

AEC Advocacy toolkit



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Introduction

Advocacy and communication for change is one of the four pillars of the AEC Strategy 2030. The strategy sets new objectives and priorities for the organisation. This is done in recognition of the fact that the world around us is changing at an ever-increasing pace, which means that the AEC must not only improve its ability to look ahead and understand new developments and trends that affect our members, but also become even clearer in the communication of the value of music and music education.

Creating change requires images of a desired future and the ability to communicate these images. In collaboration with members, stakeholders and partners, AEC will:

- represent and advance the interests of the Higher Music Education (HME) sector at national, European and global levels for the greater societal good
- promote the value of arts and education and the importance of adequate funding
- support the recognition of third cycle level and artistic research relevant to our sector
- advocate for better access to and across Music Education at all levels
- gather and share examples of good practices and innovative approaches of Higher Music Education institutions, also within the sector itself

This advocacy toolkit was produced by the AEC Advocacy Task Force and is a deliverable within the AEC ARTEMIS project. It focuses on reinforcing the capacity of

AEC members to advocate themselves for the HME sector and for the cultural and creative sector at large.

The toolkit contains definitions and concepts as used by the AEC. Next, a number of tools are presented as part of a process that leads to an advocacy campaign. To facilitate the preparation of campaigns, a template has been prepared that specifically guides through the process, supporting the preparatory analysis and formulation of messages.

Definition of advocacy in the framework of AEC

Advocacy is the act or process of supporting a cause or proposal. The AEC approaches advocacy as the systematic management of interests in relation to political agenda, decision-making processes, or broader societal discussions. This includes early identification of issues that could impact Higher Music Education Institutions (HMEI), their performance, and their reputation. Additionally, AEC emphasises recognising opportunities that arise from changes in political frameworks and developing strategic options to mitigate negative impacts while maximising the benefits of new regulations and legislation.

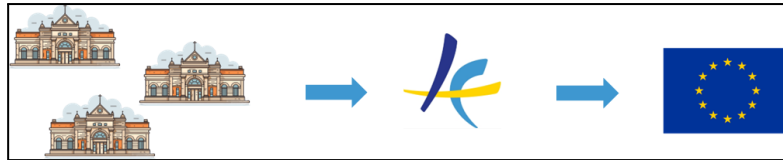
The AEC Advocacy models

The AEC advocacy models presented below highlight three distinct approaches:

1. **Representation at the European Union Level:** AEC acts on behalf of its members, advocating their interests directly with the European Union.
2. **Collaboration Among European Networks:** AEC collaborates with other European networks to address shared interests and engage in joint advocacy actions towards the European Union.
3. **Empowerment at the National Level:** AEC supports its members in planning and executing their own advocacy campaigns, tailored to the national, regional or local context.

These models collectively strengthen the advocacy efforts for Higher Music Education across multiple levels.

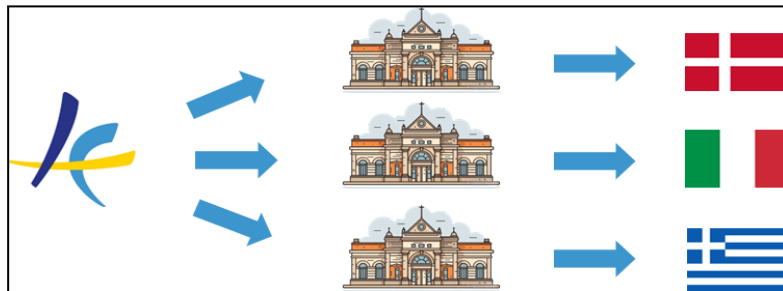
Model 1



Model 2



Model 3



Political influence under change

In the past, policy-making was a centralised process dominated by a small number of influential actors operating within exclusive corporatist networks. Access to the political scene almost guaranteed the ability to shape decisions, as influence often depended on relationships with key individuals. Policy formation focused as much on the actors themselves as on the issues they represented. There was a clear separation between political decision-making and public debate.

Today, the landscape of policy-making has shifted significantly. Policies are now shaped by numerous actors operating within a complex web of networks, where political power is widely dispersed. Simply gaining access to the political scene no longer ensures influence; instead, "political responsiveness" has become the key to success. Policy-making is increasingly centred on specific issues and cases rather than on the personalities or positions of the individuals involved. Furthermore, the boundaries between political agenda and public discourse have blurred, with social media serving as a powerful platform for connecting the two.

This evolution underscores the need for advocates to adapt. The question is no longer what politicians can do for you, but rather what you can offer to align your cause with the priorities of policymakers and the public, fostering mutual benefit and greater impact.

The toolkit

The implementation model shows the steps in building an advocacy campaign, beginning with the identification of the challenge. This could be proposals for new legislation, subsidy cuts or change of frameworks that would affect the HMEI in a negative way.

The model takes the user through the necessary steps to analyse the situation, to plan, put in action and evaluate an advocacy action. The individual steps are explained more in-depth in the annex: Campaign template.

The implementation model is followed by a number of tools assisting the user when going through the individual elements of building an effective advocacy campaign.



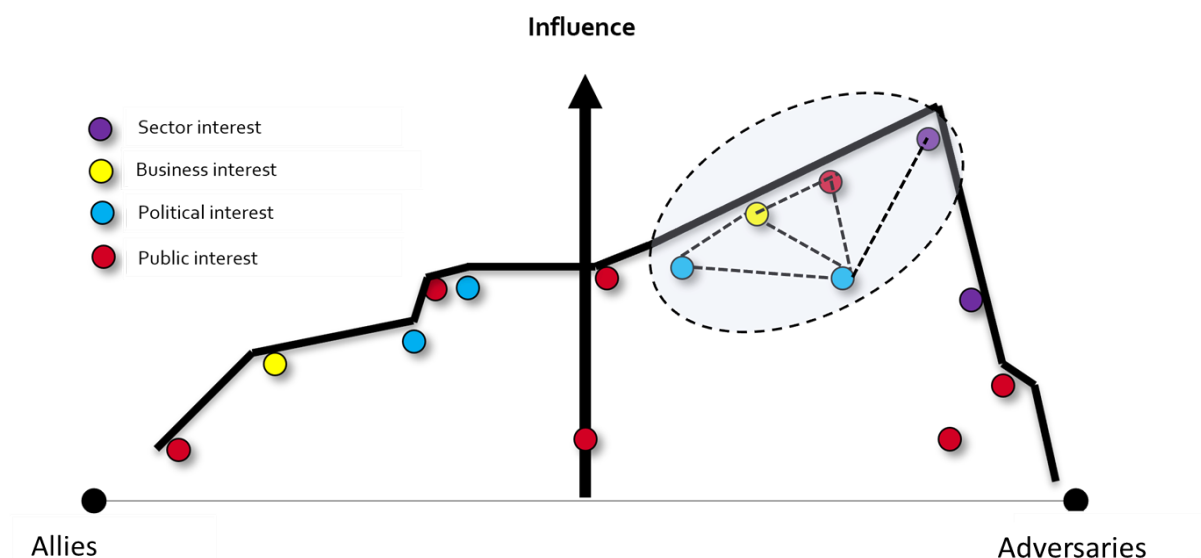
Tool 1: Resources

In an advocacy plan, you have three kinds of resources to draw on when planning an advocacy action:

- **Hidden resources** are those outside your institution, e.g. a public discourse that supports your position, interest groups with similar challenges or options as yourself that you can collaborate with, or it can be other organisations having access to decision-makers that will help promote your case.
- **Catalytic resources** are simply the available budget and employees that can be included in your process, and that will determine the level of your efforts, e.g. producing reports, advertising and attending meetings.
- **Operational resources** are those that you can determine and have control over yourself. They can be built up over a long time, such as institutional reputation or legitimacy, or they are actions that you can decide to use here and now such as a contact to a politician, a civil servant or a news channel.

Tool 2: Stakeholders

Stakeholders are parties who have some interest in your case. It can be the public, politicians, business or institutions in the field. The interest can be positive or negative and it is important to map the various stakeholders and their interests to be clear about their position.



Focus your efforts on areas where you have the greatest potential to make an impact. This may sometimes mean targeting areas where the resistance is strongest.

Tool 3: The political process

The political process often follows the same scheme: Someone sets the agenda (remember, it could be you), and a process starts according to the model.

It is very important to understand that the earlier you can influence the process, the better result you might achieve. After a formal political decision is made, you can only influence minor details such as the implementation, and it will probably take years before a new “window” of opportunity arises.

Process phases	What it means
Agenda setting	What is the challenge? What are the options and the costs?
Initiative phase	Formal initiative by a minister or a politician: "Something must be done..."
Policy formulation	Officials, political committees, commissions etc. formulate the political content in detail.
Decision	Formal decision is made – process according to national (parliamentary) systems.
Implementation	On basis of the legislation political officials and experts create more precise rules in guidelines and...
Policy change	Ongoing evaluation and not least public debate about impacts and consequences of the legislation.



Tool 4: Strategic approaches

You can choose from **two strategic approaches** when addressing the challenge threatening you. Either you are convinced that you are doing the right thing, and therefore the task is to buffer your institution from new external demands. On the other hand, if the threat cannot be met, you can consider creating a bridge to the new idea and instead minimise negative consequences by gaining influence on the new solution.

In this process, you will also have to decide which tone of voice will give you the best attention and the result.

Buffering:

- Contact with political opinion creators – make alliances
- Meetings with politicians wanting to engage or needing a good cause
- PR & information material
- Public appearances (demos)

- Conferences

Bridging:

- Create new objectives or update strategy and rationales
- Create new formats, new categories, new processes
- Change the internal organisation

Tone of voice:

- Aggressive
- Friendly
- Elusive
- Passive

Tool 5: Framing and Priming

Every effective advocacy campaign begins with a clear and compelling narrative. Once the narrative is established, it is crucial to focus on **framing and priming** - strategies that help present, shape, and manage an issue for maximum impact. **Framing** is about choosing the right words giving your message the angle and weight to influence the recipient, while **priming** is about what content you decide to put forward and what you leave out.

To achieve this, use the communication channels and media that are preferred by your stakeholders, ensuring your message reaches the right audience. **Rely on credible sources or spokespersons who have authority and trustworthiness in the specific issue being addressed.** Strengthen your message by incorporating relatable language, such as examples, stories, or anecdotes, and adopt an appropriate tone of voice to resonate with your audience.

It is also important to position yourself as part of the majority, representing a mainstream and balanced perspective rather than an extreme one, as extreme views often fail to garner widespread support. Tailor your message to align with realistic goals that your institution or organisation can achieve, ensuring that expectations are both practical and impactful.

Tool 6: Action plan

The action plan is necessary to have all key elements in your advocacy action plan together. You do not necessarily need all elements, but make sure to have a timeline that allows space for all parts of the process.

ACTION PLAN	Mar	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sep
Meeting politicians		★	★	★	★		
Media strategy & plan			★	★	★	★	★
Conference / Presentation							
Working groups	★	★					
Internal Task Force		★					
Create alliances			★	★	★		
Monitoring		★	★	★	★	★	★
Evaluation							★

EXAMPLE

The AEC Advocacy Task Force

- Irene GAROFALO, ELIA – European League of Institutes of the Arts
- Katharina WEINERT, EMC – European Music Council
- Manuel DAMÁSIO, GEECT – European Grouping of Film and Television Schools
- Guillermo RODRÍGUEZ, EPASA
- Nana SHARIKADZE, musicologist, Rector of Tbilisi State Conservatoire 2019-2023
- Stefan GIES, AEC Senior Advisor and Culture Action Europe Board member
- Finn SCHUMACKER, AEC Executive Director (TF Coordinator)