

General Tips

1. **Recognize that legislators deal with a wide range of issues.** Legislators cannot possibly keep completely informed on all issues. Be prepared to provide them with information or referral sources.
2. **Know your legislator.** Make a point of referring to something you know is of special interest. Making that personal connection can make him/her remember you more easily.
3. **Get to know the legislator's staff.** The staff in a legislative office can be very powerful. If they don't like you, they can make it very difficult for you to make contacts.
4. **Be honest.** Decision-makers appreciate candor and forthrightness.
5. **Know your message.** Be prepared to state your case in a few short sentences.
6. **Cultivate relationships.** Develop relationships with elected officials *when you are not asking for something!* It is easier to listen to friends than to strangers, and it takes time to get to know each other.
 - a. Invite them to an event or performance, and when they attend, publicly acknowledge them and thank them for their support of the arts.
 - b. Send newspaper articles about your arts organization and events that convey how the arts and your arts organization serve the legislator's constituents.
 - c. Provide a few statistics on how much service is provided, and the way your agency enhances your community.

Writing Tips (Letter or Email)

1. **Identify yourself and explain your relationship to the issue:** "I am president of _____, an organization serving ____ members statewide. We are concerned about _____."
2. **Be Brief:** Limit yourself to 250–500 words, no longer!
3. **Focus on one issue per communication.** Legislators dislike laundry lists of issues.
4. **Reference the bill number.** If you're writing about pending legislation, either include the bill number or identify the subject as best you can.
5. **Include your name, address, phone number, and email.** If a lawmaker doesn't know how to reach you, he or she cannot respond. Emails or faxes are recommended, especially in congressional offices where mail must go through security procedures.
6. **Clearly state your position on the issue.** Give reasons for your point of view. Tell how it affects you personally, your family, business, profession, or the community.
7. **Be reasonable.** Legislators are human too. Don't ask for the impossible. Always be willing to suggest alternatives to the bill or your original suggestion.
8. **Be specific about any request you may have.** "Please let me know your views on this bill/issue..." "Would you be willing to author new legislation in the area of..." "Can you get back to me by (date)?"
9. **Write "from the heart."** Avoid stereotyped sentences or cliché phrases that might make your letter look like a form letter. Form letters look like they're part of an organized pressure campaign and don't have as much impact as a personal letter.
10. **Always say thank you** to the legislator and staff people.

Personal Visit Tips

Face-to-face discussion is the most effective means of communication. It is essential to establishing a solid working relationship.

1. **Schedule a meeting when the governing body is not in session—before pressures build up.** Make an appointment. Call the day ahead to confirm your appointment. When visiting, keep the group small enough for an easy exchange of views.
2. **Recognize that a legislator's time is precious.** Be punctual. Be succinct in your presentation. Plan for no more than 30 minutes of the legislator's time.
3. **Be personal and respectful.** The tone of the message is as important as the message, maybe even more so.
4. **Bring success stories.** Tell the story of how the arts and your arts agency serve the legislator's constituents; give a few statistics on how much service is provided, and the way your agency enhances your community.
5. **Listen.** Give them an opportunity to respond. Think about their responses. What interests them? Where are their comfort zones? Is their reaction positive or negative?
6. **Seal the deal.** Confirm what you think their opinion or stand is.
7. **Leave behind a reminder of your visit.** This could be your agency's annual report, a promotional brochure, an arts mug, poster, etc. This helps to remind the legislator of your visit and your organization.
8. **Follow-up.** Send thank you letters to the legislators or staff who took time to listen to your issue.

What is the best way to communicate with my elected officials?

An e-mail message is efficient and easy, but is not the last word in effective advocacy communication. Many in public office consider the advocates' e-mail blasts as the equivalent of preprinted postcards—impersonal communications that can be easily disregarded.

The guiding principle for contacting Congress or any other representative body is simple: personalized messages mean more. In advocacy, quality trumps quantity.

The impact of sending emails to Congress is strengthened by calls from constituents, visits to a legislator's office, and meetings with legislators at events back home. Ultimately, advocacy is transacted on a personal level.

For more on communicating with legislators, see the NASAA Advocate, [E- Advocacy: On-Line Strategies for Arts Advocacy](#).

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"If you believe in great things, you may be able to make other people believe in them, too."
~*Oliver Wendell Holmes*