

Advocacy Lead Manual

2026-2027





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Introduction

Why are we here?

Students for Partners In Health Canada (SPIHC) works to build the global right-to-health movement by mobilizing students and young people to advance Partners In Health's mission. While Partners In Health strengthens health systems and delivers high-quality care to communities experiencing poverty, SPIHC helps build the resources, awareness, and public support needed to sustain these efforts globally.

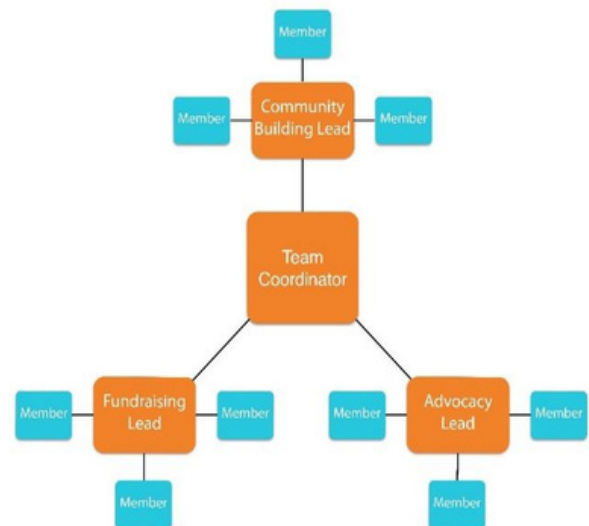
Through SPIHC, student leaders are recruited, trained, and supported to organize on their campuses and in their communities. Our work is grounded in three core pillars: advocacy, fundraising, and community building and education. By engaging decision-makers, raising critical funds, and fostering informed communities committed to health equity, SPIHC empowers students to contribute meaningfully to the realization of the right to health for all.

How are we structured?

In order to be effective in achieving our goals, SPIHC teams have a formalized, shared leadership structure. A leadership team offers a consistent way to work together interdependently, recognizing and leveraging the unique talents of the individuals who make up the team. Team structures also help create capacity – the ability to work creatively together in ways that produce more vibrant, engaging events and programs than any individual could create alone. Leadership teams have clear missions and goals that all team members work towards through collaboration, creativity, and commitment. Leadership teams are also essential in providing a foundation from which an organization can expand its reach, as no one person can singlehandedly create an organization of massive scale.

Importantly, your team structure must also be interdependent. An interdependent leadership structure not only capitalizes on an individual's unique skills and resources, but creates an environment of both support and accountability. Effective interdependent leadership takes the form of a “**snowflake**” as shown below:

Each team will have an Advocacy Lead, Community-Building Lead, Fundraising Lead, and Team Coordinator who will oversee both the leadership and full team. Having four designated leaders will allow tasks to be divided easily and equally. Additionally, because each leader has a distinct role, our National Team in Canada will be able to provide specialized training to each Lead through webinars, toolkits, and calls.





Your role as an Advocacy Lead

The Advocacy Lead will spearhead the team's efforts to contribute to policy change. They will become experts in understanding what SPIHC means by advocacy, and will be trained in (and will train their team in) a number of advocacy tactics. Throughout the course of the year, the Advocacy Lead may organize and oversee call-ins, meetings with Members of Parliament, bird-dogging efforts, publications in local media, and/or rallies. In order to achieve the team's advocacy goals, they will help recruit a 3-5 member advocacy team to assist in these actions. The Advocacy Lead will also attend online training webinars led by the SPIHC National Team.

What do we mean when we say “advocacy?”

“Advocacy” sometimes means different things to different people. Some people consider advocates to be focused on education, or raising awareness, or even just personally supporting a certain cause in which they believe. SPIHC means something very specific when we talk about advocacy – we are not as concerned with public education or awareness campaigns, but instead we focus on **political action to create change**.

While we recognize the importance of education, we believe in the power of action. We believe it is our responsibility not just to make people *aware* of important issues or problems in global health, but to present them with opportunities to take action to solve those problems – and to take those actions ourselves. When we talk about advocacy, we are talking about tangible, measurable action taken to change or influence a policy that affects global health, and specifically, the type of work that Partners In Health carries out. This might mean advocating for more federal funding for global health funding, convincing your MPs to support a bill to strengthen global health systems, or protesting legislation that will restrict access to affordable medicines – or any number of other efforts!

Unlike education or awareness campaigns, **SPIHC advocacy campaigns have:**

1. Winnable and measurable goals (e.g. passing or defeating a bill)
2. Identifiable targets (e.g. high-powered Members of Parliament)
3. A clear timeline (e.g. the federal budget is voted through in September)

We'll spend the year learning and growing together, becoming experts in advocacy. We'll teach you about SPIHC-led advocacy efforts, and how to bring important information and training to the rest of your team. You'll build relationships with your elected officials, you'll learn how to ask targeted, clear questions about global health, and you'll take tangible, measurable actions to improve access to health care around the world.



Why do we advocate?

At Partners In Health, we serve communities of marginalized people all around the world – but we can't reach all of them. That's why at SPIHC, we highlight the importance of political advocacy. Medical service work is incredibly important to treat people who are sick *today*. Building health systems in Rwanda, Haiti, or Peru is incredibly important to make sure that future generations in those communities have reliable access to treatment. But because our work on the ground can only reach the people close to us, **we need advocacy to change the policies and structures that affect access to care for everyone**, not just the people in our partners' country sites.

Leading your Advocacy Team

As an Advocacy Lead on your SPIHC team, you will be responsible for leading a small committee of your peers who are passionate about policy change to plan and execute advocacy actions. While you will need to plan ahead and set long-term goals with your team, your role comes with an extra important challenge: you'll need to be able to build a nimble team that can act quickly, sometimes without much advanced warning, in order to take advantage of pivotal moments in a campaign.

Your role is in large part about *timeliness* – for instance, if Parliament announces that they will vote on an important bill this Thursday, it will not do you much good to visit them next week. We'll provide you with all the resources and training we can to help you understand important global health policy issues, but you'll need to be ready to respond to some last-minute updates.

You and your team are also advocacy ambassadors to your full SPIHC team. At key moments in each campaign, make sure to pull in every member of your SPIHC team! For example, if your team is advocating for more co-sponsors for a certain bill, your whole team could participate in a call-in day to call and email their Member of Parliament, but an advocacy team member would be the one to draft an op-ed or schedule a meeting with your MP. One suggestion: for each major SPIHC advocacy campaign, start by hosting a "learning session" at one of your full-body SPIHC meetings to teach all your members about the campaign, and ask them to take a quick action at the end of the meeting.

Setting Goals

Even in moments of quick action, but *especially* at the beginning of a year or campaign, it's incredibly important to start by setting goals with your team. Without setting goals of what you'd like to accomplish, you won't be able to measure your progress or determine what you might need to change to have a successful year.

Goals can be *long-term* ("publish 3 op-eds this year"), *short-term* ("turn out 30 people to the rally next week"), *broad* ("build a positive relationship with our Representative") or *specific* ("speak with our Rep's district office at least once a month"). But goals must *always* measurable – you



need to be able to know whether or not you've accomplished them! Ideally, your team will create a set of long *and* short-term, broad *and* specific goals.

A note about setting advocacy goals: This process is a bit different than setting fundraising goals, where your team can get completely creative with how they'll reach a certain dollar amount. Within advocacy, there are a certain set of tactics that we simply *know* are more effective at changing policies than others, or are more relevant to a certain campaign. In addition, for your advocacy to be powerful, you need to be amplifying a broader SPIHC campaign that all other teams are also participating in (for example, supporting a certain bill in Parliament). Grassroots advocacy power comes from numbers! So, while your team should definitely set measurable and ambitious goals, work within the SPIHC campaign and tactics that we know will be most effective.

Using the worksheet that follows, set some year-long goals with your team members of what you'd like to accomplish in the realm of political advocacy. You should think big and be ambitious, but set specific plans for how you will accomplish these goals as a team, including some checkpoints and intermediate goals. You can (and should!) get specific when planning for each of your goals; try using this worksheet to create more detailed work plans when planning for any particular advocacy action.

Setting Expectations and Responsibilities

When determining how you will reach your goals, you will need to determine how you will divide responsibilities among your advocacy team. Make sure that every team member plays a meaningful role in your campaign; your role as an Advocacy Lead is not to delegate discreet tasks to individual members, but to lead your group in understanding the campaign and helping members take ownership over important pieces of the work.

You will have to pay attention to the various skills and interests of your members, and do your best to make sure that these are in line with their assumed responsibilities. At the beginning of the year, lay out a clear plan for communication – will you use a group text, emails, or Facebook to check in? (Think realistically about how you use any/all of these!) How often will you meet? Where will you meet? Then, create a workplan that details what you plan to accomplish by each meeting, who owns each piece of work, and how you will check in on progress. Expect this to be a working document; change *will* happen, and you will need to adjust often. Setting clear expectations and responsibilities will help you adjust with more ease.

As you work on engaging both old and new members throughout the year, fitting them into your workplan in meaningful ways, check out the “Ladders of Engagement” below.

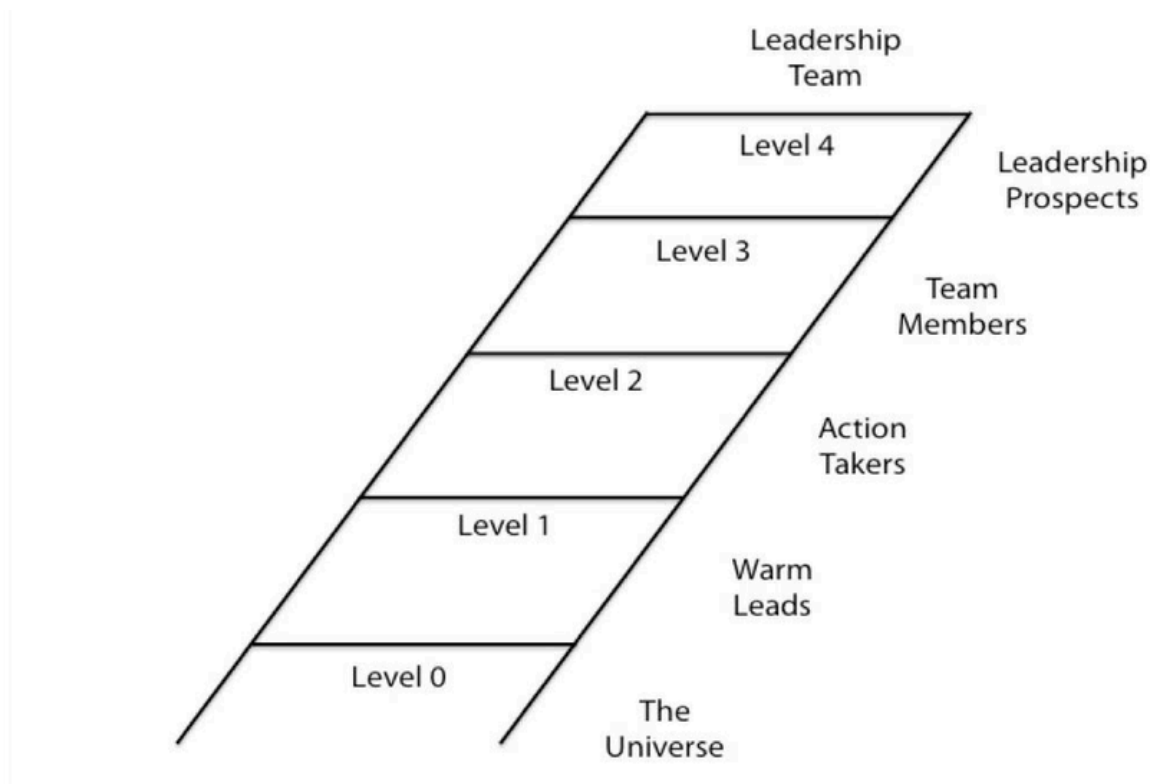
Keeping your team members engaged: Ladders of Engagement

Recruiting members, building relationships among your team, and establishing early goals is just the first step in building up a strong team. It is essential that these relationships be cultivated, enabling



individuals to grow as leaders. A “ladder of engagement” offers a visual representation for this approach, with each rung representing a more progressive action leading to a higher level of engagement. You should be mindful of the place at which each team members enter (Think: How much do they know about global health? About policy? Have they ever participated in political advocacy?) and how quickly and easily they move up the rungs of the ladder. Each rung will be a more difficult ask, requiring more experience, confidence, and effort. Always offer actions at their level, with opportunity and encouragement to move up and take on more serious responsibility.

Ladder of Engagement



By tracking members through the ladder of engagement, you can make tailored “asks,” helping to grow both that individual’s *and* your overall team’s capacity. Below is an example of the ladder of engagement in practice for an advocacy campaign:

Level 0: An individual signs up for your email list, or attends a public SPIHC-sponsored event

Level 1: An individual starts attending SPIHC Advocacy Team meetings

Level 2: An individual helps plan an upcoming advocacy event with a large team

Level 3: An individual takes ownership of an indirect action, like drafting and submitting an op-ed

Level 4: An individual participates in in-person direct action, like birddogging or demonstrating



How Do We Prepare for Advocacy?

1. Map your opportunities

Successful advocacy starts with identifying the moments when decision-makers are most likely to be listening. Advocacy opportunities exist at the local, provincial, national, and international levels, and they often arise throughout the year. By mapping these opportunities in advance, your chapter can engage strategically rather than reactively.

Look for opportunities such as:

- Meetings with your local MP or other elected representatives
- Budget consultations and pre-budget submissions
- Elections and election campaign events
- Government consultations and major policy reviews
- Parliamentary debates, committee hearings, and public consultations
- Press conferences, announcements, and town halls
- Conferences, summits, and campus events attended by decision-makers
- Visits from ministers, MPs, Senators, or other influential leaders
- International and regional commemorative days, such as World Health Day or International Women's Day
- Special occasions, awareness campaigns, and national holidays that provide relevant advocacy hooks
- Media moments and breaking developments related to global health and health equity

By anticipating when and where decision-makers will be present, you can plan meetings, public actions, letters, social media campaigns, and media outreach to maximize the visibility and impact of your advocacy efforts.

2. Know & Map your MP

Members of Parliament are elected to represent the concerns and priorities of their constituents. Understanding who your MP is, what issues they care about, and what influence they have within government can help you tailor your advocacy approach.

Consider the following questions:

- Which MP represents your campus and surrounding community?
- Are they a member of the governing party, opposition, or an independent?
- Do they hold a ministerial, parliamentary secretary, committee, or leadership role?
- Have they spoken publicly about global health, international development, gender equality, human rights, climate justice, or related issues?
- Do they have personal, professional, or community connections that align with your advocacy priorities?
- Have they previously supported Partners In Health, SPIHC, or similar causes?



Create a brief profile for each target decision-maker that includes their role, areas of interest, previous engagement with your issues, contact information, and any relationships your chapter may have with them. Understanding your decision-maker's priorities will help you frame your message effectively and identify the most persuasive advocacy asks.

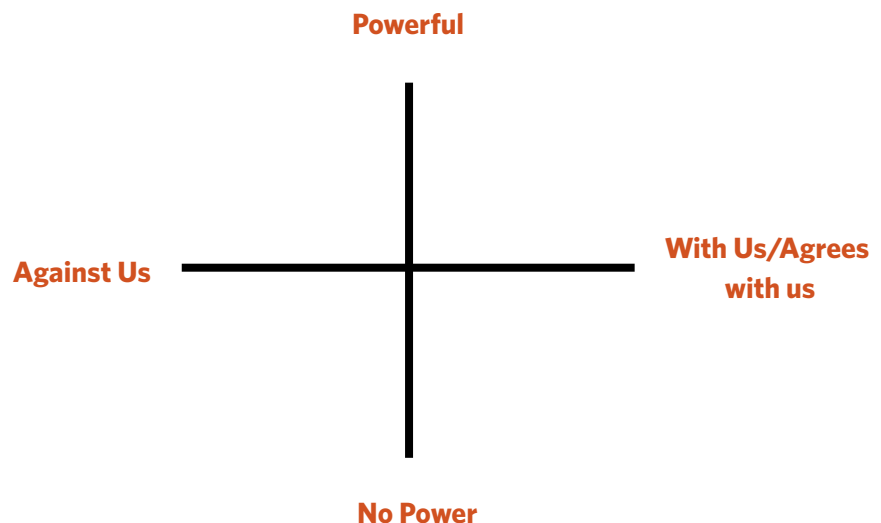
Remember: effective advocacy is built on relationships. The more you understand your MP and their interests, the better equipped you will be to build trust, find common ground, and secure meaningful commitments in support of global health equity.

Power Mapping

Power mapping is a strategic tool used to identify the individuals, institutions, and relationships that influence a decision-making process. It helps you determine where to focus your time and energy for the greatest impact.

When power mapping, consider:

- **Primary targets:** The people with direct decision-making authority, such as MPs, Ministers, Parliamentary Secretaries, or government officials.
- **Secondary targets:** People who can influence the primary target, such as staff members, party colleagues, committee members, community leaders, faculty members, journalists, or partner organizations.
- **Allies and supporters:** Individuals and organizations that already support your issue and can help amplify your message.
- **Opponents or barriers:** Individuals or institutions who may oppose your policy objective or influence decision-makers against it.



A simple power map can help your chapter visualize who holds power, who influences them, what relationships already exist, and where new relationships need to be built.

Key Question: *Who can help move our target toward supporting our advocacy ask?*



The Champion Scale

Not all decision-makers support an issue to the same degree. The Champion Scale helps assess where an individual currently stands and determine the next step needed to deepen their support.

Uninformed → Neutral → Supporter → Advocate → Leader → Champion

[-1] Uninformed

- Publicly disagrees with your position or actively works against it.
- Goal: Build understanding and reduce resistance.

[0] Neutral

- Has little knowledge of the issue or has not taken a position.
- Goal: Educate and increase awareness on the issue.

[1] Supporter

- Agrees with your issue and expresses support privately.
- Goal: Move MP beyond taking basic action. Secure a concrete action or commitment.

[2] Advocate

- Takes action in support of the issue, such as attending meetings, signing letters, asking questions, or speaking publicly.
- Goal: Increase their visibility and leadership on the issue.

[3] Leader

- Goal: Inspire MP to be a vocal leader in the House of Commons

[4] Champion

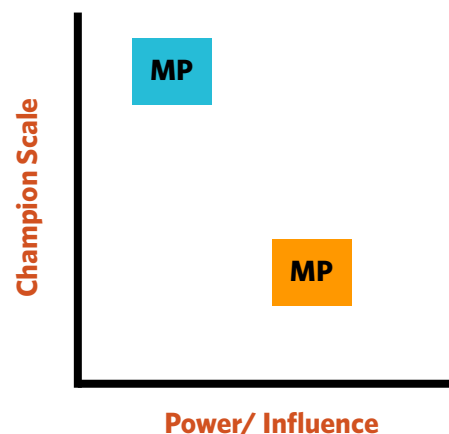
- Actively leads on the issue, mobilizes others, and consistently uses their influence to advance your goals.
- Goal: Maintain the relationship and empower them to bring additional decision-makers on board in the House of Commons.

Remember that advocacy is about moving people one step along the scale, not necessarily turning every decision-maker into a champion overnight. A successful meeting may simply move an MP from neutral to supporter, while a successful campaign may help transform a supporter into a vocal champion for global health equity.

Tip: After every interaction with a decision-maker, ask yourself: Where are they on the Champion Scale now, and what is the next action that would move them one step further? This helps chapters set realistic goals and measure relationship-building progress over time.

Bringing It All Together

A combined Power Map and Champion Scale helps chapters assess both how influential a stakeholder is and how supportive they are of your issue. This allows you to prioritize relationship-building efforts and develop tailored engagement strategies.





How Do We Advocate?

So how do we actually *do* political advocacy? The following tactics and techniques are some of the most common we'll be employing this year. Keep in mind, these are very *brief overviews* of the types of engagement you'll lead – we'll provide you with plenty more in-depth training on each advocacy tactic throughout the year! *As we repeat throughout this section, make sure that you are always checking in with the SPIHC National Team when planning advocacy actions to make sure that your messaging is accurate, tailored to your intended target, clear, and consistent with the rest of the network.*

- 1. Speaking with lawmakers face-to-face** is one of the most impactful actions you can take as a global health advocate. Just like with any relationship, relationships with lawmakers and other decision-makers are most powerful when created in person. There are two main face-to-face tactics you'll learn and use this year:

Legislative visits: Meeting in your constituency office or on the Hill

Your MPs have offices and personnel dedicated to hearing your concerns. In fact, you are the most important voices for them to hear! After all, you give them power by electing them to represent your interests in Parliament; they need to keep hearing about those interests.

You should be meeting with your MP's local constituency office often throughout the year to keep them updated on important global health issues and actions they can take to help. This will help you build a relationship with their office and staff so that your concerns are always top of mind. Always thank them for actions they've taken to help with our issues in the past, and present them with new opportunities (we'll help you determine what these are!).

Birddogging

Birddogging is an incredibly effective advocacy tactic and an important opportunity to engage decision-makers whenever possible. Unlike a meeting with a constituency office, where you will generally have one-on-one time with a staff member, birddogging provides direct access to your target decision-maker.

Birddogging can take place at town halls, campaign events, community meetings, debates, speaking engagements, constituency events, policy announcements, or other public gatherings where elected officials or candidates are present. Targets may include MPs, Members of Provincial Parliament (MPPs) or other provincial representatives, ministers, party leaders, municipal officials, or political candidates.

The goal of birddogging is to make a clear, direct ask and secure a public commitment to support your issue.



By asking questions in a public setting, you can help raise awareness, encourage accountability, and demonstrate that your issue matters to constituents. Election periods can be particularly effective times for birdddogging, as candidates are actively engaging with voters, but opportunities to engage decision-makers arise throughout the year.

When you get a decision-maker to pledge their support for your issue in a public setting, you can hold them accountable for their support in the future. Always make sure that you ask a direct “yes” or “no” question, providing the “right” answer in your question itself (e.g. “Will you commit to protecting and increasing Canada’s investment in the Global Fund at the next replenishment?”), and record their answer as accurately as possible—whether that be through video, audio, or verbatim note-taking. You’ll be able to share their answer with the entire SPIHC engagement network so that other members across the country can hit our target with the same question at their next event, strengthening their support!

We’ll help you prepare a great deal more through written resources and live trainings, but be on the lookout for primary candidates coming through your town! You’ll rarely have much advance notice, and will have to be quick on your feet to get your team together for a bird-dogging opportunity. Always contact the SPIHC National Team *immediately for help crafting a question and a plan when you find an opportunity to birddog!*

2. **Contacting Parliament through phone calls, emails, and letters** can be a great way to garner a great deal of support from those who won’t be able to join you for in-person opportunities.

Call-ins are most effective when you need immediate, coordinated support ahead of an important vote or government decision. While they are not always as powerful for relationship-building as an in-person meeting, MPs’ and Senators’ offices will take notice when they receive a significant number of calls from constituents and advocates supporting a particular action.

When planning a call-in, always check with the SPIHC team for support developing an accurate and effective call script so that advocates are clear about the issue, the specific ask, and what they should say when they call. Afterward, collect feedback from callers—such as which office they contacted, whom they spoke with, and any response they received—so that we can track our reach, identify follow-up opportunities, and report back to the broader network.

Letters and emails can also be an effective way to demonstrate support from people who may not be able to participate in a meeting with a decision-maker. If your team or other supporters send letters or emails, keep track of how many were sent and, where appropriate, bring copies or the total number to your meetings with MPs, Senators, or their staff. This helps demonstrate that your advocacy represents broader constituent and community support.



3. **Direct Actions** are larger public events planned by your team that center on a specific target and ask. Planning a demonstration, rally, or vigil, for instance, would be considered a direct action. We don't expect you to employ this tactic with great frequency, but actions like these can be important rallying points during controversial campaigns, and can earn you crucial media coverage. You will have to be incredibly strategic about every piece of a direct action, from crafting your messaging to recruiting participants to reaching out to press to cover your event. Your whole team will need to contribute to the effort to pull off a successful action!

Direct actions should always include a specific ask directed toward a specific target, but can vary greatly with timely, topical, and regional messaging. Direct actions are often coupled with creative signs, props, and chants – this is your chance to get creative!

4. **Speaking through the media to people in power and the public** can be another way to put pressure on your target without going directly to them. You can do this through writing op-eds and letters to the editor (LTEs) in your school or local papers. Unlike most newspaper coverage that is supposed to be unbiased, op-eds and LTEs are your chance to get published with a strong opinion on a certain issue. Different papers have different publishing rules, so you'll have to check your local paper's rules on word count, submission dates, etc. But no matter your local guidelines, you'll have to work quickly to publish your opinion piece before an issue or your hook is no longer relevant.

When writing an opinion piece, keep your focus tight and be concise – make it very clear where you stand. Write in your individual voice, but also be mindful of what kinds of pieces your paper likes to publish, and what readers like to read. In order to be effective, you'll need to clearly explain why the reader should care about your issue, and you should include a call-to-action near the end of your piece. Whenever possible, tie in a local hook. Don't just think about why this issue is important; think about why this is important to your readers.