

ADVOCACY IDEAS:

DO:

- Thank legislators for meeting with you and for their support or consideration, even if they are against you. You may need their vote in the future on another matter.
- Be professional, courteous, positive, direct, clear, concise, factual, credible, and specific.
- Do your homework.
- Always follow up with information you have promised.
- Be sensitive to partisan politics but always try to come across as non-partisan.
- Follow up with a visit or telephone call to a legislator with a letter, thanking him/her for what you heard them say they would do.
- Use correct forms of address.
- Type your fact sheets, letters, and testimony. Be sure they include your contact information.
- Try to establish a relationship of mutual trust with your legislator.
- Be very specific about action you need from your legislator on an issue.
- Remember to get results – not credit.
- Present a united front. Work out compromises privately. Treat your legislator as a friend, and as an intelligent citizen. Attend legislative hearings, committee meetings, budget mark-up sessions, and floor votes on your bill.
- Establish a reputation for reliability and credibility. Be reasonable and realize that everyone thinks their issue is the most important one being considered.
- Show your legislator how your legislative platform will help him/her and his/her district.
- Know what other issues or problems your legislator is working on, and help him/her when you can.
- Pass along anything nice you any have heard about him/her, but don't overdo it. Get down to business quickly.
- Treat your legislator as you would like to be treated.
- Engage your Party and Republican clubs for a unified effort.
- Be selective with issues to pursue; don't try to do everything.

DON'T:

- Do not go public on an issue until you have touched base with all interested parties.
- Don't make decisions on your bill without first consulting the bill's sponsors
- Don't give inaccurate information or lie.
- Don't threaten or be rude to a legislator and /or his/her aide.
- Don't make moral judgments based on one vote on an issue.
- Don't ask the public to support or oppose candidates based upon their position on one issue.
- Don't waste a legislator's or aide's time.
- Don't begin with saying, "As a citizen and taxpayer . . ."
- Don't say, "I hope this gets by your secretary."
- Don't write members of the House when the vote is in the Senate and vice-versa.
- Don't ignore your legislator, and then contact one from another district for help with your issue.
- Don't publicly or privately complain about your legislator or a member of his staff.
- Never start or carry rumors.
- Don't hold grudges,
- Don't give up.
- Don't be argumentative or abrasive.
- Don't interrupt your legislator when he/she is obviously busy.
- Don't cover more than one subject in a contact.
- Don't write a letter longer than one page.
- Don't fail to give the legislator a one-page fact sheet when writing or visiting.
- Don't press for an answer on your first visit.
- Don't blame legislators for all the things that go wrong in government.
- Don't be offended if he/she forgets your name or who you are, even if it is just five minutes after your visit.
- Do not send too much information – be selective – otherwise your emails will begin to be ignored.

Advocacy Tips

Who is your audience? Research to find out about your legislator: Republican or a Democrat? Liberal, Moderate or Conservative? Does he/she serve on a key committee?

Take one issue at a time. Every communication should stick to one issue. Pick the most vital and explore it in depth.

Start with a letter or a phone call. Build a relationship with your elected leader before making your actual visit. You might organize a few of your friends to write or call on the same topic - a dozen or more letters on the same topic will get a legislator's attention. When you call, ask to speak with the Legislative Aide. Politely explain your concerns and ask for the representative's specific position on the issue. For increased effectiveness, write an original, professional appearing letter.

Know your issue and bring effective handouts. Present your opinion and back it up with facts - background information, including statistics and studies that support your point of view. Include the bill number if there is a bill of interest to you. Know the opposing arguments and frequently asked questions. Have answers prepared. Make your legislator's job easier.

Use personal anecdotes. Tell your legislators how the issue affects you and your friends. This is the best way to persuade your legislators that what may seem like an abstract or arcane point really affects his/her constituents deeply.

Offer solutions. Don't just talk about how bad a problem is, tell your legislator what you'd like to see done to fix it. In addition, let the legislator know what he/she should do: make speeches, cosponsor legislation, write to the appropriate agency or vote for/against a bill, etc.

Build a relationship. Make contact repeatedly and be credible and reasonable every time. These things will help build a relationship between you and your legislator. The legislator's aide will know you by first name and your legislator will try much harder to be present when you visit. You'll quickly become part of your legislator's support system and he/she might even come to you for advice. Nothing is more valued than an informed, active, and friendly constituent! You can be a partner, not an adversary.

Act locally. Every legislator has a district office and most hold local meetings. Starting and building a relationship with your legislator at home, before or after the legislative session, is critical to establishing the long-term trust you need to effectively ask for his or her vote at the Capitol. Meeting with a local staff member is a great way to raise your concerns and is the next best thing to an Austin visit.

During Legislative Session. Work more directly with the Austin/Washington D.C. offices.

Timing. The best letter or call does no good if it comes after a vote. If a letter arrives too early, it is forgotten. Letters should generally arrive a few days before the vote, whether in committee or on the floor. However, it is better to reach someone early in the debate than after they have made up their mind or not at all.

Tracking feedback. All offices track constituent's feedback differently, but once they realize an issue is gaining momentum, they will track pros and cons. E-Mail if you want to hear back from your Legislator, otherwise phone calls and faxes are also effective. They will not be interested in details - keep it simple.

Committee Chairmen and Members. For U.S. Congress, target the ranking member (who will not be a Republican) for guidance. Also, check to see if any Texans are on the committee and contact them. Each committee will be unique and they will help you to be most effective. (Many offices ask from where you are calling.)

Advocacy Tips

Follow-Up

Be polite and persistent by following up with a thank-you letter. Legislators clearly remember the constituents who follow up. Ask for an update on where the issue stands. Some issues take time and they come up again and again, so be persistent.

Personal Visits – Most Effective Tool

The personal visit is the single most effective technique. Like most staffs, overworked aides and legislators have systems for handling constituents and issues. Form letters and emails get the least attention. Next are phone calls and original letters. The personal visit rates highest priority and those issues brought up are attended to more quickly and seriously.

Common Sense Rules:

Courtesy and Respect

- Be fair, realistic and reasonable.
- Start with a compliment.
- Introduce yourself.
- Address your legislator as "Representative" or "Senator"
- Make your appointment well in advance. Indicate the date you will visit and what you wish to discuss.
- Be honest. If you lose your credibility, you won't get it back.
- Be a good listener. Do not do all the talking; have a conversation.
- Arrive on time.

Issues

- One issue per meeting.
- Be brief. Do not let the legislator or staffer sidetrack the meeting.
- Be prepared when you arrive and know what you are going to say.
- Present your opinion, bolstered by facts, figures and a personal story.
- Know and understand opposing arguments. Be prepared to discuss them.
- Fifteen minutes (possibly 20) is a realistic expectation for your meeting. Do not be surprised if your meeting starts a bit late or is cut short or you are not able to speak directly to the legislator. Often, staff members meet with constituents – treat them in the same manner as you would the member.
- Never lie, never guess. Just say "I don't know, but I'll get back to you," and then get back to them. Gently remind your representative that you are a constituent and that you always vote. All politics is local.
- Be passionate (not emotional), and never leave in anger.

Closing

- Leave when your time is up.
- Ask for a commitment from the member to support your position, but do not apply pressure or be threatening.
- Have a short statement or fact sheet to leave behind. If it is in writing, it has a better chance of being remembered.
- Never end in harsh words or personal remarks. You will damage your credibility and hamper further communications.
- Say "thank you" and indicate you're looking forward to following up on this issue.

Afterwards

- Write a brief thank-you note.
- Indicate that you will be monitoring the issue closely.
- Answer any questions you couldn't answer in the meeting.