



strategy + support for
musicians creating change

Air Traffic Control

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HOW MUSICIANS CAN BE INVOLVED IN PUBLIC POLICY

When it comes to policy battles, musicians have played a number of key roles around the issues and campaigns they care about, including helping to energize and sustain advocacy over time, awaking emotion in their fans, and engaging new audiences. They have also been vital to demystifying lawmaking and our federal government with their visits to the Hill. In addition, their ability to model civic duty to their immense fan bases has proven to play a key role in the activation of new voters.

I'm a rock singer, so I'm used to speaking my mind in front of a mic. But to be honest, this isn't the crowd I'm used to.

- Damian Kulash (OK Go) opening his Congressional testimony on Net Neutrality, 2008.

MUSIC + POLICY

In a policy sphere overrun by corporate interests, advocacy groups, grassroots organizations and labor unions, artists have a unique and untapped potential to help drive social justice policy. Some factors in their potential success include:

- Access. Elected officials are eager to meet with both superstars and emerging artists, and many staff members are big music fans. This provides a level of access and focus that is atypical among Washington advocates.
- Charisma and standing. Many artists are comfortable in public settings and are very effective at delivering compelling messages through testimony, interviews, news conferences, blogs, op-eds and other means.
- Mobilizing networks. Artists have built-in networks to inform and mobilize wide communities. Often, in a social networking age, like-minded artists have the ability to quickly amplify messages and distribute information.
- Validators. Artists have the demonstrated ability to inspire and validate activism on a host of issues. Some artist activism over the past thirty years has focused on broad themes (Live Aid, Amnesty International, Tibet) and has redefined the cultural and political dialog. Artists have the ability to maximize success of incremental policy fights while redefining what is possible in the long term. They can also reinforce and validate the importance of activist organizations, helping these organizations with visibility, recruitment and fundraising.

HOW MUSICIANS CAN AFFECT POLICY

1. Go to Washington, DC! Whether it is during a tour or otherwise, going to DC can be a quick and easy way to get a lot done. Here are some ideas of what to do while in DC:
 - a. Visit members of Congress and their staff, regulatory officials and their staffers. In many of these offices, the staffers have a lot of influence (and may even be fans).
 - b. Blog and tweet about it the experience. Music fans enjoy seeing the world through musicians' eyes, and witnessing the political process is no different.
2. Work with an advocacy organization that knows how to do policy. We can recommend some great ones, including Future of Music Coalition, one of our partner organizations.
3. Call on fans to take action. Musicians can easily engage fans in learning more or contacting their elected officials about policy issues. The best calls to action focus on exciting and engaging fans, and don't convey all of the details of the issue, legislation or action. Rather, they point to places where fans can learn more.
4. Place an opinion piece in a local newspaper or on a political blog. Opinion pieces are effective in advocacy and policy campaigns. Bands can also record an mp3 or a quick mpeg4 YouTube video message on band website in coordination with allied organizations or political blogs.

Air Traffic Control (ATC) exists to help musicians play an effective, unique and vital role in the promotion of social justice. Musicians and managers established ATC five years ago to assemble an experienced and trusted team of leaders, resources and tools that would help them to create more effective social change collaborations with each other and with social justice organizations. As a result, ATC became an artists' air traffic control—one that develops capacity, efficiency, and coordination to produce stronger and more creative social change partnerships. For more information, please go to www.atctower.net.