

Communicating with Legislators

Communicating with your elected officials is an important part of living in a democracy. Whether it's through direct lobbying, a phone call, an email, or a personal letter, when legislators hear from their constituents about issues that are important to them, it has a direct impact on their decision making.

Here are a few helpful tips:

Consider Yourself an Information Source

Legislators have limited time, staff, and interest on any one issue. They can't be as informed as they might like on all issues—or the ones that concern you. Keep the meeting short and focused and leave a copy of your factsheet(s).

Make a Personal Connection

Start by introducing yourself and thanking the legislator for taking time to meet with you. Mention that you are a voter in their district. Make a personal connection by letting them know if you have any friends, relatives, or colleagues in common.

Tell the Truth

There is no faster way to lose your credibility than to give misleading information to a legislator. Don't be afraid to admit you don't know something. If a legislator wants information you don't have or asks a question you don't know the answer to, acknowledge it, and offer to get back to them with the information they are looking for. It's a great excuse to follow up!

Be Specific about What You're Looking For

If you want a vote, information, answers to a question—whatever it is—make sure you ask for it directly and get an answer.

Don't Burn Any Bridges

It is very easy to get emotional over issues about which you feel strongly. Be sure that no matter what a legislator's decision on an issue, you end the conversation on good enough terms that you can go back to them.

Take Notes

After the meeting, jot down notes from the visit while they are fresh in your mind.

Follow Up

Find out if your legislator did what she/he said they would. Then, thank them or ask for an explanation as to why they did not vote as they said they would. Consider submitting a letter to the editor to hold your legislator accountable to their constituents.

