



General Tips for Working with Legislators

Your legislator's time is valuable, but s/he appreciates constituent contacts. Here are some ideas on how to most effectively develop an ongoing relationship with your legislator while advocating for policies that help grow Iowa and promote your priorities.

Do Your Homework

- ✓ Know the issues and the particular interests of your legislator. Keep a background file on your legislators, including special interests and personal profiles. You won't agree on all issues all of the time, but a legislator needs to know what constituents are thinking.

Keep In Touch

- ✓ Write, call, or visit your legislators and their staff members to introduce yourself. Let them know who you represent and volunteer to keep them informed about your issues, their impact on your community and on the legislator's district.
- ✓ Add the legislator's name to your mailing list and ask to have your name added to the legislator's mailing list. Ask how they like to be contacted – by email, mail at home or mail at the Capitol, or by phone.
- ✓ Make sure the legislator receives notice of and invitations to special events held in your community or your office. This serves as a reminder of your role in the community. Remind your legislator that attending these functions is an excellent way to meet with constituents.

Be Consistent and Reliable

- ✓ Your most important goal as an advocate is to be viewed as a credible source of information for your elected official. Never lie and never hedge on the facts. If you don't know the answer to a question, always tell your elected official that you will get back to them with the best information you can find. Once you lose your credibility, all future efforts will be compromised.
- ✓ Don't dilute your message or confuse your legislator on your priorities. Be clear, concise, and keep the message simple. Mixing too many issues, or personal and professional issues, can lead to confusion. A confused legislator will leave your conversation without a clear understanding of what you would like him/her to do.

Give Credit Where Credit is Due

- ✓ Give public recognition to deserving legislators. This can be done through local or organizational awards, during local radio call-in shows, with a simple thank-you letter, or by writing a letter-to-the-editor expressing thanks publicly. Get the word out to your friends, colleagues, boards, and others about the good work a local legislator does on your issues.

Be a Player

- ✓ Woody Allen said 95 percent of life is showing up. So show up – be seen! Attend events, social or political and otherwise, at which legislators are present. Even if you can afford to give only a small amount of money, attending fundraisers is an important part of our political process.
- ✓ If the legislator has been helpful to you, get involved in his/her election campaign. People who give their time, and who can recruit others to campaign, are very important to a legislator.
- ✓ Make connections. If your board members and staff are friends or campaign supporters of a legislator, make that connection for your legislator. You don't need to do this overtly.

Share Your Success

- ✓ Network with each other and share your experiences in talking to your legislators. Let your colleagues know what worked, and what didn't. Your message will resonate best if everyone is speaking the same language and policymakers aren't confused about your programs or issues.
- ✓ Develop systems that get the word out fast. E-mail has made this simple, so start your own community grassroots effort. If legislators know you can activate a network of advocates within minutes, they will be more responsive as long as you let that network know when good things happen too! Groups whose members step up and contact legislators to thank them as well as lobby them are more successful than those that only contact legislators when they need something.