

How to Influence State Legislators

MOST IMPORTANT - BUILD A RELATIONSHIP WITH THEM

Legislators are people too, as an elected representative they have a responsibility to get to know their constituents and their hopes, aspirations, and needs. The legislative session is usually a very busy time of year, consider reaching out to your state legislators outside of the session to build a relationship. You can also connect with your state legislators at events like constituent nights hosted by legislators, attending community meetings that they are speaking at, or if you have the resources by attending their off session fundraisers.

ADDITIONAL STRATEGIES

- Write Letters to the Editor
- Call or Email their Office
- Lobby in Person
- Influence Other Voters in the Area

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Why write letters to the editor (LTE)

- An effective action to influence legislators
- Can inspire others to join campaign

How to write LTE

- Choose papers that your targeted legislators read
- Keep it concise and short
- Connect to a proposed piece of legislation or a recent article
- Give personal take
- Use statistics especially about their district
- Include a call to action
- Follow-up with the newspaper

CALLING & EMAILING LEGISLATORS

Why call or email your legislator

- Develop or maintain relationships
- Phone calls and emails from constituents can influence their decisions
 - » Many worry about the next election and getting re-elected even in "safe" districts

How to contact your legislator effectively

- Call/Email only your legislators
- Introduce yourself and the city you live in
- State the purpose for calling/emailing (seek information, thank, encourage, demand) and why this matters
- If you get voicemail, leave a message but follow up with an email.



Best Practices

- Have a script ready/know what you are going to say but be personable
- Focus on a single question or single ask
- Keep a record of your conversation

IN-PERSON VISITS

Why visit the legislator in person

- Visits from constituents can influence their decisions
- Can get media attention if its a large group or combined with a press conference, rally, or other highly visible action
- Can be done in a variety of ways

Office visits - at the statehouse or district office

- Best with 10-15 constituents
- Best to schedule in advance - usually during business hours
- Can be with legislator or their staff
- Have a specific ask, If the purpose is to influence the legislator on an issue
- Consider bringing a local validator, if the purpose is to influence
- Bring a summary of your issue, if the purpose is to influence
- Be polite
- Share a personal story of how legislation impacts you or the community
- Take notes of what is said

Town Halls - a meeting between legislators and constituents

- Can show up at one that is scheduled or organize one
- Gets legislator on public record about issue
- Prepare question(s) ahead of time

Lobby Day - an organized day for constituents to:

- Speak to their legislators with a focus and set goals
- Sometimes connected to a press conference or attempt to get media attention



MULTIPLE EFFORTS INCREASE EFFECTIVENESS!

- Individual contacting legislator = helpful
- Organized group contacting legislator = compelling

How to Organize Others:

- Find friends and neighbors in your district who are interested in the issue
- Plan group actions:
 - » Letters to the editor writing party
 - » Phone banking party
 - » Plan a group office visit
 - » Attend a town hall together and have different group members ready to ask questions/make comments
 - » Attend a lobby day together
- Find an organization working on your issue and sign up to volunteer



THE SUCCESSFUL FORMULA - WHAT WORKS

- 1000 emails in a house or senate district in the state legislature on one issue
- An opponent to mention the issue
- A friend, donor or trusted validator to have a conversation with the legislator
- Personal touch from friend or donor
- Relentless and consistent outreach and engagement by a significant group of people over time

MESSAGING

- Use talking points
- State the problem and how your reform would solve it
- Make connections
 - » Connect the message to the legislator's district
 - How does this impact the people of this district
 - Use statistics, if you have them from reputable sources (use more than one source, if you can!)
- Connect to something you know they care about
- Make it personal!