Google Group for the development of apps for people with sight loss (primarily on Android) groups.google.com/forum/#!forum/eyes-free

Government of Canada Standard on Optimizing Websites and Applications for Mobile Devices:

tbs-sct.gc.ca/pol/doc-eng.aspx?id=27088

Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG)

2.0: w3.org/WAI/intro/wcag.php

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Hadley's Resource List for developers:

hadley.edu/seminardownload/S@H-Resource-List-for-AppleVis.docx

How to make accessible apps (Apple):

developer.apple.com/accessibility/ios/

How to make accessible apps (Google):

developer.android.com/guide/topics/ui/accessibility/index.html

Disability Legislation and Standards

We advocate on the premise that everyone should be able to participate in all aspects of society. In some provinces there are laws and standards to ensure everyone can participate in society without discrimination. To advocate effectively, you need to understand the legislation and standards that protect our rights to ensure the law is working for you.

B. Canadian Legislation

Canadian Human Rights Act

laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/H-6/FullText.html

Example: Canadian transportation systems,
telecommunication companies, banks

Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms

laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/const/page-15.html

Example: Equal protection of the law without
discrimination based on disability.