

ACTION GUIDE: TIPS FOR NEW ACTIVISTS

Citizens who don't have experience at grassroots activism should use these tips.

- **Organization: Local Allies.** Find like-minded allies quickly. Activism becomes much more effective when you have a group of supporters and when you can coordinate with other groups.
- **Organization: National Groups.** Ask national groups for help. They often have resources and contacts you can use, and they can provide publicity.
- **Publicity: Social Media.** Use social media—Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc. Develop **hashtags** to promote your cause (e.g., #AmericanBirthright, #EducationReform).
- **Publicity: Graphics Software.** Use PowerPoint and other free/cheap software to create graphics for your handouts, PDFs, and other web or printed resources.
- **Research: Substance.** Research your topic thoroughly. Where social studies standards are concerned, please read both *American Birthright* and the existing social studies standards in your state/school district, so you can speak in detail about the advantages of *American Birthright* and the flaws of the existing state standards.
- **Research: Funding Sources.** Find out who's paying for materials referred to in social studies standards, including recommended curriculum. Research their ideological affiliations.
- **Research: Process.** State education departments frequently have a highly technical process and schedule for recruiting personnel to craft social studies standards, and for accepting comments from the public. Legislative committees also have a complicated process and schedule for accepting testimony. School boards have their own process for putting new items on the agenda and for listening to citizens. Research the process needed to get *American Birthright* on policymakers' agendas, to submit comments to education department website, and everything else you need to do to argue for it most effectively.

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- **Research: Reference Material.** Read the footnotes, endnotes, and bibliography of state standards. Vague language in the text often references radical ideology such as Critical Race Theory that is stated explicitly in the documents referred to in the reference material. Effective arguments against the ideological assumptions of state standards frequently depend upon reading the bibliography.
- **Outreach: Contact Policymakers.** Contact your governor, your state superintendent, your state representative, your state senator, and your school board. Look up their web pages to see where to direct your correspondence. Make your arguments—always in a civil tone. We’ve provided model letters on the Civics Alliance’s “Grassroots Resources” webpage. (<https://civicsalliance.org/american-birthright-grassroots-resources/>) Combine email with phone calls and letters—phone calls and letters still make more of an impression with some policymakers. Policymakers won’t know what you want if you don’t tell them. It’s also important in your later work to be able to say that you *have* contacted policymakers, especially if they haven’t responded positively to your requests—or responded at all. You can ask them to give the public a good reason for their noncompliance.
- **Outreach: Ask for Commitment.** Ask policymakers to make a simple commitment: e.g., “Will you commit to adopting *American Birthright* as the state social studies standard?” Be polite, but include a request that has a simple Yes/No answer. Don’t ask vague questions which will allow them to reply with vaguely supportive but noncommittal language.
- **Outreach: Occasions to Write.** Whenever there’s a piece of relevant news, use it as an occasion to write—to your fellow supporters, to policymakers, to the media. Keep up a drumbeat of news—but you have to have a reason for each new letter.
- **Outreach: Testimony.** Prepare yourself to give concise, even-tempered, well-grounded testimony in public venues. Practice out loud giving a two-minute piece of testimony, grounded in personal experience and in precise references to text. Write it out so it can be re-used as a letter or publicity—and so you can see how persuasive it is, cold on the page. Send this written testimony in along with your spoken testimony, CC-ed broadly to everyone who needs to know about what you’re saying, so that officials cannot hide your testimony.

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- **Instant Resources:** Read the materials at Parents Defending Education’s “Engage” webpage. (<https://defendinged.org/engage/>) Also look at the Civic Alliance’s “Local Policy Resources” webpage. (<https://civicsalliance.org/local-policy-resources/>) These will provide many more useful tips.