

Using Advocacy to Engage Individuals

- **Virtual campaigns and petitions.** Starting a cause on Facebook or an online petition can encourage people to engage with advocacy from the comfort of their homes. It can serve as a means of connecting them with opportunities for more direct action. Petitions that people sign onto either in person or online help to demonstrate the sheer numbers of people that support an initiative. Get the most out of a petition by:
 - Getting the full name, physical address and e-mail address of participants—it will matter to elected officials and policy makers whether petitioners reside in their jurisdiction.
 - Make the ask as specific as possible by clarifying the change you want to see happen.
 - Develop and use common language throughout a campaign.
- **Letter writing campaigns.** Writing a letter can have a greater affect on a policy maker than e-mail, especially at the local level. Make it easy for people to complete and send a letter by giving them a template to print and fill in. Consider covering the cost of postage for these letters.
- **Neighborhood Canvassing.** Going door-to-door to speak with people is a great way to get their input on early grade reading issues, educate them about the issue, and invite them to give, advocate and volunteer for the cause. Choose neighborhoods with residents that are most likely to sway the policy maker or decision maker you would like to influence. Make sure that canvassers have a clear message and talking points to help them get the conversation started. Give them materials to pass out that offer summary and additional information about early grade reading in the community, United Way's efforts and clear ways for individuals to get involved.
- **Town halls and community forums.** An alternative to a community conversation is a town hall or community forum where community members come together in a direct dialogue with policy makers and administrators to share their stories and aspirations, and push for a policy solution. These conversations will require a strong facilitator to keep the conversation constructive without usurping the voice of community members.
- **Testimonies before a government panel.** The school board, city council, state legislators and other government bodies often allow citizens to testify on important issues they face in their schools and communities. Organizing a panel of individuals to testify is a powerful way to share stories and communicate the need for change directly to policy makers. Volunteers that agree to testify may need to be coached on delivering

testimony by a seasoned advocate. Check online or by calling the relevant government office to better understand the legislative cycle and requirements for submitting testimony.

- **Advocacy events.** Rallies, community celebrations, marches and other events can present opportunities to draw people together to learn about and show support for an issue. Keep these events positive and centrist—they can serve as a visible sign that United Way and allies represent real people and add impetus to your call for change.