A Girl’s Guide to Advocacy
Why care about women in politics? Did you know that our government continually makes decisions on laws and policies that affect your daily life in both big and small ways? Everything you do is shaped in some way by our government: whether you’re eating a meal, studying in class, or visiting the doctor.

Girls must get involved to ensure the important decisions made by the government—the laws and policies that affect you—are in your best interest. You have a unique perspective on these issues. That perspective matters and must be voiced so that you can have an impact on your life and future.

Girls’ Day at the State House is a great way to get started. But what if you don’t want to stop after only one day? The Girls’ Day Action Guide will help you further develop your leadership skills and learn about Maine’s system of government so that you can participate. Though you may not be old enough to vote, the Action Guide can help you make your voice heard by political leaders and help you become an activist. And, maybe someday you’ll get the chance to represent Maine girls and women in the halls of the State House, in the U.S. Congress, or even the White House.

The Girls’ Day Action Guide was created to help you assert the political power that you already have by helping you to:

• Become an informed, active citizen by learning about the government and the political process;
• Develop skills that will help you become a leader in your community, school, and in politics; and,
• Get involved and speak out on issues that matter to you and your community.
• Girls can have an impact. The Girls’ Day Action Guide is here to inspire you and provide you with the information to claim your voice and power through the political process.
Qualities of Leadership

• **Know Where You Stand** — Think about your core values and have the “courage of your convictions.” Know where you can and can’t compromise. Be true to yourself.

• **Create a Network of Supporters** — Gather support from others who believe in what you’re doing – *no one* succeeds without help.

• **Establish Goals and an Action Plan** — Provide direction for yourself and others. All leaders set goals – that’s how political leaders make progress on issues that affect us. Create a plan with action steps for accomplishing your goals.

• **Communicate** — Speak up: your voice is your “tool.” Be a respectful listener with others and be a mindful speaker when communicating your beliefs.

• **Champion Change and Innovation** — Challenge the status quo (the way things are usually done). Be creative, have conviction, and stand up for what you believe in, even if others may not agree.

Growing your Leadership Skills

• Seek out more experienced mentors or role models who can offer you experience, advice and guidance to help you succeed.

• Watch others lead. Ask women in leadership roles in state or local government, business, or religious or civic organizations if you can spend a day “job shadowing” them.

• If possible, attend classes, workshops, leadership conferences, or other trainings in order to learn more.

• Educate yourself. Read books on women leaders whose accomplishments inspire you. These books will help you develop your own leadership skills.

• Sharpen your leadership skills. Take on a leadership role in the community or school. Run for class or club officer, join a peer leader group, tutor young children, or organize a public information campaign on an issue that is important to you.
How an Idea Becomes a Law

**Idea**
Best when it comes from a real problem and real people.

**Bill**
A ‘sponsor’ supports the bill, with writing help from the Reviser’s Office.

**Hearing**
The bill is ‘heard’ by a committee, and people can send in testimony.

**Committee Vote**
The committee votes on the bill and makes a recommendation to the Legislature. Sometimes they amend (or change) it.

**House and Senate Vote**
The House and Senate each vote on the committee’s recommendation.

**Governor’s Signature**
If the bill passes both the House and the Senate, it goes to the Governor for a Signature.

**A New Law is Born**
When the Governor signs it, it becomes a law (usually 90 days later).

**Fix and Update**
The law gets fixed and changed forever.
How to Analyze a Bill

**In the Idea Stage**
- Is this a real problem? Would a law fix this problem?
- Are people following the current laws? Why or why not?

**In the Drafting Stage**
- Where should this new law go?
- What existing laws should it connect to?
- Who would know more about this issue?

**In the Hearing Stage**
- Who would support this issue?
- Who will oppose this issue? Why?
- Can I find a compromise with the opposition?
- Whose stories will help the committee understand the issue?

**In the Implementation Stage**
- Who needs to know about this new law?
- What could go wrong in implementation?
- How will we know it worked?

**At Every Stage**
- Who will be most harmed by this law?
- Who will get the biggest benefit?
- What are the unintended side effects?
- Do the people who need this law have barriers to accessing it?
How Citizens Can Affect Policy

**Have an Idea!**
Bring your ideas, problems, challenges etc. to your local legislator or decision-maker.

**Vote**
Vote for candidates in every election that agree with you on the issues.

**Talk**
Talk to candidates, legislators, and other elected officials about the issues that matter to you.

**Write**
Write on social media, to newspapers, and to legislative committees about policies that matter to you.

**Call**
Call legislators and let them know what you think. Your opinion makes a difference.

**Learn**
Learn about the tools that help people get involved

**Act**
Don’t just stand there, do something. Policy makers can’t fix a problem they don’t know about.
Even if you aren’t old enough to vote or run for office, you can still become involved in the political process. We live in a representative government where legislators are in office to represent the collective voices of their constituents. So, one way to ensure your own involvement is to *always* be outspoken on issues that are important to you.

To be an activist means to become active on behalf of a cause, issue, or person. If you do this, you will increase the control you have on your life and your future. Legislators cannot fairly represent your views if they do not hear from you. Your voice IS your power. You may be asking yourself, “Well sure, this all sounds good, but how do I get my Representative or Senator to listen to me on a particular issue?”

**Who is My Legislator?**

One of the first steps is knowing who represents you. If you don’t know which legislators represent you in the Maine Legislature, don’t panic. The State of Maine website has a link to the State of Maine government. Go to [www.main.gov](http://www.main.gov) and search for the “Maine Voter Information Lookup Service” to find your legislators. If you do not have access to a computer, you can simply call your town office and ask for the names and contact information of your legislators – it’s as simple as that.

The Maine delegates who represent you in the U.S. Congress (also known as the Maine Congressional Delegation) are Congresswoman Chellie Pingree or Congressman Jared Golden and Senators Susan Collins and Angus King. Their contact information is listed at the end of this guide.
Promoting Your Cause

So, now that you have your legislators listening to your concerns, what’s next? You must gather support from others who believe in what you’re doing because no one succeeds without help. How do you get others to feel strongly about an issue that is important to you? Activism on your issue is only as successful as the number of people who know about it. You need to develop a plan to promote your cause. Here are some ideas:

• **Decide what you want to communicate.** You need a clear, focused core message and supporting facts. Facts will support your case, but find a way to make it personal. Try to center the people who are most impacted by the issue you are advocating for.

• **Take your passion and make it happen!** Figure out exactly what you are trying to do: Do you want to pass a bill, raise awareness about a specific issue, or maybe change the culture of your community? All are great goals, and figuring out what exactly you’re trying to do will inform your next steps.

• **Work smarter, not harder!** Do some research about your issue and see if there are any organizations in Maine that are already doing that work. Take it from us, nonprofits love it when folks reach out looking to get involved in their work!
  - Talk to their community organizer to put together an effective plan of action. They will be able to help you brainstorm the most effective way to engage with your community.
  - Many nonprofits also have a Communications Director. They can help you write a letter to the editor or point you toward community hubs of communication that can amplify what you have to say.
  - If you want to write a letter to the editor by yourself, check out some of our newspaper contact information yourself. This could be a great writing project to get a teacher’s help with.

• **Start talking about it!** You have the best chance of getting through to folks that already know you. Your family, your friends, and your classmates are a great place to start.
Now you have an increased understanding of leadership, the world of politics, and the know-how to make your voice heard. You are an informed citizen. What are you going to do with these new tools? Get involved in anything that interests or inspires you. Speak out about and organize around social injustice. Make your mark on the political system right now, and have a voice in crucial decisions. Your voice is all you need to be a political activist and affect change. **You’re never too young to begin.**

**Other Forms of Activism**

Attend a meeting where policy decisions are made – a school committee, town meeting, city council, or legislative session. Choose an issue addressed by one of these groups and follow its progress through the political process.

**Research an issue that is important to you.** Make sure you get information from several different sources before choosing a side. Then write an article for the school paper; a letter to your local newspaper; create a local poster campaign; connect with local clubs or groups for more information; or educate your community!

**Research an election that is important to you.** Call the campaign offices and volunteer for them by stuffing envelopes, handing out flyers, posting signs, or answering telephones. Even if you are not old enough to vote, you can still get involved by supporting or driving those who can, working at the polls (call your local town clerk!), and more.
Some Helpful Tools for Citizen Action

Maine Legislative Website: http://legislature.maine.gov/

Submit testimony on a bill: https://www.mainelegislature.org/testimony/

Find your legislator at Open States: https://openstates.org/

Find out about feminist public policy:
- Feminist Majority Foundation: https://www.feminist.org/
- Maine Women’s Lobby: https://mainewomen.org/mwl/

Learn about voting rights and voter engagement:
- League of Women Voters Maine: https://www.lwvme.org/
About the Maine Women’s Lobby Education Fund

The Maine Women's Lobby Education Fund was founded in 1990 to increase economic, social, and political opportunities for women and girls through public policy and leadership development.

The Maine Women's Lobby Education Fund conducts public outreach, education, and research in the following areas: economic security; access to quality health care; civil rights; freedom from violence.

The Maine Women’s Lobby Education Fund seeks to increase women’s participation in government and to bring insightful research and women’s voices to the search for solutions to biases and barriers that still exist against women in our society.

Thanks to our Girls’ Day Sponsors:

Abbagadassett Foundation, Inc.

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