

Legislative Toolbox



Effectively Communicating with Lawmakers

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The best idea in the entire world is no more than an idea without an effective strategy to communicate and generate support for the idea. If your organization has a great idea to for a legislative initiative, here are some things you can do to make sure your ideas are well received.

Know Your Audience

When communicating your idea, either in writing or in person, you need to know your audience and tailor your message accordingly. With just a little bit of planning and research, you can find out valuable information about the individual or group you are trying to persuade. If you are meeting with legislators or testifying before a legislative committee, it's a good idea to know something about the individual legislators such as their political affiliation, the area of the state they represent, and some of the issues they have championed as legislators.

Use Terms Your Audience Will Understand

While you may know the intricacies of your particular issue, the legislators you are asking to support your idea may not be as knowledgeable. Stay away from jargon or technical details that may cloud your message.

When in doubt, spell it out. An acronym that your audience is not familiar with only confuses the message you are trying to communicate. While you may know that NABFU is the Northern Anoka Basketball Fans United, your audience may not be as familiar with this acronym.

Just the Facts

Most legislators appreciate getting solid facts about a particular issue. For example, if you are lobbying for mandated health care

coverage for all men between the ages of 27 and 32, a legislator may want to know how many people would be covered under such a mandate, what the cost would be, what savings would be generated, what consequences would ensue. Any facts that can be provided to help make your case are good. Accuracy of your facts is crucial. Legislators do not want to be misled, whether it is intentional or not.

Short and Sweet

Legislators are busy people and do not have time to read a detailed two page email or listen to an hour of testimony on your pet project. They greatly appreciate short messages that get to the point quickly. Have additional information to back up what you are saying in case they have questions.

The Messenger Matters

If you have a choice of who will be the spokesperson for your cause, choose carefully. You want someone who is relatable, articulate, and knowledgeable. Keep in mind that if you are speaking to legislators one on one, the spokesperson may change depending on which legislator you are talking to.

Social Media

Members of the public, staff and legislators are using new social networking tools to quickly share and broadcast information. These tools include Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and others. These public online networking sites are a new media outlet, used to inform followers about votes taken, press conference details and floor happenings. This is just one more way you can effectively communicate with lawmakers and other advocates.