



Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities

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Member Engagement in Advocacy

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About SARM

Since 1905, SARM has been advocating on behalf of Saskatchewan rural municipalities (RM) to ensure their collective voice is heard by senior levels of government on issues that affect their ability to govern their community effectively. We also provide support to our members to deal with legislative, regulatory, and process changes imposed by the provincial and federal government. SARM's advocacy efforts are established at the grassroots level, driven primarily by resolutions passed at our annual and midterm conventions.

A part of SARM's advocacy strategy is to build our Members' capacity to engage in these efforts at the local level. In this document, we will outline the steps SARM takes to educate our Members on timely provincial and federal issues. We will also provide information on how RMs can engage in our advocacy efforts and create local advocacy strategies to help address individual concerns with government and other bodies.

How does SARM advocate on behalf of Member RMs?

It is important to engage in advocacy because, using government as our example, decision-makers react to those credible groups or people who most effectively bring their issues to the forefront of the public agenda. All governments have competing interests and concerns that must be addressed, as well as their own policy priorities. Those who can best engage in this process will have their voices heard. Those who choose not to engage will have no say in decisions that could fundamentally impact their ability to do govern their municipality.

1. We identify those issues affecting RMs in which government can play a role in resolving.

SARM, through its Act of Incorporation, is mandated to work on files of importance to rural municipalities (RM) and agriculture producers. There are currently four primary ways such files originate – membership resolution, RM request, board direction, Federal and/or Provincial Government influence.

2. We focus our efforts.

The more focused our efforts on a select number of issues, the more likely we are to be successful. We often need to make some choices about which matters to concentrate on, but that is preferable to having too many issues covering a broad cross-section of concerns. SARM utilizes a 'File Prioritization Framework' to assist us in decision-making related to advocacy work and to prioritize files based on key indicators including resource expenditures, benefit to members, and potential for success. At this point we find allies on the issue and determine whether this is something we can work collaboratively on to reduce SARM resource expenditures and increase visibility and influence with government.

3. Develop key messaging.

Depending on how the issue was identified, key messaging on an issue is developed in varying ways. In all cases, SARM Policy Staff research the issue in depth, consult with Board Members, and engage RMs through surveys or other forms of correspondence when logistical information is required. If an issue is identified through resolution then we build key messaging around the resolution content unless new information comes to light that requires adjustments.

The key messaging is typically two to three key points that explain the salient points of the issue in easy to understand language. The messaging represents the essence of what we want a decision-maker to remember and respond to around the issues presented to them.

4. 'Ask' development.

Once key messaging has been established, SARM develops a briefing note and/or letter and/or Media Release and/or business case outlining the Association's position on the issue. These documents are distributed as per the advocacy plan for the issue.

5. Create and implement an advocacy plan.

Once our 'ask' is fully established, SARM determines the key audience for our materials i.e. government elected officials or staff, the means by which the key messages will be delivered to decision-makers, and timeline for communicating our 'ask'. Potential tools include the SARM website, monthly newsletters, and emails, weekly Policy Updates, in person meetings with decision-makers, petitions, letters, business case, fact sheets, and Media Releases.

Finally, we present our 'ask' to decision makers; that is, we articulate what exactly we need the government to do for us to address the issue at hand. This is the goal of the advocacy strategy, to be able to ask a decision-maker for the one thing you need them to do, not a list of what you want from them.

6. Engage Members and the public in advocacy.

Our chances of success are much greater when we have a large numbers of RMs spreading SARMs key messaging on an issue. It is here we use the media, social media, petitions, letters, e-mails and other grassroots strategies to engage as many RMs in the discussion as we can.

7. Amend strategy and repeat until successful.

Being successful in an 'ask' to government takes patience and perseverance. An advocacy plan may become stale dated and in need of updating; this can be the result of changes in Member needs or new developments on the issue i.e. changes in government.

How do we engage RMs in Advocacy?

1. Communications

- SARM maintains a website at www.sarm.ca that houses vast amounts of information of interest to our members including information about upcoming events and the services we provide.
- Our Policy Department also distributes an email containing information and action items to our Members by 10:00am each Tuesday. This email is sent directly to your RM office.
- A record of all communications from the Policy Department to our Members can also be found at - <http://sarm.ca/advocacy/policy-bulletin>. Members can print it for council meetings and use it as a tool to ensure they never missed any important information.
- Media releases, formal submissions, advocacy brochures, passed resolutions, the Rural Councilor, web-based videos, and more direct communications are also used to reach out to our Members and provide them with information they can use to advocate on a particular issue. All of this information can be found under the 'Advocacy' tab at the top of the home page - <http://sarm.ca/advocacy>.
- SARM also maintains a Twitter account [@SARM_Voice](https://twitter.com/SARM_Voice) that is updated regularly with information of interest to our Members.

- Additionally, information on advocacy efforts and current government 'asks' is provided during the Midterm and Annual Conventions, and June Division Meetings.
- SARM Staff are also available to provide information on a particular issue of interest to your RM.

How Members can advocate on their own behalf?

1. Educate Council and Administration.

Make sure your Administration and Council are aware of the issues SARM is advocating on your RM's behalf to be addressed by provincial and federal governments. Use the information available via means of communication noted above to get up-to-speed on the issues.

2. Educate your community.

Hold a town hall meeting or invite your community to join you online in either a public social media platform or private online community, start posting questions to get people talking. This is a great way to get your network talking to each other, sharing ideas, opinions and articles of relevance. This can also give you the inside scoop on topics that interest your audience so you can continue to engage with them.

3. Contact the relevant decision makers and make your voice heard.

i. Hold a Public Meeting

- Invite the decision-maker(s) and local MLA to attend a Town hall meeting or similar type of public forums and have your ratepayers and Council members ask them questions about the important issue and educate them on SARM's position and ask of them to address the issue at hand.
- Be sure to invite the media to attend and provide them with quotes in follow-up to the meeting.
- Bring a digital camera, and ask to have your photo taken with the candidate. Taking a photo is a great way to extend the discussion with decision-maker. Post the photo on Facebook or Twitter as a way of bringing the accountability of the public to the decision-maker.

ii. Use the Media

- Find a member of the media or a blog-ger and offer a quote that can be included in a news report and/or write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper. Journalists want a local perspective on the event and will want to hear your feedback about the candidate's statement or answer to your question.

iii. Write Letters

- Write a letter to the decision-maker(s) and MLA about the issue and utilizing key messaging. If possible, schedule a meeting between your Council and the decision-maker to discuss the issue in more detail.