

5

POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT



"IT IS REWARDING TO EXPERIENCE PEOPLE SHARING THEIR COMPELLING PERSONAL STORIES ABOUT HOW PUBLIC POLICIES AFFECT THEIR LIVES AND HOW REPRESENTATIVES VALUE THE EXPERIENCES TOO."

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COMMUNICATING WITH ELECTED OFFICIALS

Effective advocacy starts with clear communication

It is important to be as informed and prepared as possible before contacting your legislator.

Consistent contact with your elected officials through social media, such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn can be an effective way of engaging with your legislators and sharing your personal story. [Read more about virtual advocacy here.](#)

Be persistent about your engagement with your elected officials. Make sure they know you are invested in these issues and are not going away. The following pages will outline the best ways to effectively and efficiently engage elected officials.





IN PERSON VISITS

Build a long-term relationship

Elected officials want to get to know their constituents. Building a professional relationship will pay long-term benefits to both you and them.

Find common ground. Look more broadly than the few issues on your current legislative agenda. Find that “golden nugget” that makes an elected official or senior staff person tick and, if you can, support their priorities. Introduce them to as many like-minded family and friends as you can by inviting them to events, meetings and showing support for them on social media.

Think and act long term. If the Member supports your issues, always let them know of your appreciation and express it through social media. If the member doesn't yet support your issues, their support may come in the future. Patience is a virtue and knowing of your support on issues, may very well keep your member from actively opposing your issues. Keep them updated.

Staff make a difference. Legislators depend on the advice of their staff, so building relationships with them will be an advantage. An aide may be more knowledgeable about a particular issue and may have more time to talk with you. Legislators have offices in their home states and districts, and most make themselves available through public venues to meet with constituents. State and district staff work hand in hand with Washington staff. They can open many doors for you. Also, do not forget the expertise of committee staff. Committee staff are specialists by nature, whereas staff in Members' offices tend to be generalists. Keep a dialogue open with as many staff as you can.

IN PERSON VISITS CONTINUED

Information is power

Sharing reliable information is a powerful tool in establishing trust with members of Congress and their staff. Trust is the strongest foundation on which you can build a solid relationship.

Tell your story. Your personal story about how an issue affects your life is central in making your case for a change in public policy. A personal story can help explain the technical parts of a complex issue. Let Members and staff know you hope they will share your story with their colleagues.

Know the lay of the land. Know both the upsides of your issue and any potential downsides. Sharing a general overview of all sides of an issue will help speed decisions on your issues and will be appreciated by staff and members who deal with overwhelming workloads and time constraints.

Bring it home. Members and staff want district or state-specific information, so connect the impact of your issues to their constituents. Statistics matter but so do individuals and organizations back home that support your position. Put it in writing so they will be able to use it later.



IN PERSON VISITS CONTINUED

Be yourself and always be at your best

The way you approach, interact and follow up with Members and staff is as important as the message you want to deliver. Being at your best will quickly build lasting relationships.

Your mom was right. Little courtesies pay big dividends. Leading with a smile or a kind word and a thank you for their valuable time sets a proper tone for face to face meetings, as well as, for emails and other forms of communications. Be brief in your presentation and considerate of their time.

Be honest. Facts and figures are important but so are passion and determination, so speak from your head in your own words, but by all means also speak from your heart. Don't worry, if you don't know an answer to a question, just assure them you will try to find the best answer you can.

Always follow through by following up. Send a thank you note (email) immediately after your meeting or when you receive a reply. But, give offices some reasonable time to get back with you before you contact them on the same issue again. When you do follow up, begin with another note of thanks for their valuable time. Please always ask before you share their reply in any public venue.



TELEPHONE CALLS

Telephone calls are usually taken by a staff member, not the Member of Congress. Be sure to ask to speak with the aide who handles the issue that you are calling about.

- Identify yourself to the aide.
- Let the aide know if you are a constituent (someone who resides in the elected official's district).
- Tell the aide you would like to leave a brief message, such as: "Please tell Senator/Representative (Name) that I support/oppose "S.____/H.R.____)." You should also state reasons for your support or opposition.
- Personal stories can be very persuasive. If possible, share how the legislation would affect (positively or negatively) your life if passed/not passed.
- If unknown, ask for your Senators' or Representative's position on the bill.
- You may also request a written response to your telephone call.





E-MAILING CONGRESS

Generally, the same guidelines apply as with writing letters to Congress. E-mailing is a good method of communication with a Congressional office.

- Your purpose for writing should be stated in the first paragraph of the e-mail.
- If your e-mail pertains to a specific piece of legislation, identify it accordingly, e.g., House bill: H. R. _____, Senate bill: S._____.
- Be courteous, to the point, and include key information, using examples to support your position on the legislation/issue.
- Address only one issue/topic in each email; and, if possible, keep the letter short.
- These days, written letters are sent via email.

ADDRESSING WRITTEN CORRESPONDENCE

- An appropriate greeting is "Dear Representative" or "Dear Senator" or "Dear "Congressional Staffer's Name""
- When writing to the Chair of a Committee or the Speaker of the House, they must be addressed as "Dear Mr. Chairman or Madam Chairwoman:" or "Dear Madam Speaker or Mr. Speaker:"

TOWN HALL MEETINGS

Connect with legislators and your local community

Representatives often hold town hall meetings and keep their websites updated with dates and locations of upcoming meetings. Town hall meetings are a great way to engage in person with your elected officials. If you're concerned about the accessibility of the meeting venue, make sure to call your elected official's office to inquire about accessibility beforehand.



SPEAKING UP AT TOWN HALL MEETINGS

Making your mic-time count

- Prepare any questions you want to ask and research your elected official's positions before the meeting.
- Representatives hold town halls to hear first-hand experiences from constituents, so share your personal stories when discussing existing or proposed legislation.
- Talk to the elected officials' staffers at the meeting and ask for their business cards. This is an opportunity to build that relationship with staff in the office.
- Be respectful. Town halls can get heated when attendees feel strongly about issues, but it's important to remain professional.

