An Employee Guide to ADVOCACY 101: Using Your Voice Inside and Outside of the Workplace

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The Power of Advocacy

No matter where you live or work, in red states or blue states, in big cities, or small towns, you can be a part of the movement to advance the rights of the LGBTQ+ community. Advocacy takes many forms, and the Human Rights Campaign Foundation (HRCF) is here to help you identify the most effective techniques for creating change around a specific cause. Today, the LGBTQ+ community continues to face an onslaught of anti-LGBTQ+ legislation and rhetoric while simultaneously, there is unprecedented support for LGBTQ+ civil rights. The American public is more out and has more allies than ever, and this trend is expected to continue into the next decade. Highlighting the urgency of this moment, Human Rights Campaign (HRC) declared its first-ever “State of Emergency” for LGBTQ+ Americans in June of 2023. We all have an important role to play as part of the solution by advocating inside and outside of the workplace for LGBTQ+ rights and equality. Your individual advocacy makes a critical difference, but groups of advocates will find strength and greater impact in numbers.

Individual Advocacy, Outside of the Workplace

Until every LGBTQ+ person has the protections of full equality, regardless of where they call home, your individual role as an advocate is important. Advocacy can take the form of voting, one-on-one conversations with your friends, family, neighbors, and colleagues, or activities like meeting with elected officials, writing a letter to a newspaper editor, organizing or attending rallies, providing public testimony, or even a peaceful protest. When considering these activities, it is important first to understand your employer’s code of business ethics and any policies on political engagement. You can find opportunities to get involved in ways that feel comfortable and appropriate to you and then lean in as you can. For example, Count Me In is HRC’s campaign for individual advocates who wish to support LGBTQ+ equality, specifically focused on lifting up transgender and non-binary people.

The overall call to action is to get involved and stay involved!
**Advocacy Inside and Through the Workplace**

Employees can also engage in internal workplace advocacy by working to change internal policies and programs to build LGBTQ+ inclusion and equality within the walls of your company. As members of employee resource groups, you likely have participated in this type of advocacy as a core function of your group’s charter. Examples include advocating for improved policies around recruitment and retention of LGBTQ+ employees or greater access to healthcare, training, and advancement opportunities. Learn more about these best practices in corporate policies, practices, and benefits in HRCF’s [2023-2024 Corporate Equality Index report](https://www.hrc.org/index-report).

In addition, employees can help inform external employer advocacy, which includes your company speaking out publicly or working behind the scenes to influence public policy decisions affecting its employees or customers. Building strong communication channels with internal decision-makers about the needs of employees and their families and the impacts of policies on your ability to thrive in the workplace and community can bolster your employer’s decision to respond. HRC has a long history of organizing employers’ private and public advocacy, including our [Business Coalition for the Equality Act](https://www.hrc.org/business-coalition-for-equality-act), the national [Business Statement on Anti-LGBTQ+ State Legislation](https://www.hrc.org/business-statement-on-anti-lgbtq-state-legislation), and our business [Count Us In pledge](https://www.hrc.org/count-us-in-pledge). Learn more about best practices in this kind of advocacy in HRCF’s report, [The LGBTQ Corporate Citizen: A Framework for Emerging Best Practices in Allyship](https://www.hrc.org/corporate-citizen).

**Build a Plan and Act**

The initial phase of your advocacy involves planning and preparation. Below is a five-step roadmap for establishing and achieving your advocacy goals.

1. **Educate Yourself and Connect With Others**

Find trusted, reliable sources of information to keep yourself informed and connected to the landscape for LGBTQ+ inclusion and equality. Organizations like HRC and state and local LGBTQ+ advocacy organizations are great places to start. The sheer volume of information required to know the “who, what, when, and how” of advocating for change can become daunting and may discourage someone who wants to be more involved in advocacy. No single employee should feel responsible for knowing everything that is happening and/or responding when it comes to advancing LGBTQ+ equality. This is why connecting your advocacy efforts to those coordinated by local, state, and national advocacy organizations is critical to sustaining your commitment and directing your time, resources, storytelling, and talents in the most impactful way possible. Advocating in a community with others supports resilience and strengthens impact. Here is what you gain when making this connection:
• **Research and Analysis to Identify Winning Strategies**: Advocacy organizations track, monitor, and analyze policies and legislation across the country in real time. Proposed legislation often undergoes several rounds of drafts that can lead to significant changes in a bill’s text. What may have been concerning about an earlier bill draft may be addressed and neutralized later. Similarly, pro-equality legislation may start strong but could be amended in ways that ultimately make it less ideal for passage. Advocacy groups will identify strategies to help ensure that these positive changes occur and that loopholes that could cause harm are removed. If a bill is truly unsalvageable, advocacy groups will identify strategies to prevent it from leaving the committee or ensure it fails when it comes up for a final vote. Advocacy groups also engage, represent, and research the specific needs of local communities. They will consider questions like what obstacles exist in the public sphere, what can be done to increase support, and what messaging and education are needed to counter misinformation spread by your opponents. Advocacy groups seek ways to counter this misinformation with public education rooted in understanding audiences and garnering support and input from individuals and organizations seen as authorities.

• **Goal Setting and Defining Advocacy Objectives**: Advocacy Groups will determine success metrics in both the short and long term. For example, a short-term goal may be to recruit a certain number of supporters. A long-term goal may be to leverage that support to ensure the passage of a particular bill or policy. Advocacy groups work to identify how single issues are a part of larger systemic problems. While it is important to aim for achievable goals, their focus on a larger context is vital to building a sustainable long-term movement.

• **Scale**: To grow a movement, it is most effective to achieve easy wins by focusing your efforts on capturing an audience already likely to offer their support. To do this, advocacy groups identify how best to reach their target audiences and which communications platforms they use. One of the best ways to increase scale is by crafting an inspiring message to recruit more people to action. What are their needs? What are their values? And how can you connect them with others who share their desired advocacy goals? Working across movements is another great way to grow power. By recognizing a common struggle, advocacy groups can make powerful allies in your personal advocacy journey.

2. **Identify Your Strengths**
Set advocacy goals and plan how to achieve them rooted in your strengths. This will set you up for success and help you identify new ways to grow your advocacy over time. Define your skills, assets, and sphere of influence to maximize your effectiveness. Consider these concepts early in your advocacy journey to point you in an effective direction.

- What is your unique background and expertise? Are you addressing the issue as a concerned citizen or as a seasoned professional in a relevant field? Parents, medical professionals, businesspeople, community members, and people from all walks of life can each advocate from a unique perspective and, when combined, create a movement that is greater than the sum of its parts.
- What assets (time, resources, knowledge) do you have to contribute?
- What spheres of influence do you have? Whether it be community or social networks in or outside of the workplace.

3. **Strengthen Your Story and “Ask”**
Raising one’s voice to support a cause is often the first step in wielding influence for advocacy purposes. You likely understand, in profound and nuanced ways, the benefits of lived equality and the harms of discrimination. Consider these important concepts to effectively use your voice and build a compelling narrative for your intended audience:
- Understand your audiences’ motivation and craft a message with this in mind.
  - Appeal to reason. Understanding your mutual goals and those of your intended audience will help you identify messages that appeal to their sense of reason. A lawmaker will likely care about a policy’s impact on their constituents or the business implications from an economic development perspective.
  - Appeal to emotion. Perhaps your intended audience is a parent or someone concerned about policies’ implications on people’s health and well-being. Perhaps they are concerned about safety or the values of self-determination and civil rights. Sharing stories by connecting your common values and experiences with your target through emotion can be a powerful motivator. Within your workplace, your company’s values and mission statement might represent these common values. Tying these company values with your advocacy can be powerful.
  - Appeal based on the intended audience’s status or authority. Are you an expert in your field or highly regarded at your job? If you can garner the respect of important decision-makers, they are more likely to listen and offer their support. You may also seek the support of colleagues and allies with positive reputations in your industry, organization, or community.

- Root your message in shared values of dignity, privacy, freedom, acceptance, and respect when speaking to an audience not firmly committed to LGBTQ+ equality. This might look like:
  - “We don’t need to understand everything about each other to treat each other with dignity and respect. We all want to be valued and accepted for who we know we are.”
  - “We can all agree it’s wrong to single out and attack anyone, including transgender people, just for living their lives and being who they are. We need more love and kindness and less hate.”

- Focus on the solution and make a clear ask.
  - When speaking with elected leaders, clarify what solution you seek and what you ask them to do next. As noted above, working with advocacy organizations and others aligned with your effort is key to understanding the most salient and urgent requests for lawmakers at a given time during a bill or policy’s lifespan. Even if your request is for the elected official to provide you with a response, it’s important to leave them with a clear next step. If the lawmaker supports your goals, be sure to thank them for their support and ask them to hold firm in their support.

4. Act!
Just do it! Don’t let fear or analysis paralysis keep you from starting. The next section outlines the common ways that individuals advocate for policy change so that you can find what works for you.

5. Keep Going
Once you start, find ways to lean in where you can. If you are advocating once a year, consider increasing it to once a month, and so on. Find your pace and level of comfort, and then explore new ways to get involved.

Common Ways To Advocate As An Individual

Again, when it comes to personal advocacy, be sure to consult your employer’s business code of ethics before taking action. Ensure you are in compliance so that your advocacy activities do not jeopardize your employment or your internal workplace advocacy efforts. The following are common ways to advocate, with best practices, tips, and examples.
**Contact Your Elected Officials**

Reaching out to and/or meeting with a lawmaker can feel daunting, but you have the skills to be effective. It is important to know beforehand that you may speak to or meet with an aide or staffer, not the elected official. Elected officials are busy people, and getting face time with them is challenging. They certainly cannot read all the incoming mail or listen to every constituent voicemail. There is no need to feel ineffective if you do not communicate directly with an elected official—staff are important, too. A staffer can listen to your concerns and be very influential when reporting to their boss.

- **Schedule in-person meetings:** Building a personal relationship with policymakers can be an effective form of advocacy and demonstrates that constituents care deeply about LGBTQ+ issues. Schedule a meeting with your mayor, local councilperson, state legislator, member of Congress, or other elected officials. These tips can help you prepare for your conversation: Identify yourself as a constituent and voter. Be brief, polite, and clear. Draw on your personal and community experience to tell your story. Make a specific ask – what do you want the elected official to do? Request follow-up – ask the elected official to respond to your email or phone call or to schedule another meeting. Say thank you—even if a lawmaker already supports your position, thank them and encourage them to continue supporting LGBTQ+ inclusion and equality.

- **Write, Email, or Call Your Policymaker:** Sign up to receive information about HRC’s action alerts for contacting elected officials based on your location: hrc.im/inyourarea

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**How To Contact Your Elected Officials**

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<th>Writing</th>
<th>Calling</th>
<th>Email</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>White House</strong></td>
<td>The White House1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NWWashington, DC 20500</td>
<td>Call Comment Line, 202-456-1111</td>
<td>whitehouse.gov/contact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Congress</strong></td>
<td>Find your U.S. Senator or Representative House.gov Senate.gov</td>
<td>Call Capitol Switchboard to be transferred to your U.S. Senator or Representative 202-224-3121</td>
<td>Find your U.S. Senator or Representative House.gov Senate.gov</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Governor</strong></td>
<td>Look up contact information at usa.gov/state-governor</td>
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<td><strong>State Legislature</strong></td>
<td>Look up contact information for your state legislators at congress.gov/state-legislature-websites</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Local Government</strong></td>
<td>Look up your local government officials at usa.gov/local-governments</td>
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Participate in collective action: Connecting with advocacy groups allows you to grow your advocacy and connect with others.

- Participate in lobby days with trusted organizations like the Human Rights Campaign or in-state and local LGBTQ+ movement organizations.
- Attend rallies or protests.
- Participate in or plan a petition or sign-on letter.

Learn more about HRC’s lobby days and activations here

Write an op-ed or letter to the editor (LTE): LTEs can effectively amplify your message of support or concern for a policy. Think of them as your opportunity to write a quick and concise column for your local newspaper. Things to consider when submitting a letter to the editor:

- **Timeliness:** Editors regularly publish letters that pertain to current events and specific news coverage. Editors typically prefer letters anchored in the here and now because it gives the reader a tangible sense of how policy efforts impact them. Applying emphasis to things like the recent stream of anti-transgender bills or a recent related event in your community (e.g., Pride, debate in public schools) will go a long way in getting your letter published.

- **Brevity:** Most publications cap their letter to the editor submissions to 250 words or less. Make your points brief and arguments concise -- consider the impact of every sentence you write. Do not waste valuable real estate on phrases like “I’m writing to you because of x.”

- **Make it Personalized and Local:** Making your submission relatable to the publication’s readers increases your chances of getting published and maximizes the impact of your argument. Consider adding relatable details about yourself, your community, and why you or those you love are impacted by the policies being considered.

- **Call to Action:** As an advocate, you aim to garner the support needed to advance your policy goal. Everyone, including your readers, can play a role in that. Now that you have communicated the benefit or harm of these efforts, your readers should know how they can prevent or stop bad legislation from being introduced or passed into law or, conversely, how they can support adopting pro-equality policies. They should also know how they can be supportive of the LGBTQ+ community, especially the transgender and nonbinary community.

- **Submitting and Sharing Your Work:** Newspapers and other publications routinely ask for letters to the editor submissions. The easiest way to submit a letter is to find instructions in the Opinions section of your newspaper. Social Media Publications generally make their letters to the editor available online, where their impact can be expanded exponentially. Once your letter is published, share it with your family, friends, and your network, and encourage them to share it on social media.
Phone or text bank:
Advocacy organizations like HRC offer easy-to-use phone and text banking programs that allow you to reach out to key audiences for efforts like Get Out the Vote or legislative activations. These are held in-person, virtually, and even through asynchronous online programs, allowing you to do it at your own pace and on your schedule. You are provided a script to use, and then you record the outcomes of the conversations you have (or text messages you send) in real-time. It is an easy, low-barrier way to engage in advocacy, especially for those not yet comfortable holding legislative meetings or engaging more directly in public testimony or actions.

Get connected to a phone/text bank opportunity near you

Voting, Voter Registration, and Get Out The Vote
Elections matter, and having pro-equality lawmakers in office makes an enormous difference in whether laws and policies at the local, state, or federal levels help or harm LGBTQ+ people. Ensure you are registered to vote in your community and help others register to vote. Learn about the policy positions and voting records of your elected officials and candidates for office, and consider this when voting at the ballot box. Many LGBTQ+ groups like HRCF and HRC conduct voter engagement campaigns, track voting records of elected officials, and provide volunteer opportunities to urge people to register to vote and to get out of the vote. Voter registration is a nonpartisan engagement.

[Pledge to Vote in 2024!](#)

Pledge to Vote in 2024! Take the Pride to the Polls Pledge to Vote in 2024 and make a difference. With the pledge, you will be guided through a process to be election-ready.

Change can happen through advocacy, grassroots efforts, time, and determination. HRC witnessed several victories in 2023 and 2024 when only one or two legislators voted to stop anti-LGBTQ+ bills from passing because constituents kept talking to them, meeting with them, and providing them with the data and partnerships they needed to explain or defend their votes. Not being afraid to have hard conversations works. Building a coalition of fair-minded and influential people works. You can do it!

Close The Loop: Activate Your Employer As An LGBTQ+ Corporate Citizen

Building A Safe and Inclusive Workplace Through Advocacy
In addition to your individual advocacy and work to build internal support for LGBTQ+ inclusion and equality, you can advocate that your organization's leadership adopt pro-equality advocacy goals and actions as well. HRCF’s [Corporate Equality Index](#) encourages companies to take part in outreach and engagement efforts, and HRCF’s report, *The LGBTQ+ Corporate Citizen*, outlines a framework for how employers can take a whole-of-business approach to truly advance equality, including workforce, supply chain, products & services, marketing, philanthropy, and advocacy. Your voice is an asset to your employer in understanding the impact of public policy and the potential for both benefit and harm to the business. Elevating your voice and concern and obtaining support for your advocacy goals will often require building buy-in with internal stakeholders. Here are some tips to get started:

- **Educate colleagues about the importance of advocacy:** Share resources like this guide to give employees a sense of agency in accomplishing their policy goals. Recruit new participants and consider how their unique talents can best support your efforts.
- **Establish a meeting with interested employees to plan your next steps:** These may include meetings with the Human Resources and/or DEI teams.
**Identify Stakeholders and Decision Makers:** To achieve change at your organization, identify the parties responsible for implementing the policies you are advocating for or against. This is different for every organization, but some examples may include:

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<tr>
<th>ERGs</th>
<th>Employee Resource Group leaders (and their executive sponsors) know employees’ needs, goals, and the impact of public policy at work and at home. Your insights are invaluable to your employer. Start here.</th>
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<tr>
<td>HR</td>
<td>HR leaders are intimately aware of and responsible for employees’ ability to thrive in the workplace. They will be key stakeholders in demonstrating both the impact and potential benefits to employees of advancing LGBTQ+ equality outside of the workplace.</td>
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<td>DEIB</td>
<td>The teams leading and supporting DEIB initiatives in the organization should be allies in your efforts. That team should also have a seat at the table for any advocacy discussions, both internal and external.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Corp. Comms</td>
<td>These teams provide branding, engagement, and brand perception management targeted toward various stakeholder communities. Given the attention of brand engagement with the LGBTQ+ community during Pride and year-round, they are important internal stakeholders.</td>
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<td>Gov. Affairs &amp; Policy Leaders</td>
<td>Your organization’s government affairs and policy leaders are responsible for monitoring and advancing policies that benefit the business and its ability to operate and grow, create an optimal environment to recruit and retain talent, and reduce risk. While these leaders are often focused on business-specific issues, broader social issues have a real and measurable impact on the inputs of their analysis. Employees should ensure the company’s government affairs team communicates the organization’s goals, priorities, and outcomes to employees and creates space for dialogue when possible.</td>
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<tr>
<td>General Counsel</td>
<td>The legal authority for the organization is often at the center of decisions to minimize risk and ensure an optimal environment for the growth and productivity of a business. Ensuring the general counsel understands the risks associated with discrimination and the benefits of pro-equality policies will ensure that risk assessment includes a full picture of harm and benefits.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The CFO</td>
<td>As the senior advisor responsible for the financial health and growth of the business, ensure the CFO understands the impacts on business operations, the bottom line, and the company's future financial health.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The CEO</td>
<td>With the CEO and all senior executives, share your personal story and explain how you and your family are impacted—for good or bad. This awareness and buy-in will be critical to securing and sustaining support.</td>
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• **Make sure asks are reasonable, attainable, and ambitious:** If an employer is hesitant to engage in your issue of concern, consider which arguments would be most convincing. Refer to the different types of persuasion earlier in this guide.

• **Engage with your employer to improve internal policies when harmful and discriminatory policies may advance** in your state or region. These employer support actions can include:
  - Creating a more welcoming environment for marginalized and impacted employees
  - Adopting a more inclusive healthcare plan, legal benefits, or other support resources
  - Allowing employees to move to relocate when state laws endanger their health and safety
  - Designating an employee advocacy or lobbying day, pursuant to your business code of ethics
  - Taking a public stance on policy issues affecting the company’s employees and consumer base
  - Engaging trade and professional associations and other business groups to amplify your company position
  - Privately leveraging relationships with lawmakers
  - And more

• **Present your Advocacy Proposals to Organizational Leaders**
  - To make the most persuasive case, come prepared with clear solutions and action items.
  - Show how your proposals align with your organization’s values.
  - Although there is strength in numbers, starting with a smaller, more selective group may be more effective.
  - Be conscious of precedents in corporate advocacy, including moments when your employer stood up publicly to express a principle.

• **Addressing Concerns and Questions**
  - Even with a strong presentation, shrewd leaders may wish to consider all options before taking a stand or adopting a policy. Stay level-headed by preparing for any concerns in advance.
  - Position yourself and fellow employee advocates as important advisors regarding the subject of your advocacy. Successive engagement will normalize your place at the table.
  - Ask for quarterly or annual meetings with the C-suite. This creates an ongoing dialogue and allows questions to be addressed while implementing new policies, practices, or positions.
  - Follow up all conversations and meetings, not only with thanks but also with added information, questions, and updated status.

**Conclusion**

Advocacy is a means to empower yourself and others to enact positive change for society. It is a noble goal that requires both courage and thoughtfulness. Recognize your sphere of influence and seek to expand it by bringing in allies. Consider the tools of persuasion and bring the right people to the table to make your case. Prepare by connecting with LGBTQ+ advocacy organizations to determine specific “asks” and strategies. Then set short-term and long-term goals. Both individuals and employers play an important role in advocacy, and working together will ensure we achieve fully-lived equality for all LGBTQ+ people, no matter where they live and work.
We are experiencing a “State of Emergency” for LGBTQ+ Americans. HRC has two powerful initiatives for advocates to support the LGBTQ+ community

**Count Us In** - For businesses who wish to advocate for equality, amplify LGBTQ+ stories and educate key stakeholders on priority issues.

**Count Me In** - For individual advocates who wish to take action and show their allyship toward transgender and non-binary people.

HRCF provides consultation on emerging issues in LGBTQ+ workplace inclusion and equality, and we are eager to discuss questions and concerns. To engage, please reach out to us at workplace@hrc.org.

To learn more about best practices in corporate allyship, read *The LGBTQ+ Corporate Citizen: A Framework for Emerging Best Practices in Allyship* at hrc.im/corporatecitizen.