

# Sharing your story for policy advocacy

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## *What is "my story"?*

Your story is when you talk about your life. Some things you might share in your story could be:

- What has happened in your life, and how you think and feel about your life.
- What things could have made your life better.
- What you want to see happen next in your life, and what you want to happen for other people who have lives like yours.

You can also talk about things that you have seen, or people that you know. You can also talk about the things that other people in your life have been through, if they say it is okay.

Your story doesn't have to share everything about your life. You can keep some things private, or only share the parts of your story that you want to share. Other people shouldn't make you share things you don't want to share.

## *Why should people share their stories?*

Many people who work in the government get elected. **Elected** means chosen by everyday people like you and me. People who get elected to work in the government are called **elected officials**.

Elected officials listen to the problems that everyday people have, and make rules or laws to solve problems. These rules and laws are called **policies**. Elected officials need to think about what policies people want, and help make those policies. If they don't, they won't get elected again.

But making policies takes a lot of work. Elected officials have to think about a lot of different problems. They have to choose which problems to work on, so they need to learn how a problem affects people in real life.

When someone shares their story, it can make a big difference. Hearing a real person talk about a problem is important because it gives elected officials a name and face to remember.

They will think of that person when they think of the problem, which can make the elected official want to fix the problem.

### ***Why do people with disabilities need to share our stories?***

The government makes a lot of policies, and many of those policies affect people with disabilities. Sometimes, the government makes policies without talking to people with disabilities. When that happens, we don't get to share how we feel about the policies. Because of this, some of the policies that get made to help us don't help at all, and some even hurt people with disabilities.

We need to make sure that policies help people with disabilities instead of hurt us. People with disabilities need to make policies ourselves, but some people think that people with disabilities can't think for ourselves. They think that we don't have opinions about our disability, or that we don't care about how the world treats us.

That's why we don't get taught how to talk to our elected officials. We only get taught how to share some of our stories, like the kinds that tell people about our lives, or "inspire" other people. That isn't fair! People with disabilities have powerful stories. We should be in charge of what we want to share, and we should get to use our stories to help change the world.

Our stories can help the government make good policies, so we need to let elected officials know about the problems that people with disabilities have. Making sure elected officials hear from us makes a big difference. Nothing about us, without us!

### ***How do I tell my story?***

You shouldn't talk about your whole life every time you tell your story! You should talk about the parts that will help make good policies. You want your story to make people want to take action, so they will help you fix the problems you talk about in your story.

Choosing how to tell your story takes a lot of steps. Here are some things you should think about:

### **What problem or policy do you want to talk about?**

Your story should focus on one problem that you want to fix. This can be a law you would like your elected officials to pass, or you might want them not to pass it.

### **How does the problem or policy affect you?**

Your story should be about your life, or it can be about someone you care about. But don't try and tell a story for someone else.

### **Why should your elected official care about your problem?**

Elected officials are very busy. They need to talk to lots of people and make policies that help people, which takes a lot of time and energy. Elected officials usually care most about problems that affect a lot of people, and won't care about a problem as much if it only affects you. Use your story to show how a problem you faced hurts others, too.

## **For example:**

Harold's dog ran away, and he went to talk to his city council about it. Harold said how sad he was about losing his dog, and asked the council to make a new policy. The policy would give money to help people find their lost dogs. But the city council wouldn't make a policy just to help Harold, since Harold didn't show that his problem affected other people, too.

Harold tried telling his story in a different way. He still said he was sad about losing his dog, but he told stories of other people losing their dogs. He told stories of dogs getting hurt when they got lost, and said this happened because the city's dog catchers. The dog catchers couldn't do a good job because they didn't have trucks and other tools they needed to help.

Harold asked the council to make a new policy to give money to buy what the dog catcher's needed. Harold showed how the policy would help the whole city, so the city council passed Harold's policy!

## **What is the goal of sharing your story?**

You want to fix the problem you talk about in your story, so you need to make sure the person you're talking to knows that. Be sure to tell them how you think the problem should get fixed.

Think about the order your story should go in. Most stories have around the same order:

Start with your name and where you live, then say what problem or policy you want to talk about. Talk about why that problem or policy matters to you. Show how that problem or policy affects your life, and use an example from your life. You should also talk about how this problem or policy affects other people, and give examples here, too.

After that, ask a question about how the problem will get fixed. You can talk about how you'd like the problem to get fixed, or ask a question about what will happen with the policy.

Now you know what should go in your story, and what order your story should go in.

Now, work on making your story easy to remember. Think about why what you have to say is important, and how you can say it to make people pay attention.

- Here are some things to think about:
- Is my story short enough that people will listen to it all?
- Does my story have enough details so that people will remember it?
- Is my story about me or someone I care about?
- Will people remember me when they think about a problem or policy?
- Does my story show that a problem or policy affects lots of people?
- Do people know that it is a big problem?

## Sample Story Script

Here is a script you can use to write your own story:

My name is **[full name]**, and I live at **[address]**. I would like to talk to you today about **[the problem or policy]**. This affects me because **[reason]**.

**[Here is where you can share your story. Show how the problem or policy affects your life, and the lives of other people.]**

Please help people like me by:

**[Choose which one works for you:**

**Voting to pass a law that fixes the problem**

**Voting to not pass a law that causes a problem**

**Making a new policy to fix the problem]**

This would help people like me because:

**[Talk about how what you just asked them for would help you. Why should they pass or not pass the law? Why should they make a new policy?]**

**(You could also end your story with a question, like:**

**What will you do to make sure this problem gets fixed?**

**What will you do to make sure this policy becomes the law?**

**What will you do to make sure this policy doesn't become the law?)**

Thank you for listening to my story.

## Scenario Script

Remember Sally Jones from Normaltown, California? She is still working with the Stop the Bees Community Group. Angry bees are still swarming the United States, and Sally wants to solve that problem. Remember, this is an imaginary example!

Sally helped come up with the Beekeeping Act. It is a policy that would build new bee colonies.

The colonies would get built far away from where people live, so it would help make people safer.

The Beekeeping Act will get voted on soon. Elected officials will decide if it becomes the law, so Sally wants to talk to her elected official. Her elected official's name is Anne Smith. Anne Smith is a representative, which means she votes on laws that affect the whole United States.

Sally wants Representative Smith to vote "Yes" on the Beekeeping Act. Here is a story that Sally might share with Representative Smith:

Hi, I'm Sally Jones from Normaltown, California. I'm a member of the Stop the Bees Community Group, and I'm here to talk to you today about the Beekeeping Act. This affects me because bees keep attacking Normaltown, and make it hard for people to go outside. The bees sting people as soon as they go outside. My nephew got stung by 57 bees when he went outside last week. He is still in the hospital now, and lots of my friends and family in Normaltown have been stung. I got stung 5 times just coming here to see you!

Everyone in Normaltown is afraid to go outside. But the bees aren't just in Normaltown; they keep attacking lots of towns across the United States. The Beekeeping Act will help fix the bee problem. It will give money to build bee colonies away from towns like Normaltown. We won't have to be afraid to leave our houses anymore. I want to feel safe going outside again, so please help people like me by voting for the Beekeeping Act.

Thank you for listening to my story.

## ***Where can I share my story?***

There are many places where you can share your story. We talked about some of these places in the "[They Work For Us](#)" toolkit. You can:

- Call your elected officials
- Meet in person with your elected officials
- Email or write letters to your elected officials
- Use social media to connect with your elected officials

This toolkit will talk about using your story:

- In a Petition
- In an Op-Ed
- At a Town Hall meeting
- In Legislative Testimony
- During a Public Comment Period

## ***How do I learn about the policies that affect me?***

Before you share your story, it's important to learn about different policies because you need to know how they might affect you or people you care about. Sometimes, it can be hard to find information about a policy, or the information you find may be wrong. We will talk about where you can go to learn more about policies, and show you how to make sure what you're learning is correct and fair.

Here are some places you can learn about policies:

- Think about what problems matter to you, and about policies that could fix those problems. Think about who might know more about those policies. For example, you might care a lot about disability



rights, so you can look online for advocacy groups that work on disability rights. You can sign up for their email lists, or follow these groups on social media. These groups usually send out information about policies. They will tell you how you can help a good policy become the law, or keep bad policies from becoming the law.

- There are 2 groups that can tell you about disability policies in your state: Developmental Disability Councils (DD Councils), and Protection and Advocacy Agencies (P&As). You can find your state's DD Council by searching online for "[your State] DD Council". You can find your state's Protection and Advocacy Agency by going to <http://www.acl.gov/programs/aidd/Programs/PA/Contacts.aspx>
- It can be hard to find information about policies in your city or town. You can look at the websites of elected officials in your city or town, or sign up for local mailing lists. Some advocacy groups for the whole U.S. have smaller groups in cities. You can check the website of the main group, which should have a list of smaller groups. See if there is one in your city, and then you can ask the smaller group about policies in your city.
- The news is also a good place to learn about policies. There are lots of different places to read and watch the news, so you can almost always find news about any kind of policy.

But it can be a bad thing that there are so many places to get news. It can be hard to tell if the news actually knows a lot about a policy. They might say a policy is good just because they like the policy. Some places that report the news are **biased**, which means that they talk about the news in sneaky ways. They try to make people agree with them, and believe things that are not true.

## For example:

Normaltown has a TV show called Normaltown News. The TV show got made by people who also sell honey. Because they sell honey, they don't want the bees to leave, since they get more money if the bees stay.

Normaltown News talks about the bees, but they don't talk about how the bees sting people. They only talk about how the bees help make more honey for Normaltown.

The news makes it seem like the bees are a good thing, so the news is being biased.

You should keep an eye out for biased news. Try to read or watch a lot of different news about the same policy, so you can see what each news report has in common. You can see what is different in each report, and see if one news report is a lot different from the rest. That news report might be biased.

Sometimes, people in government will lie about policies. The news may also say things that aren't true, or they may spread rumors that are only part-true. There are websites that can tell you if a new story is true or not, called [snopes.com](http://snopes.com) and [politifact.com](http://politifact.com). These websites will say how true a story is, explain how rumors spread, and show you what the signs are that a story is made up.

### What ways can I share my story?

There are some ways you can share your story straight to the government by talking with elected officials and other government workers. These ways are:

- Town Halls
- Legislative Testimony
- Public Comments

There are also other ways to share your story outside of the government. These ways focus more on sharing your story with everyday people, but everyday people can help get the attention of elected officials. These ways are:

- Letters to the Editor/Op-eds
- Petitions

We will talk more about each way to share your story in the next sections.

# Town Halls

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Sometimes, members of government will hold Town Hall meetings. **Town Hall meetings** are meetings that are open to everyone. People can come and ask questions about a problem or policy, or tell their members of government what they think. This is a good chance to talk to members of the government in person. You can let them know about the problems that matter to you, and ask them questions without having a one-on-one meeting with them.

## *Who holds Town Hall meetings? How can I find out when they happen?*

There are many people who might hold town hall meetings, like:

- Your elected officials
- People who want to get elected to the government
- Government groups who want opinions about a specific policy

Town Hall meetings can have different people at them. Sometimes, you will get to speak to your member of government, but other times, you will speak to one of their staff. They will report back to your member of government. They will say what happened at the meeting, so your member of government will still know what you said.

Members of government will list Town Hall meetings on their websites, and say where and when the Town Hall will happen. You can check the websites of the members of government near you.

Some Town Halls focus on problems for people with disabilities. Your state DD Council and P&A might know about these. You can ask them when Town Halls will happen, or get on the mailing lists of disability advocacy groups. They may post on social media about Town Halls, so you could also follow them on social media.

Another good place to look is <http://townhallproject.com/>, which posts Town Hall meetings for U.S. elected officials. You can sign up for their mailing list at <https://actionnetwork.org/forms/stay-up-to-date-on-our-work>

They will send you information about Town Halls where you live.

### ***What should I expect at a Town Hall meeting?***

There are usually 2 types of Town Hall meetings: general and specific. A **general meeting** is a Town Hall where you can ask about anything, while a **specific meeting** focuses on one problem or policy. Be sure to check the information about the Town Hall, since it should say what kind of meeting it will be. You should know what kind of meeting it is before you go, since that will help you think about what you should say.

If you want to talk at the meeting, you might need to sign up on a sheet, or line up in front of a microphone. There will probably be a sign or staff person to tell you what to do, or you can try to copy what the people around you are doing.

A lot of people usually come to Town Hall meetings, so you will probably only get a couple of minutes to talk. Plan ahead about the most important things you want to say. Having an elevator speech prepared for the Town Hall can help. Check the “They Work For Us” toolkit to learn more about elevator speeches.

It is a good idea to end your speech with a question, so your member of government has to think about what you said. It will help you learn more about what they think, too.

For example, Sally went to a Town Hall Meeting with Representative Smith.

Here is what she said at the meeting:

Hi, I'm Sally Jones, and I'm from Normaltown, California. I'm a member of the Stop the Bees Community Group, and would like to talk to you today about the Beekeeping Act.

The Beekeeping Act would give money to build a bee colony away from our city. Right now, there are so many angry bees all over the United States. They have attacked me and my family, and even sent my nephew to the hospital. I was afraid just to leave my house to come here and meet you.

Everyone I've talked to is afraid of the bees and doesn't feel safe. We all deserve to feel safe in our cities, and building this bee colony will give us back our safety.

My question to you is: what will you do to make sure that Normaltown families are safe from the bees?

You can also bring a written paper with more information about the problem. You can give the paper to your member of government or their staff, and they can read it and learn more after the meeting. That way, you can give a short speech, but still give members of government all the important information.

# Giving testimony

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**Legislators** are a group of people who vote to make laws, and are usually elected officials. They need to decide if they will vote “yes” or “no” to make new laws. Sometimes, they want to learn more about a policy before they vote on it, so they will have meetings to learn more.

This is a chance for you to give **legislative testimony**, which is when you speak in front of legislators about a policy. When you give legislative testimony, you can talk to many legislators at once to tell them how a law will affect you or the people you care about.

## *When can I give legislative testimony?*

Chances to give testimony happen at meetings called **hearings**, to talk about laws that might get passed. Not all hearings are open to everyday people. Keep track of advocacy groups that care about the same policies that you do, so they can tell you about hearings that everyday people can go to.

Some hearings make you sign up to give testimony before you get there. Check the information about the hearing. There should be a phone number or email address listed, and you can contact the number or address to sign up. Other hearings have you sign up to give testimony once you get there. There is usually only time for a few people to speak, so try to get to the hearing early so you can sign up for a spot.

## *How should I prepare for a legislative hearing?*

Be sure to prepare your testimony before you go to the hearing. Your testimony should usually be between 3 and 5 minutes. If you talk for too long, you might get asked to stop so the next person can talk.

Here is an outline for what should go in your legislative testimony:

1. Say your name, where you are from, and if you work with any advocacy groups about this law.
2. Say the name and number of the law.
3. Say what you think about the law and share your story. You will have a little more time than at a Town Hall, so you can put a little more detail in your story.
4. Sum up your main points in one sentence at the end.
5. Thank the legislators for listening to you.

You should type up and print out your testimony before the hearing, so you can give each legislator a written copy. Be sure to bring enough copies for all the legislators. You may not have time to say everything you want in your spoken testimony, so you can add some more details in your written testimony. You can put things like pictures, or places to learn more about the law.

### ***What should I expect at a legislative hearing?***

Get to the hearing early, and sign up to give your testimony if you haven't already. Usually, people giving testimony talk in the order they signed up. You can ask a staff member to hand out copies of your written testimony, so legislators will have them before you testify.

You will testify in front of a group. You might have to get up from your seat, or sit or stand in front of the legislators.

After your testimony, legislators may ask you questions. Only answer questions that you know the answer to. If you don't know the answer, don't make one up. Say you will find the answers to those questions, and you can tell the legislators the answers in a phone call or email later.



Time might run out before you can give your testimony, which could happen even if you signed up early. You can still ask a staff member to give out copies of your written testimony, and the legislators will look at it after the hearing.

## Scenario Script

The Beekeeping Act will get voted on by Congress next week. Sally goes to a hearing for the House of Representatives, and gives testimony about the Beekeeping Act. Here is her testimony:

My name is Sally Jones, and I'm from Normaltown, California. I am a member of the Stop the Bees Community Group, and I am here to testify about the Beekeeping Act (HR-1BEE).

Right now, there are so many angry bees in cities all over the United States. The Beekeeping Act would give money to build bee colonies away from cities, to help make cities safe again.

All the families I know have gotten hurt by the bees, but I'd like to tell you a little bit about my family.

Last week, my nephew was stung by 57 bees, and he is still in the hospital as we speak. We don't have the money to pay for any more accidents like this. The stress of living with the angry bees has made all our health worse. I know I was afraid just to leave my house to come here and meet you.

Building these bee colonies will give us back our safety, so we won't need to feel afraid to leave our houses anymore. The U.S. has spent lots more money on health care since the bees came, so the Beekeeping Act would also save money on health care. And the bee colony would not just help humans. It would also help the bees, since they would finally have their own home.

Please vote "yes" on the Beekeeping Act, to help make sure families like mine can be safe and healthy. Thank you for your time.

# Public comment periods

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After a law is passed, there is still work to do! The government needs to figure out how the law will get put into action, so there are still chances to share your story.

For example, California passes a new law that gives a set amount of money to pay for health care. California needs to figure out what kind of health care that money will pay for. It might go to building a new hospital, buying new surgery machines, or paying for doctors. They might decide to split up the money between different things. Then, they would need to figure out how much money each thing gets, and when they want the money spent by. They might want to spend it all in 1 year, or they might want it to last 2 years.

These kinds of decisions are called regulations. **Regulations** give the details about how a law will work. People can say what they think about ideas for regulations by writing something called a public comment. **Public comments** are ideas that people send to the government that talk about what regulations should get made.

It is the law that people get to make public comments about every new regulation. People also get to make comments when an old regulation gets changed. People in the government have to read the public comments, then decide on the regulations for the law.

Figuring out how the law will work is very important. It can be even more important than getting the law passed.

For instance, think about the last example about health care in California. What if California decided to use all the money to build a new hospital? They could choose to build it in a place that nobody lives. Then, the hospital wouldn't be helping people, and passing the law would have been a waste of time. That is why it's very important to make public comments when you can.

People only have a short time to make public comments, called a public comment period. **Public comment periods** are usually between 1 and 3 months long.

How regulations get handled depends on where the law got made. For laws that affect the whole U.S., regulations get listed online, and you can make public comments by writing them online.

Every state also has regulations for their state laws, and these regulations usually get listed online, too. But each state handles regulations a little bit differently. Ask advocacy groups in your state how to send in a public comment. Some cities and towns have regulations for their laws, and you can ask advocacy groups in your city or town to find out.

Here is how to send in public comments for regulations that affect the whole U.S.:

Go to the website <https://www.regulations.gov>, and look up the regulation you want to comment on. Click on the regulation, then click "Comment Now!" Then, you can write your comment in the text box on the webpage, or send your comment as a Word document or PDF.

Sometimes regulations get written in ways that are hard to understand. Try talking to advocacy groups that care about the law. They can help you understand the regulation and write your public comment.

Your state DD Council and P&A Agency can also be helpful, since they let people know about public comment periods for disability laws. Other advocacy groups also let people know about public comment periods.

You can also search <https://www.regulations.gov/> on your own to find regulations about laws you care about. You can search for different regulations with key words. Be sure to click "Open" on the "Filter Results By Comment Period" sidebar, so you will only see regulations that will still let you send comments.

Public comments look a lot like what you might say at a Town Hall, but focus on a regulation instead of a law.

For example, let's say that the Beekeeping Act became a law. One regulation would say where in California the bee colony would go. Someone in the government came up with an idea for the regulation, called Regulation 1. Regulation 1 would build the bee colony in Averageville, California.

Sally doesn't like this idea, since Averageville is really close to Normaltown. She wants the government to put the bee colony somewhere else, so she makes a public comment to let them know.

Here is the public comment that Sally made about Regulation 1:

My name is Sally Jones, and I'm from Normaltown, California. I am a member of the Stop the Bees Community Group, and would like to comment on Regulation 1 of the Beekeeping Act.

I don't think Averageville is the best place to put the bee colony because Averageville is only 10 minutes from Normaltown. Normaltown has been attacked by bees more than most other places. I wouldn't feel safe knowing we are still so close to the bees, and I know many of my neighbors agree with me.

There are also many other towns near Averageville, and Averageville has a few people living there, too. What if something goes wrong with the bee colony? The bees would be close enough to attack people again.

I think that the bee colony should go in Boringshire, California instead.

Since Boringshire is so boring, nobody lives there, and there also aren't any towns nearby. Putting the colony in Boringshire would help all Californians feel safer.

It would also be safer even if something went wrong in the bee colony, since the bees would have to travel pretty far to attack people.

Please put the California bee colony in Boringshire instead of Averageville. Thank you for your time.

## Letters to the editor

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A **letter to the editor** is a kind of written news story that shares the opinions of everyday people who don't work in the news. People write letters to the editor for newspapers, magazines, or websites. These letters are usually about problems that have already been in the news.

Letters to the editor can be a good chance to share your story, since lots of people read the news. When you write a letter to the editor, you can help people learn about a problem or policy they didn't know about before. You can get people more interested in a policy, or make them change their mind about a policy. They might talk about your letter to the editor to other people, which helps even more people pay attention to your story.

Elected officials also keep track of letters to the editor. If they see a lot of letters to the editor about a policy, they will think the policy is important. Your letter to the editor could help your elected officials make better policies.

Most online newspapers and magazines have a section of their website where people can send letters to the editor. Different news websites have different rules about letters to the editor.

For example, one site might only take letters to the editor that are less than 500 words.

Another kind of written news story is an **op-ed**, which is somewhat like a letter to the editor. Everyday people can write op-eds about problems they care about, but they don't get written as a "letter". For example, a letter to the editor might start with "Dear Editor", which wouldn't happen in an op-ed. Op-eds get written more like news articles, so they are longer than letters to the editor. They also don't have to be about problems that have already been in the news.

There is a website, <http://www.theopedproject.org/> , with a list of the op-ed and letter to the editor rules for over 100 news websites. It also has some tips on how to write a good op-ed or letter to the editor.

Here is a template for a letter to the editor. This letter to the editor wants to get people to contact their elected officials and ask them to support a certain policy:

Dear Editor,

My name is **[your name]**. (If you are writing for an advocacy group, say, I am writing on behalf of **[name of advocacy group]**).

**[I/We]** support **[name of policy]**, which is very important to **[me/us]** because **[reason]**.

**[Use this space to share your story. Show how the policy would affect you, and how the policy you are writing about would help people].**

**[I/we]** hope people will contact their elected officials and ask them to vote "Yes" for **[name of policy]**.

Thank you,

**[Your name]**

## Scenario Script

The bees have been in the news in Normaltown a lot, so Sally wrote a letter to the editor to the Normaltown Gazette. She wrote about the Beekeeping Act before it got passed. Here is her letter to the editor:

Dear Editor,

My name is Sally Jones, and I am writing on behalf of the Stop the Bees Community Group.

We support the Beekeeping Act, which is very important to us because our town has so many bees.

It is impossible to go outside without being attacked by bees. So many of my friends and neighbors got hurt by the bees. My own nephew was attacked by bees 57 times, and he is still in the hospital right now. Everyone is afraid to go outside since we don't feel safe in our city.

The Beekeeping Act will help fix this problem by giving money to build a bee colony away from our town. Passing the Beekeeping Act will help us feel safe again, and would also save money on health care for people hurt by the bees.

We hope people will contact Representative Smith and ask her to vote "Yes" on the Beekeeping Act.

Thank you,

Sally Jones



# Petitions

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A petition is a written form that people sign to ask a target to do something. A target is a person or group with the power to make changes. People sign a petition to show that they want a target to make a change. The more names a petition gets, the more powerful it can be.

Elected officials can be a good target for petitions, since petitions can ask elected officials to help fix problems. Remember, elected officials need to think about the problems everyday people have. They have to help make policies to fix those problems, and if they don't, they might not get elected again.

Petitions seem like an exciting idea, but they usually don't get a lot done. Lots of people try to make petitions, so most petitions don't get enough names for elected officials to care. People might think the names on the petition are fake, or an elected official might not be able to do what the petition asks.

Making petitions can take a lot of time and energy, and they usually don't help fix a problem.

Only make petitions if you've tried other ways to share your story first. A petition should be one of the last things you try.

## ***What are good goals for petitions?***

There are 3 main goals to making a petition, and all 3 are about getting the attention of a certain person or group.

These goals are:

### **To make the target pay attention to a problem.**

Petitions show that lots of people think a problem is important, which makes it harder for the target to ignore a problem. For example, elected officials deal with a lot of problems, so they might not know about a certain problem. A petition can teach them about a problem, and show that the problem is important because lots of people signed the petition.

### **To make other people pay attention to a problem.**

Petitions help everyday people learn more about a problem, so they can spread the word about the problem. They can get other people to sign the petition, so even more people will learn about the problem. In the end, lots more people will know about the problem and want to fix it.

### **To make the news pay attention to a problem.**

When a lot of people sign a petition, the news might notice, and do a news report about the petition. Lots of people watch and read the news, like your elected officials. The news can tell them all about the problem you want to fix.

## ***What kinds of petitions are there?***

There are 2 main kinds of petitions: online petitions and paper petitions.

Online petitions get made and sent over the internet, and people can sign their name on them by typing it online. Paper petitions get written on a piece of paper, and people sign their name on them in person.

There are pros and cons to paper and online petitions. Here is a chart about each of them:

## Paper Petitions

<b>Pros</b>	<b>Cons</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• It is harder to get people to sign things in person, so if you get lots of people to sign, it shows people care a lot about a problem!</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• It is harder to get people to sign things in person.</li><li>• People are busy, so getting a lot of people in one place is hard.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Showing a paper petition to a target in person is a big deal. Think of slamming a bunch of paper onto a desk!</li></ul>	<p>A paper petition might not work if:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• You live in a place that doesn't have a lot of people</li><li>• You live somewhere that people don't know about your problem</li><li>• You live somewhere that people don't care about your problem.</li></ul>

## Paper Petitions

<b>Pros</b>	<b>Cons</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• You don't have to make people sign in person, so you can get more people to sign through the internet.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• There are lots of petitions on the internet, so it can be hard to get people to pay attention to yours.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• You'll usually get lots more people to sign than a paper petition.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Your target might get too many online petitions sent to them, so they might not even look through each one.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• You can print out an online petition and deliver it in person. That way, you can still use it like a paper petition.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• You can't always deliver an online petition in person. For example, your target might live far away from you.</li><li>• Sending a petition in an email makes it easier to ignore.</li></ul>

You can make your own online petition through the website Change.org. Then, you can share your petition link through email or social media to get people to sign your petition.

You can print out the list of names on an online petition to deliver it to your target in person.

Delivering a petition in person is better than sending it online, since it makes the target deal with a big stack of paper that they need to look through. If you can't deliver the petition online, you can send it in an email, but emails are easy to ignore.

Sometimes, an advocacy group will make their own petition on their website. You can go to their website to sign their petition.

### ***What are the steps to make a petition?***

1. Choose your target. You should make sure your target is specific

For example, you should send a petition to one member of government, and not to the whole U.S. government

2. Make sure your target is someone who can help with your problem. For example, one goal of a petition could be to pass a law, so you should target an elected official who can vote on the law. You shouldn't target the President of the United States, since the President cannot vote on laws.

3. Choose who you'll ask to sign your petition. You should only ask people who the target cares about. For example:

Representative Smith is an elected official for Normaltown, so she gets elected by the people who live in Normaltown. Representative Smith cares about what the people in Normaltown think. She does not care what people in other towns think, since they do not vote to elect her.

Sally makes a petition, and Representative Smith is the target. Sally only wants people from Normaltown to sign it, so Representative Smith knows she needs to pay attention. She knows this could affect whether she gets elected again.

4. Choose what you want to ask about. Be specific about what you're asking your target to do, since otherwise, they might not know what you want them to do. For example:

The people of Normaltown want to make a policy to give everyone free food.

They told Representative Smith that they wanted free food, but she thought that they wanted to have a free dinner with her! What the people of Normaltown asked for wasn't specific enough, so they asked for something more specific. They asked for everyone to get 3 free meals every day.

You should only ask your target for things they can actually do.

For example, giving everyone 3 free meals every day would be hard to do since the government in Normaltown wouldn't be able to pay for it. The people in Normaltown asked for just free breakfast instead, and they only asked for cereal, since cereal doesn't cost much money. They helped make a policy called the Free Cereal for Everyone Act.

5. List your target and what you're asking for at the top of the petition. Try and write one sentence to make people get interested. Then, you can write a little more about yourself and what you're asking for.
6. It's time to tell your story. Your story should show your target why they should listen to you, and show the people looking at your petition why they should sign it. People usually don't have a lot of time to read a petition, so make sure your story is short and simple.

Use your story as a call to action for the people reading it! People might want to learn more about the problem in your petition, so put a short list of places to learn more about the problem. You can put that list at the end of your story.

7. Decide whether you will use an online petition or paper petition. Remember that there are good and bad points to an online or paper petition. Think about those before you decide which will work best for your petition.

Spread the word about your petition! You can use mailing lists and social media, and you could also try sending information about your petition to the news. Then, the news might do a report on your petition. This is a good idea for petitions in a city or town.

For state or U.S. petitions, try working with other advocacy groups. They might have connections to your target or to news reporters, and can help spread the word to the people they know.

8. Once you get enough people to sign, deliver the petition to your target! Remember, delivering the petition in person is usually better. If you can't deliver it in person, you can send it in an email.

Here is a list of some questions you can ask to make sure your petition is good:

- Does my target make sense? Is it specific?
- Who am I asking to sign the petition? Are they people my target cares about?
- Does what I'm asking for make sense? Is it specific, and is it something my target can do?
- Is my story short and simple?
- Does my story show why the problem in my petition is important?
- Does the type of my petition (online or paper) make sense?
- Do I have a plan for how I will spread the word about my petition?
- How many people do I want to sign my petition?
- Do I think I can get that many people to sign? How will I do that?



## Scenario Script

This scenario takes place before the Beekeeping Act got passed. Sally wanted Representative Smith to sign the Beekeeping Act, so Sally made a petition. It was hard for people to sign a petition in person, since they couldn't go outside because of the bees. So Sally decided to do an online petition.

Sally got 500 people to sign her petition, then she printed out the petition and delivered it to Representative Smith's office. Here is what Sally's petition looked like:

### **Representative Smith: Vote "YES" on the Beekeeping Act!**

My name is Sally Jones, and I'm from Normaltown, California. My family is not safe because of the bees, and many other families in the U.S. are not safe either. The Beekeeping Act would save these families by building new bee colonies away from our cities.

It's been a week since I last left my house. I can't go outside or else I'll be attacked by bees. Lots of my friends and neighbors have already been attacked. My nephew was attacked by bees last week, and he is still in the hospital. We shouldn't have to live like this!

Representative Smith, please vote Yes on the Beekeeping Act. Help us get the bees out of Normaltown, and out of cities across the U.S.A. We need our safety back!

You can learn more about the angry bees and the Beekeeping Act. Please go to [stopthebees.com](http://stopthebees.com) to learn more. Thank you!

Signed:

Sally Jones

Omar Owens

Sruti Patel

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# Advocacy strategies

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Now that you know how to share your story, here are some things you can do to make your voice even more powerful:

## *Making things routine*

Make a routine of looking for chances to share your story, so you can keep making a difference! Here are some ways to do that:

Choose a day each week that you will look for chances to share your story. For example, every Saturday you can check the social media of advocacy groups to find events where you can share your story.

- Work with your friends! For example, you could check in with your friends once a month.
- You can talk about what problems are in the news, and what stories you plan to share that month.
- Try getting involved in an advocacy group! There are many groups that meet in person, and there are also advocacy groups online. They talk about chances to share your story.

## *Working in groups*

There are other people that care about the same problems that you do, who have their own stories to share. It can be a good idea to work in groups, since working together with more people can help get more things done. But there are also some things you should be careful about when working in groups.

## Working In Groups: Pros and Cons

<b>Pros</b>	<b>Cons</b>
More people means more chances to spread the word about a problem	It can be hard to stay organized as a group.
Splitting up work can make things easier for everyone.  For example, one person can give legislative testimony, while someone else can write an op-ed.	Your target might get too many online petitions sent to them, so they might not even look through each one.
It's good to have more people attend meetings like a Town Hall, since it shows elected officials that lots of people care about a problem.	You can't always deliver an online petition in person. For example, your target might live far away from you.  Sending a petition in an email makes it easier to ignore.
Doing certain things may be too hard for one person, but other people in a group can help them.	You don't have to make people sign in person, so you can get more people to sign through the internet.
Working together can help come up with more or better ideas. You might miss things if you only work by yourself.	You don't have to make people sign in person, so you can get more people to sign through the internet.

Here are some tips to make the most out of working in groups:

- Try to put all the group work you do in the same place, so everyone knows where to look for new information. For example, you could make a Google Drive for all group information, so everyone would know to go there to find what you are working on.
- Try to have group meetings often, since these are a good chance to check in with each other. Make sure the meetings happen at the same time and place each time. For example, you could meet every Tuesday at 5 p.m. in the library.
- Let people choose what work they are most interested in doing. That makes it less likely that one group member will back out of a plan.
- Break down each job into small parts so nobody feels overwhelmed by what they have to do. Be clear about what you want each group member to do, and make sure that everyone knows when their part of the job needs to get done.
- Work together to make sure everyone's voices get heard! This means finding ways for group members to help each other. For example:

Josh has a disability. He is a great writer, but Josh's disability makes him have a hard time with big events. He wants to give testimony at a legislative hearing.

Alice does better at big events, but her disability makes it harder for her to write.

So Josh and Alice help each other. Josh helps Alice write her legislative testimony, then Alice helps Josh during the hearing by signing him up to testify and finding a place to sit.

## ***Keep making a difference***

You can keep making a difference after you share your story! Remember to follow-up on the issues you care about. Here are some ways to do that:

Always send a follow-up letter or email after talking with an elected official. Thank them for listening to you, and remind them of your opinion. This will help them remember you and your story.

Look for other people at Town Halls or hearings who feel the same way you do about a problem or policy. Ask them if they know about other chances to share your story, or if you could work together.

Let other people know when you share your story, and how it went. For example, let's say you talked with an elected official at a Town Hall. If you post about it on social media or to an advocacy website, people who see your post might decide to try going to a Town Hall.

Remember that there are so many different ways to share a story. It can be hard to share your story and feel like it didn't help fix a problem, but you can try sharing your story a different way next time. For example, a petition to your elected official might not work out, but you could try going to a Town Hall instead.

## Self-care

Sharing your story can be difficult, since it is hard to talk about problems that affect your life.

It can make you tired, sad, angry, or anxious, so it's important that you take good care of yourself. Pay attention to your feelings, and if sharing your story is stressing you out, here are some things you can do:

- Work with another person or a group of people to share your stories. Talk about how you will split up the work you're doing so nobody gets too stressed.
- Try to build in time to rest after sharing your story. For example, you can decide: "I will watch a movie or take a nap after I write this op-ed."
- It can be hard to take care of yourself when you're stressed, and it is even harder for some people with disabilities. Try to make a plan for how you will take care of yourself.
- Think about things like what and when you will eat, how you'll make sure to get enough sleep, and who you can ask for help.
- Take time to do your favorite relaxing things. These are different for everyone, but some examples are making art, playing with pets, learning interesting things, or watching TV shows and movies.
- Find a few people who are good listeners, and ask to talk to them about how you feel.