



Local Advocacy Action Guide

APAP's Local Advocacy Action Guide - Fall 2025

Leveraging Back-to-School and Labor Day to Localize Stories, Mobilize Partners, and Drive Change

As the school year begins and Labor Day approaches, performing arts organizations have a unique opportunity to step into the spotlight—not just as cultural contributors, but as essential partners in education, economic development, and community resilience. These seasonal moments invite renewed attention to student success, workforce readiness, and local vitality—issues where the arts are not ancillary, but essential.

National alliances like [Blue Meridian Partners](#), [StriveTogether](#), [Enterprise Community Partners](#), [New Profit](#), [The Joyce Foundation](#), [Ballmer Group](#), [PolicyLink](#), and [Leadership for Educational Equity](#) are investing billions in youth potential and social mobility. But it is arts educators, teaching artists, and performing arts professionals and advocates who transform those investments into real impact, bringing learning to life, building belonging, and anchoring opportunity in communities across the country.

We may not have claimed this space before, but the truth has always been ours. **Now is the time to own it.**

This guide was developed to help you seize that opportunity. Rooted in APAP's belief that creativity, innovation, and place-based impact must go hand in hand, it offers actionable tools to help you localize your story, align with funder and policy priorities, and drive real change where

you live and work. Whether you're planning a back-to-school campaign, connecting Labor Day themes to workforce outcomes, or preparing to brief local leaders, this guide will support your next win—with clarity, confidence, and strategy.

Table of Contents:

- [Why the Performing Arts Matter](#)
 - [Local Stories = Local Impact](#)
 - [Grow Your Impact, Partnerships, and Voice](#)
 - [Use AI to Do More and Move Faster](#)
 - [Leading the Charge for Claim our Space](#)
-

Why The Performing Arts Matter

Performing arts professionals know that live performance isn't a static product. It's a living, emotional, communal experience. Through catharsis, embodied meaning, and shared presence, performing arts forge deep, real-time transformation. When storytelling meets this transformative power of the performing arts, it becomes uniquely potent, especially when used as a campaign to **claim space and drive change**.

Data-Proven Impact and Why the Arts Matter Now More Than Ever

Compelling storytelling also needs to be paired with compelling data when making the case to local officials, funders, or partners. The following research-backed insights demonstrate that the performing arts aren't a luxury. They are civic infrastructure that strengthens education, workforce pipelines, economic development, and public health.

These examples aren't just anecdotes. They're hard advocacy evidence that the performing arts serve as civic infrastructure, measurably increasing well-being, safety, and opportunity for all. Use them to support your outreach this fall. Tailor them with your own local data wherever possible.

- **The Arts Improve Life Outcomes:** In [New York City neighborhoods](#) rich in cultural resources, including performing arts venues, researchers found a 14% drop in child abuse and neglect, an 18% drop in serious crime, a 5% decrease in obesity, and an 18% increase in top-tier educational achievement. Even after controlling for income, race, and other variables, the presence of cultural institutions correlated with [stronger, healthier communities](#).
- **Arts Education Expands Mobility:** Students with consistent access to arts education are [five times more likely to stay in school, four times more likely to win academic awards, and twice as likely to graduate college](#). Individuals with college degrees earn on

average \$1.2 million more over their lifetime than those without, primarily due to opportunities that education unlocks. According to [Fulfillment Fund](#), education equity initiatives that include arts programming show measurable improvements in student outcomes.

- **The Arts Fuel Local Economies:** Attending a single performance sends positive ripples through local economies. Audiences spend an estimated \$38–\$65 per event at nearby restaurants, retail, and transportation, [directly benefiting small businesses](#). Americans for the Arts surveys reveal that 78% say the arts deliver positive experiences, 89% see local arts venues as a source of community pride, and 86% say [cultural experiences are vital for future generations](#).
- **Scale and Growth Are Measurable:** The 2025 Texas "State of the Arts" report demonstrates the [sector grew 63% in the last decade, contributed \\$7.3 billion to the economy, \\$459 million in tax revenue, and supported over 960,000 jobs](#). In Northwest Arkansas alone, the arts generated \$232.7 million in local activity, a 77% increase since 2015.
- **Place-Based Investment + Arts = Scaled Impact:** [Blue Meridian Partners'](#) comprehensive place-based strategy has invested \$4.5 billion in pooled funding across nearly 20 partnerships, with evidence showing targeted arts programs [improve graduation rates](#) and reduce chronic absenteeism, [especially for students](#) furthest from opportunity.
- **Arts Are Workforce Infrastructure:** [StriveTogether's cradle-to-career approach](#) has reached more than 11 million youth across 66 communities, building pathways from early childhood through [career success](#) that incorporate arts-based skill development. Labor Day isn't just a time to honor work, it's a reminder that creative skills are workforce skills, and that investing in the arts fuels economic participation, pride, and possibility in communities nationwide.

***Tip:** Don't just quote these stats; ground them in your own community. Use them to spark conversations, build proposals, and anchor local storytelling in credibility.*

How to Localize a National Stat

The national data points in this guide offer powerful, research-backed evidence. To make them truly persuasive, you must connect them to local reality. This repeatable, three-step methodology turns a national statistic into a locally grounded argument for strategic investment:

- 1.) **Identify Your Target Stat:** Choose one compelling national insight that aligns with a core community priority (e.g., the 18% increase in top-tier educational achievement in NYC, or the \$38–\$65 audience spend per event fueling local economies).

- 2.) **Find the Local Proxy:** Research one corresponding, measurable local data point from your community that speaks to the same issue. This could be student absentee rates, high school graduation rates, or your local economic impact numbers (e.g., from an Americans for the Arts report or a regional economic council).
- 3.) **Create the Bridge Statement:** Write a sentence that connects the national proof to your local potential. This is where you translate national success into your community's potential impact.
 - Example Bridge Statement: "The national data shows arts programs drive an 18% increase in top-tier educational achievement. We estimate that even a quarter of that impact—a 4.5% improvement in our local graduation rate—would create X new career pathways for students in our district."

Local Stories = Local Impact

Make advocacy personal, powerful, and place-based. If national data builds credibility, local stories make people care. Your community's students, parents, artists, and audiences are your most powerful messengers. When you spotlight real experiences in real places, you turn abstract support into concrete action.

Storytelling isn't just a tactic. It's how we reclaim space, visibility, and agency in the places we live. And when paired with data, it becomes a force multiplier for policy influence, funding, and partnership-building.

How to Localize Your Story Effectively

Use these strategies to ground your narrative in your community's lived experience:

- **Always reframe your local narrative as additive.** Don't say "we need donations to support our youth arts programming." Say "we are seeking strategic investment to fund a launchpad for youth mobility and future creative workforce."
- **Showcase Local Talent & Impact:** Share specific stories of students, families, and artists whose lives were transformed by your work. Let their voices lead.
- **Ground National Data in Local Reality:** Pair big-picture stats with your outcomes. Example: "After adding an arts residency, absenteeism dropped 17% in our 9th grade cohort."
- **Connect to Community Priorities:** Frame the arts as part of solutions to issues your community already cares about—public safety, youth development, economic vibrancy.
- **Use Place-Based Visuals:** Highlight familiar spaces, local leaders, and cultural landmarks in your materials to build trust and recognition.

- **Engage Community Messengers:** Invite alumni, parents, and teaching artists to testify, speak to press, or write op-eds. Peer voices are persuasive.
- **Use Reframed Language:** Use APAP's [Message Reframe Matrix Tool](#) to translate your story into powerful, funder- and policy-aligned language.

Bringing Stories and Data to Life: Models to Learn From

To help you connect narrative and strategy, here are real-world models you can draw from:

- **Proven Partnership Models:** Blue Meridian's [Justice and Mobility Fund](#) brings significant resources to criminal justice reform, while their [Place Matters](#) strategy strengthens community partnerships through data measurement, technology, and talent development. Their [HBCU Transformation Project](#) received \$124 million to increase enrollment and expand pathways to economic mobility.
- **Cross-Sector Success Stories:** StriveTogether's [backbone organization model](#) has enabled communities from Birmingham to Vancouver to build civic infrastructure that achieves collective impact, awarding up to [\\$1.5 million in funding to 10 communities](#) for student-centered learning initiatives.
- **Strategic Planning In Action:** Wake County Public School System's [10-month strategic arts education planning process](#), facilitated through consensus-building techniques and involving 30 stakeholders, resulted in a board-adopted plan that addresses equity gaps and provides concrete actions for systemic improvement.

***Tip:** Use these examples to inspire your own case-making. Adapt the tactics. Quote the data. Make the story yours—and make it stick.*

Grow Your Impact, Partnerships, and Voice

This is your moment to lead, with clarity, strategy, and confidence. Whether you're building programs, funding relationships, or public momentum, these action areas are designed to help you activate your organization's full potential.

Each cluster below includes proven practices, strategic framing, and trusted tools to help you turn insight into impact this season.

Quick Start Guide

- **Low Capacity (1-2 Hours/Week):** Focus on *Launch a Back-to-School or Labor Day Campaign* using the [social media prompt starters](#) in [APAP's AI Resource Hub](#) to generate timely, re-framed content.
- **Medium Capacity (3-5 Hours/Week):** Focus on *Engage Policymakers with Purpose* by adapting one of the national data points with a single local story, and drafting a *City Council Briefing* using the [Capitol Insights Guide](#).
- **High Capacity (5+ Hours/Week):** Prioritize *Attract New Funding* by using the [Bridgespan framework](#) to build an alliance with a mobility-focused organization and design a *Joint Funding Strategy*.

Expand Your Reach and Relevance

- **Develop Strategic Partnerships:** Think beyond transactional collaborations. Use structured approaches to assess alignment, build trust, and plan for long-term mutual benefit.
 - *Resource:* Arts Consulting Group's "[Building Meaningful Strategic Partnerships](#)" framework
 - *Tool:* Number Analytics' [partnership flowchart guide](#)
 - *Guide:* Municipal Artist's [relationship-building strategies](#) for government-arts partnerships
- **Grow Programs that Meet the Moment:** Design interdisciplinary programs focused on social-emotional learning, STEM integration, and hybrid delivery models that reach students most in need. Research shows districts with unified arts programming experience higher student engagement and stronger parent-school-community partnerships.
 - *Resources:* On The Stage's [8 Benefits of a Unified District Experience in the Arts](#) and Expanding Learning's [Reversing Summer Reading Loss Through the Arts](#)

Lead With Messaging, Advocacy, And Data That Delivers Results:

- **Launch a Back-to-School or Labor Day Campaign:** Launch data-driven advocacy campaigns that leverage back-to-school and Labor Day moments to highlight how the arts drive both student achievement and community vitality.
 - *Resource:* [Meleca Creative's Impact Toolkit](#) with Results-Based Accountability framework and validated measurement tools (PROMIS Scale, 4Cs Framework).
 - *Toolkits:* [Americans for the Arts' Arts Impact Explorer](#), [advocacy webinar series](#), and [customizable letter templates](#).
 - *Guide:* Tennesseans for the Arts' [grassroots advocacy toolkit](#) with messaging strategies and legislator resources.

- **Engage Policymakers With Purpose:** Use case studies like Wake County's [consensus-building strategic planning model](#) to inspire engagement with stakeholders and create compelling evidence for policy change. Focus on consensus-building and data-driven proposals that tie to local priorities.

Attract New Funding & Cross-Sector Partnership Investment

- **Build Alliances With Shared Vision:** Connect with mobility-focused organizations advancing housing, workforce, health, or mobility. Strategic alignment leads to shared outcomes and long-term sustainability (and shared funding).
 - *Resource:* Bridgespan's [place-based community change consulting framework](#) for understanding barriers and creating new partnerships.
 - *Framework:* Enterprise Community Partners and StriveTogether's [housing-education alignment toolkit](#) supported by Ballmer Group.
- **Design Joint Funding Strategies:** Develop proposals anchored in public value and with community priorities—mental health, community resilience, learning loss recovery.
 - *Tools:* BoardSource's strategic [planning resources for nonprofit boards](#), focusing on stakeholder engagement and equity-minded approaches and Blue Meridian's [investment model of flexible, transformative capital](#)

Elevate Your Influence as a Thought Leader and Strategic Convener

- **Host, Convene, Catalyze:** Be more than a venue. Be a civic anchor. Serve as backbone organizations and conveners using StriveTogether's [collective impact model](#), gathering stakeholders, and hosting forums and [strategic planning](#) sessions to co-create strategy with civic leaders.
 - *Resource:* Annie E. Casey Foundation's [Results Count Leadership Development hubs](#) and network approach supporting 50K+ equity leaders
 - *Guides:* Association of Fundraising Professionals' [nonprofit strategic planning revolution](#) that fuses traditional and real-time methodologies for maximum adaptability, and Bridgespan Group's [Fundamentals of Nonprofit Strategy](#)
- **Tell the Right Story, the Right Way:** Publish impact updates using validated measurement tools and credible data that resonates with funders and policymakers.
 - *Toolkit:* Grantmakers in the Arts' [advocacy resources](#) and funding guidelines for supporting advocacy efforts
 - *Platform:* Leadership for Educational Equity's network for [amplifying local work on national stages](#)

Publish with Purpose, Reach Who Matters

- **Strategic Storytelling for Strategic Audiences:** Go beyond promotion. Craft stories that drive policy, funding, and public will. Pair qualitative narratives with measurable

data, and align your message to civic priorities like education, equity, and workforce development.

- *Toolkit:* APAP's *Message Reframe Matrix Tool* for audience-aligned messaging that connects the arts to community resilience
- *Platforms:* Use local op-eds, LinkedIn articles, funder newsletters, and city council briefings to share timely, localized impact stories
- *Network:* Tap into platforms like Grantmakers in the Arts, Americans for the Arts, and Leadership for Educational Equity to amplify national relevance

Amplify Local Impact Stories on Multiple Platforms

- **Write and Place Local Op-Eds:** Share timely stories and key data in your local news outlets to reach influential community members and policymakers.
 - *Tools:* Use CARE's [Send-An-Op-Ed Community Toolkit](#) and ACTION Campaign's [letter-to-the-editor tool](#) for step-by-step guidance on crafting op-eds and letters to the editor that spotlight impact and align with local or legislative priorities.
- **Leverage LinkedIn and Digital Articles:** Publish LinkedIn articles and activate sector-specific sharing options to highlight results and build momentum among funders and professionals.
 - *Guides:* Use I-Mission Institute's [5 Tips for Nonprofits on LinkedIn](#) guide and Taplio's [guide for nonprofits](#) on using LinkedIn's features for nonprofit storytelling and strategic engagement.
- **Engage Funders Through Newsletters:** Develop donor-focused content for newsletters to ensure your advocacy updates connect data-driven stories to ongoing donor interest and support
 - *Guides:* Benevity's [nonprofit newsletter guide](#) as well as LinkedIn's similar [newsletter guide](#).
- **Deliver City Council Briefings:** Present localized impact evidence in briefings and municipal advocacy campaigns to deepen relationships with government leaders and advance policy and funding goals.
 - *Guide:* Capitol Insights' [municipal advocacy strategies](#) for strategies and tips on preparing effective briefings and advancing municipal priorities.

Tip: *Start small. Pick one action area and explore the tools. Let this be the season you sharpen your story, grow your reach, and lead with power.*

Use AI to Do More and Move Faster

Generative AI can help your organization communicate more clearly, act more quickly, and align more strategically with purpose-driven messaging—especially when capacity is tight and attention is short. Whether you're crafting an op-ed, preparing a city council briefing, or drafting a grant narrative, AI tools can jumpstart ideas, sharpen language, and elevate your voice.

- **Start with Smart Prompts:** Use well-crafted prompt starters to generate drafts, data points, or message options for school board meetings, Labor Day posts, or back-to-school campaigns.
 - *Example Prompt:* “Translate Labor Day into a performing arts workforce message—now rewrite it for a school board member.”
 - *Quick Tip:* Use follow-ups like “Make it shorter,” “Add urgency,” or “Rewrite for a funder” to refine results.
- **Match Your Voice to the Moment:** Choose prompt templates designed for distinct tones—like heartfelt storytelling, persuasive advocacy, or board-level clarity—to tailor your message for each audience.
 - *Tool Tip:* Try ChatGPT for op-ed drafting, Claude for reviewing long documents, or Canva Magic Write for visual storytelling in decks and reports.
- **Work Smarter, Not Harder:** Use generative AI to refine text, find citations, or turn bullets into polished narratives—freeing up your team to focus on relationships, strategy, and community impact.
 - *Resource Hub:* Explore [APAP's AI Resource Hub](#) for curated prompts, tool guides, and sector-specific resources built for performing arts advocates and nonprofit leaders.
- **Model Ethical Use and Signal Credibility:** Referencing your use of AI transparently shows you're leading with innovation and integrity—grounding your message in both cutting-edge tools and real-world community voice.
 - *Framing Tip:* AI is a thought partner, not the final editor. You lead. It helps.

Tip: Use AI as a thought partner, not a final editor. You bring the lived experience, strategy, and community wisdom. AI helps you move faster and free up energy for deeper engagement.

Lead the Charge to Claim Your Space

When performing arts storytelling emerges from a sector that moves people, shifts economies, and heals communities, it lands not just as message but as public proof—a campaign that claims and creates civic ground. By acting on these evidence-based strategies, performing arts professionals not only grow their organizations and impact, they drive lasting change, unlock

new funding streams, and position themselves at the center of community progress and collective advocacy.

This campaign isn't art for art's sake. It's storytelling with data, with impact, with the power to reclaim civic ground and ensure every young person is empowered to thrive in school, at work, and in civic life.

How to Get Started

To truly own the narrative and sustain long-term influence, advocacy cannot be a temporary campaign; it must be a function of your organization's core structure. This section focuses on the internal alignment and governance needed to embed the performing arts as essential civic infrastructure for the long haul.

- **Board Alignment and Training**
 - **Action:** Conduct a focused briefing for your Board of Directors, staff, and key volunteers on the "Strategic Reframe" language.
 - **Goal:** Ensure all organizational spokespeople—from the executive director to board members at a community event—are using consistent, powerful language that positions the arts as a driver of economic and civic mobility, not as simple "charity" or "enrichment." Board members become powerful advocates when they are fluent in the new, aligned messaging.
- **Internal Goal Setting & Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)**
 - **Action:** Set 1–2 measurable, high-level Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) focused specifically on advocacy and civic engagement for the season.
 - **Goal:** Move beyond measuring only attendance or ticket sales. Integrate advocacy into your annual objectives. Examples of measurable KPIs include:
 - Secure 1 Op-Ed placement in a major local media outlet by November 1.
 - Present 2 Data Briefings to local or state policymakers before the next legislative session.
 - Establish one new cross-sector partnership with a mobility- or health-focused organization.
- **Establish a Sustainable Cadence**
 - **Action:** Formalize a small, cross-functional Advocacy Team or Task Force—comprising staff, a board member, and a key partner—to manage the strategy and data localization efforts.
 - **Goal:** Ensure advocacy efforts continue beyond the immediate Fall campaign. Regular, pre-scheduled meetings (e.g., a 30-minute bi-weekly check-in) maintain momentum, embed the work into day-to-day operations, and ensure a pipeline of local stories and data is always ready for deployment.

APAP is Here to Support Your Next Win.

At APAP, we believe that **creativity, innovation, and place-based impact must go hand in hand**—and that the performing arts are uniquely positioned to **humanize technology, elevate community voice, and must shape what comes next**. That belief is why our advocacy team developed this update with support from trusted generative AI tools to accelerate insight, strategy, and synthesis. Are you launching a back-to-school campaign, preparing for a city council meeting, or making the case to a local funder?

- Need help localizing for your region?
- Want to learn how to leverage storytelling more?
- Need talking points tailored to your community?
- Want help translating back-to-school themes into a policy or partnership ask?
- Looking to connect Labor Day themes to workforce, arts education, or community development?

Reach out to us at advocacy@apap365.org and let us help you localize your impact, align with strategic partners, leverage AI tools, and turn opportunity into action.

Drafted leveraging trusted generative AI tools