

Advocacy Tactics: Congressional Hearings, Public Speaking, and Arguing

>>> CONGRESSIONAL HEARINGS AND OTHER SPEAKING OPPORTUNITIES

Congressional hearings, court proceedings, panels, and other speaking opportunities are all great ways for advocates to increase awareness on their issue, increase understanding of the issue, build relationships with important players, and help improve visibility of you or your organization as topic experts. When you are invited to speak at or attend a hearing, proceeding, or panel, here are some tips to keep in mind to help you get the most out of your advocacy experience:

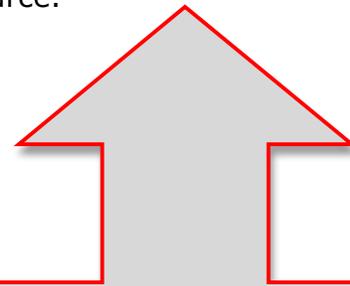
- **Know your audience:** When testifying before Congress, it's not just about who or what you know - but your ability to meld the two. Take a moment to feel out the room: gauge who is vocal on the topic, or who has a vested interest, and make sure to introduce yourself (beforehand if possible). This way, leaders will see you as a familiar face and be more likely to listen to you, which helps when the

time comes for cross examination and coalition building.

- **Be present:** Mentally and physically. Even if you're not testifying, it's extremely important to be in the room during a hearing if you can.
- **Say it well:** Articulate your points as eloquently as possible. Speak slowly, be clear, and display a direct line of logic. Doing so makes you appear confident and knowledgeable, as well as able to engage in a discussion that is advantageous for all parties involved. Many questions can be intimidating, but

be sure to not shy away from the question – even if you are answering a different one than originally posed. The most talented advocates are able to address their main talking points and answer the question seamlessly.

- **Government officials may not be expert in your area:** Congressmen are not technical experts and are often not even policy experts in some issues under their consideration. Explain issues clearly, answer any seemingly simple questions, and pitch yourself as a useful resource.



If in a hearing on a technical public interest issue, such as spectrum allocation, you may find that one representative does not seem well-versed on the issue, but still asks you pointed, but possibly misinformed questions. Take advantage of this lack of information: answer questions, and push your point. This becomes a win-win situation for the advocate and the government official -- advocates get to provide the information and logic to support a policy maker, while the policy maker becomes more knowledgeable on the issues at hand.

- > **Panel participation:** Being on a panel is an effective way to have your ideas and opinions heard by a wide range of attendees, as well as engage in constructive conversation with people with different perspectives on your issue. The way you frame your argument should change depending on who is at the presentation – be able to convey your ideas in more than one way so that it resonates with as many people as possible.

> **Hearings and Court Proceedings:** Hearings, in some ways, are similar to preparing for trial or speaking in court (counterarguments, doing your research,

testifying). However, unlike court, there are no set rules for Q&A, and no guarantee you'll be given the chance to get your points across.

>>> STRATEGIES FOR ARGUMENTATION

The following are useful strategies for argumentation. Your ability to clearly and maturely argue your point in congressional hearings, panels, and one-on-one meetings with legislators, media, and the public is essential to being an effective public interest advocate:

- **Think through your argument:** It is crucial to anticipate all the ways in which your opposition could rebut, and how you can then counter their points. Predict what data they will use to refute your argument, and have readily available information that can be presented in a way that reinforces the points they are trying to diminish.
- **Give your argument context:** This can be done through a historical perspective, as well as a modern day media lens. Judges, public interest advocates, and other people in the field are responsible for keeping up to date on current issues, so strengthen your credibility by drawing parallels to historical similarities as well as current examples. This will show your well rounded understanding of the issue, as well as a thoroughly researched foundation of knowledge.
- **Emphasize efficiency:** The most effective arguments are the ones that demonstrate how the implementation of your position will make the project or industry run more efficiently. Your opposition and critics will find it difficult to rebut well thought out, logical economics. If the efficiency argument does not convince them, then it is appropriate to support with other policy arguments.
- **Make the numbers work for you:** Don't be afraid to use the numbers to your advantage and to create the most compelling arguments. However, in doing so, be sure to stay true to the integrity of the data provided. Anticipate how your use of data will be challenged and only use it if you can counter that attack.
- **Compete with companies:** Companies may have endless money, so to compete with them, or challenge them, you must also get top-notch people. But keep in mind that hiring an expert is not enough—any experienced economist has testified on numerous cases and written extensively, and cannot contradict past positions while working on your issue, so find someone whose stance aligns with your needs, or find multiple experts.
- **Make it relatable:** Use an analogy to get the conversation going to produce thought provoking statements, in turn making your point easily retainable.
- **Stay relevant and within the appropriate legal doctrine:** Antitrust law is not equivalent to the Communications Act, so if an antitrust argument is what's on the table, come in with an antitrust argument.
- **Directly refute using your opponent's argument:** The best platform for making your case is countering the logic and conclusion of your opponents. When done effectively, direct rebuttal can give you an upper hand. Discredit them with their own materials and expertise.

- **Communicate complex ideas in simple terms:** Knowing the information and being able to convey it in a comprehensible way are two different tasks. It is important to be able to take what you know and to communicate in laymans' terms.
- **Use expert language when appropriate:** While you want to be able to efficiently explain complex ideas in simpler terms, be sure that you take advantage of opportunities to use others' established credibility to make your point. If an expert or specialist in a field uses certain terminology, repeat that term as well in your subsequent argument, to turn their credibility as an expert towards your argument.
- **Use personal stories:** Use personalized arguments and examples to deny opponents the ability to make an issue cold or removed. See the handout on "Storytelling and Advocacy" for more in-depth information.