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In Praise of Letters to Leaders

Nonprofit lobbying takes many forms. There's direct one-on-one lobbying. There's grassroots mobilization that empowers multiple voices to be heard. And then there's the sign-on letter that blends the best of both forms of lobbying – a direct appeal on a legislative priority – including “the ask” – and a showing of significant support. This article highlights several state-of-the-art advocacy letters to make the point that communicating with elected officials comes in many forms and the work products can have multiple uses.



At the federal level, regular readers of this newsletter will recall several opportunities throughout the pandemic where you took advantage of the opportunity to sign onto letters to the President and congressional leaders. Several notable letters, signed by thousands of charitable nonprofit organizations from all 50

states and the District of Columbia, provide a powerful advocacy tool for messaging and grassroots mobilization. Who can forget the famous “[Logo Letter](#)” in the early days of pandemic advocacy and last year’s [Nonprofit Community Letter](#) on pandemic and workforce shortage relief?

This month we saw an interesting variation on the theme of using a letter to advance advocacy. The YMCA of the USA normally conducts a day on Capitol Hill to give its local leaders the opportunity to highlight the impact their organizations are having on their communities and renewing or building relationships. This year, the local leaders carried with them an [Open Letter to Congress](#) from YMCA CEO Suzanne McCormick. The letter laid out the Y’s priorities in youth development, healthy living, and social responsibility. Hundreds of YMCA Advocates from across the country delivered the same message to multiple offices, both providing consistency of messaging and the oomph of direct engagement.



At the state level, the efforts of **Maryland Nonprofits** present a notable example of mass mobilization in support of a policy goal. The state association of nonprofits planned well ahead of the 2023 legislative session by spreading word that the unprecedented projected budget surplus in 2023 means it is time for Maryland to make good on its commitments to the nonprofits and the workers that have been asked to do “more with less” for decades. In consultation with nonprofits throughout the state, a coalition proposed a new state-funded \$100 million general operating grant fund to support small and mid-sized nonprofits serving communities in need.

In support of the proposal, Maryland Nonprofits circulated a [sign-on letter to the Governor and legislative leaders](#). More than 600 nonprofit organizations from throughout the state joined in making the case for the grant fund. Earlier this month, the letter and advocacy campaign saw its first victory with the introduction of House Bill 1226, which would establish the [Nonprofit Sustainability Fund](#) in the Department of Commerce. A \$100 million annual grants fund could make a world of difference.

Letters to lawmakers can be a valuable tool for framing the message, showing broad-based support, and driving the debate in support of nonprofit priorities. So the next time you see a sign-on opportunity, think of it both as a way to save you a trip to the Capitol and a way to join with dozens, hundreds, or even thousands of your

fellow nonprofits to promote policy priorities that can help you advance your mission.