

EFFECTIVE ADVOCACY CHECKLIST

By Stephanie Vance

Confused about the process of communicating with congress?
Use this handy checklist to make sure you're on the right track.

Is my Congressional Office the Best Place to Start?

I have figured out that I want:

- _ Casework: I need help with a particular federal program (social security, or the IRS, for example)
- _ Policy Representation: I want my representative or senator to take a position on a certain federal (not state or local) issue.

Background Research

Think about the following questions:

- _ Who are my representative and senators?
- _ What is their legislative record and general philosophy?
- _ What issues are they passionate about?
- _ What committees are my representative or senators on?
- _ Is my representative or senator newly elected, or more senior?
- _ What party does my representative or senator belong to?

Message Development

- _ Tell a compelling story -- you have something of value to contribute!
- _ Know your facts
- _ Make your message your own
- _ Be positive

General Message Delivery

These tips apply to all communications -- letters, phone calls, and meetings.

- _ Decide which method of communication suits you and your purpose
- _ Develop a thoughtful, well-argued message
- _ Ask your member to take a specific action
- _ Ask your member to respond to the request
- _ Make it clear what your priorities are
- _ Tell your congressional office how you can be an ongoing resource
- _ Make your message targeted and forceful without being rude or threatening
- _ Tell the truth
- _ Be reasonable about opposing points of view
- _ Be prepared to answer questions about opposing arguments

Effective Meetings

- _ Determine whether a meeting is needed to deliver the message
- _ Decide where you want to meet, after looking at the congressional calendar
- _ Decide who you want to deliver your message (preferably someone from the district)
- _ Limit the number of people you bring to the meeting
- _ If you're in DC for a national meeting, try to coordinate with others from your state
- _ Fax the scheduler a meeting request, including a list of issues and attendees
- _ Follow-up with a phone call to the scheduler after sending a written request
- _ Schedule carefully to assure you will be on time, but not too early, for each meeting
- _ On voting days, try to schedule meetings with members before 11:00 A.M.
- _ Be prepared to meet anywhere -- standing up in the hallway or on the run to a vote
- _ Be prepared to deliver your message in five minutes
- _ Make sure you have short, concise, and consistent information to leave behind

- _ Leave your information in a file folder with your organization's name on the label

Effective Written Communications

- _ Make your communication stand out by making it personal, thoughtful, and accurate
- _ Ask for a response
- _ Confine each written communication to one topic
- _ Double check office numbers, fax numbers, and e-mail addresses

Effective Phone Calls

- _ If you want someone to think about what you're saying, ask for a response
- _ Have the basic facts about the issue on hand

Following Up

- _ Send a thank you note to the staff and the member soon after a meeting
- _ Wait at least three weeks for a response before checking back
- _ Report on your meeting in a non-threatening way

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