



Advocacy Tip Sheet

General Organizational Tips

(Adapted from presentation by Jim White of the Nonprofit Association of Oregon)

- Appoint a board member or establish a Board Advocacy Committee.
- Educate and involve your elected officials.
- Educate and involve your constituents.
- Get involved and exercise your rights!

Effective Messaging

(Adapted from Washing Nonprofits and “The Board Advocacy Project”)

An Effective Message Answers Three Questions:

1. What is the problem? - Give a specific example/proof of the need for affordable housing.
2. Why should I care? - Use a value statement.
3. What is the solution? - Define a specific needed policy step and action that the listener can take.
Example: Fund the Housing Trust Fund at \$200M in 2014-2015 biennium!

Elements of an Effective Message:

- **Framing and Values** – The message fits into a familiar context or frame and speaks to values we all share.
- **Captivate the Audience** – The message is inspiring, memorable, and relevant to the listener – not just to the messenger.
- **Back It Up** – Data is never the message, yet data must be available if necessary for proving a point or answering a question.
- **Broad and Deep** – The message is broad enough to encompass everyone we touch, but contains specific actions the listener can take follow.

Tips for Contacting Legislators

(Adapted from a handout by Mary Kay Hogan, Aponté and Hogan (Colorado Nonprofit Association’s lobbyists)).

Whether it is a phone call or personal letter, communication from constituents is appreciated and welcomed by legislators. Writing an effective letter or email is not a difficult task. Here are a few guidelines.

- **Personal Letterhead** – Write on personal or business letterhead, if possible, and sign your name over your typed signature.
- **Return Address** – Be sure your exact return address is on the letter, not just the envelope. Envelopes often get discarded. Even though your address is on the letter, be sure to also state that you are a constituent or that you work in the legislator’s district, if applicable.
- **Identify the Subject** – Identify your subject matter clearly. State the name and bill number of the legislation you are writing about at the top of the page.
- **State Reason** – State your reasons for writing. Your own personal experience is your best supporting evidence. Explain how the issue would affect you, your business or your profession, or what effect it could have on your community or the state.
- **No form letters** – Avoid stereotyped phrases and sentences that give the appearance of form letters. They tend to identify your message as part of an organized pressure campaign, and are often discarded. Make your own letter, in your own style, incorporating your organization’s key message.
- **Be Reasonable** – Don’t ask for the impossible, don’t threaten, and don’t say “I’ll never vote for you again unless...”.
- **Be Brief** – All of your letters should be one page, one sided. Attachments to support your views are fine. Always say thank you!

Tips for Attending or Hosting a Legislative Visit

Adapted from a handout by Mary Kay Hogan, Aponté and Hogan (Colorado Nonprofit Association's lobbyists).

Personal visits are an extremely effective means of engaging your legislator(s) on issues of interest to your organization. Legislators want to meet and hear from their constituents, and learn about organizations that help their constituents. However, they are very busy people, so it is crucial to make the most of the time you have with your representatives and senators.

The best time to host a legislative visit is during the summer and fall, when the legislature is not in session. If you plan to visit them in their offices in DC, try to schedule the visit for when they are in session. You may not be able to meet with you legislator directly, but meeting and building relationships with legislative staff can be very productive. You can learn who represents you personally or the area where your organization is located by calling your county clerk or visiting www.vote-smart.org.

Before Your Visit:

- ✓ Invite your legislator in advance by phone, and follow up with a letter confirming the date and time of the meeting. Expect no more than one hour for a typical site visit.
- ✓ Make it easy for your legislator to meet with you. Offer several possibilities and do your best to accommodate their schedule.
- ✓ Prepare a good fact sheet about your organization or legislative issue (tips below).
- ✓ Learn in advance where your legislator stands on your issue or the mission of your organization.
- ✓ Be prepared to explain how your organization affects voters in the legislator's district.
- ✓ Dress appropriately for the visit – normal business attire is acceptable.

During Your Visit:

- ✓ Be on time, prepared, and polite.
- ✓ Start by concisely introducing your organization. Include the following information:
 - ✓ Who you are
 - ✓ What your organization does
 - ✓ What you need from your legislator
 - ✓ A reference to the fact sheet you have prepared
- ✓ Don't attack the legislator for his/her record on your issue(s), and don't disparage government or politics.
- ✓ Don't use technical terms or acronyms, unless you are certain that your legislator will understand them.
- ✓ If you don't know the answer to a question, say you'll find out and get back to him/her – and follow through.
- ✓ Before s/he leaves, ask how you can be of help to him/her.
- ✓ Thank him/her for his/her time.

After the Visit:

- ✓ Follow up with a thank you note along with any information that you promised during the visit.
- ✓ Keep in touch during legislative session – contact your legislator on issues of interest to your organization, and remind him/her of his/her visit to your facility.