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Tips for Producing Your Own Music Advocacy Booklet

SHARING TESTIMONIALS

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Sharing testimonials that convey the personal impact of an education that includes music and the arts is a valuable addition to your advocacy strategy, especially when presented to administrators, school board members or state legislators.

The tips below are not intended as a step-by-step guide, but as elements to consider when developing a music education advocacy booklet or gathering testimonials to share through various formats, including social media. While collecting and assembling this information takes time and effort, the results may surprise and inspire you.

This information was assembled in consultation with Mark Despotakis of Progressive Music in Pennsylvania and Robin Walenta of West Music in Iowa, who led the development of testimonial booklets in their states and used them as part of their advocacy efforts with state legislators.

“I was surprised by how much this information meant to our elected officials. So many of them still had the book from the first year. They continue to refer to it and were eager to get their personal copy of the second edition.”

—Robin Walenta, president and CEO of West Music and member of the [Iowa Alliance for Arts Education](http://www.iowaalliance4artsed.org) (IAAE www.iowaalliance4artsed.org) on producing IAAE's advocacy 2nd annual testimony book

1 planning

- **Start by choosing a platform to capture and gather testimonials**—Suggested online survey options include [Wufoo](#), [SurveyGizmo](#), [SurveyMonkey](#) & [Google Forms](#).
- **Compose a question that will inspire enthusiastic and moving responses**—Select a question that will support the importance of music education, such as, “How has music education affected your life?” or “Why should music education be part of the curriculum?”
- **Determine your target groups and create a plan for spreading the word**—Who can provide your testimonials? Students, parents, former students, community members, business leaders and teachers are all good examples.
- **Decide what information you want to collect**—Examples include name, grade level, school, city, occupation, artistic discipline, photos, etc. **Note:** You must get permission from your respondents to publish their content. Tell your respondents exactly how you’ll use their information and give them the option of remaining anonymous. Suggested standard disclaimer: “By submitting this information, I agree to allow my comments, name and relevant information to be published as part of [insert advocacy book title].”

Best practice: List the standard disclaimer with a check-box option to be listed anonymously.

- **Tie it to an event**—Create a deadline for submissions and select your publishing date based on an event at which you can maximize the impact of distributing your booklet, such as a school board meeting, a town hall meeting or a state capitol “drive-in” for music education. Consider including student performances at your distribution events or a live reading of the testimonials.

- **Establish a project timeline**—Once your publishing date is set, work backward. In general, allow two months for promotion and collection, two weeks for editing and two weeks for printing/production.
- **Create roles for volunteers**—Depending on your project plan, you may want to appoint a promotions person, editor, survey administrator and/or a sponsorships/fundraising person.

“I was so inspired at how well these students were able to articulate how music had changed them.”

—Mark Despotakis, market development director of Progressive Music, and Advancement of Music Education council chair with the [Pennsylvania Music Educators Association](#) (PMEA [www.pmea.net](#))

2 promotion

- **Establish a promotional campaign**—How will you get the word out? Examples include email, social media, paid or donated magazine/journal ads, printed flyers, postcards and/or posters. Will it be mailed or distributed at performances or other events? Included in newsletters, websites, etc.?

Best practice: Include social sharing options in all your communications and encourage all to spread the word.

- **Collaborate**—Arts education associations in your state or community make great partners and often have websites, newsletters and large member lists.

3 production

- **Compile the results**—Most survey tools allow you to export responses into Word or Excel. **Note:** exporting to Excel will allow you to easily sort and organize your materials by grade, occupation, school, discipline, city, etc. After your format is set, [mail merge the information into a Word document](#).
- **Spread out the workload**—Edit the submissions as they come in, and don't wait until the end of the survey period to begin this labor-intensive process. You'll want to edit for spelling, grammar and punctuation, and possibly for brevity, opting to select the best parts of each submission.
- **Layout**—As you organize the information for your audience, consider including photos and varying the content type. A selection for a school board member audience might be organized by school and discipline, whereas testimonials for state legislators might be presented by city, district, parish or county. **Note:** Letters from community leaders and elected officials can have a high impact and should be prominently featured. (See published samples—IAAE, pg. 3-7)
- **Specific legislative or policy “Asks”**—If your plan is to include an “ask” to elected officials and policymakers, be concise, relevant and specific. Briefly outline the issue, state your case and let your audience know exactly what you want them to do. (See published samples—PMEA, pg. 4)
- **Consider sponsorships**—Since production is the most expensive element of producing a booklet, consider offsetting your costs by partnering with local businesses, especially print companies. **Reminder:** Arts education associations in your state or community make great partners!

“Don't be afraid. There are so many passionate people that want to share their experience. The impact is huge and it's not as hard as you might think.”

—Robin Walenta, president and CEO of West Music and member of the [IAAE](#).

published examples

- **PMEA's**
[“How Has Music Education Impacted Your Life?”](#)
PMEA polled current and former music students and, most importantly, community members from across the state via an online survey tool over a six-month period. Responses were then downloaded, edited for grammar and punctuation, and listed by county to create a 411-page book.
- **IAAE's**
[“Create, Legislate and Celebrate: A Day of Fine Arts Advocacy”](#)
IAAE polled current and former music, visual arts, theater and dance students over a three-month period. Responses were then pulled ‘as is’ into the final doc and listed by county. Student art was selected for the covers and distributed throughout the 92-page book.



For more information on music education advocacy:

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