



Building Legislative Support - Winning Library Champions

WLA supports an active legislative program, which is only as effective as the individual advocacy efforts of library supporters. Here are some tips to make your contacts with legislators effective and enjoyable.

Get to Know Your District Legislators Personally

- Study up on your legislators. Visit the leg.wa.gov website and find them. Read their bios. Find their committee assignments. Look over the list of bills they've sponsored. You'll learn a lot about what they care about by doing so.
- Go to town meetings, and other gatherings—and introduce yourself. Legislators, like the rest of us, feel more comfortable with people they know. Get to know them.
- If you like them, donate time and money to their campaigns.

Do Your District Legislators to Know You?

While it's important to know them—the ultimate goal is for them to know you. Here's WLA Lobbyist Steve Duncan's test: When your legislator returns to the office after a long day and is leafing through the stack of messages, does your face come to mind when that legislator reads your name? If it does, you pass. They now know you.

Politics is a Year-Round Activity

While legislators are extremely busy during the session, they're often available in your district the rest of the year. Offer to meet for coffee to talk about issues with them in between sessions. Offer your library as a resource to them and their staff. Show them how the library can benefit them in their job and in their personal business or hobbies. Invite them to participate in story times, building openings and other events. See *WLA's Legislators and Libraries, a one-page how-to guide for more information*.

The "In Session" Season

Simple rules whether meeting in person, over the phone, or by e-mail:

- Be courteous at all times and be positive.
- Prepare statements that present a definite position and quickly and clearly describe the impacts of the legislation on you and your local library.
- Limit each message to one issue and include the bill number.
- Don't make political judgments about or for politicians.
- Be ready with the question: "Can we count on you for your support?" If the answer isn't what you want, be willing to agree to disagree—and if they disagree with your position, don't argue and end up motivating them. Never motivate your opposition. If the answer isn't an answer at all, be polite. They probably meant it to be that way.
- Thank them for their consideration, their time and support if given and follow up with a thank you note when you return home. If your legislator(s) voted against your position, express appreciation for considering your point of view.

Meeting in person...

- Finding time on legislators' calendars during a session will be tough; so be pleasant and persistent. If you can squeeze in on their schedules, even for 10 minutes, respect that time slot and expect it to be for no more than 10 minutes.
- Think of your visit in terms of their day. You may follow a group opposing the death penalty, or a group that wants the slug to be the state bug. Meetings, hearings, bill numbers, letters, calls and e-mails, votes and issues swirl in their heads.
- Be brief. Have an agenda. Pick one person in your group to be spokesperson. If available, provide a one-page fact sheet that supports your position and includes your name and phone number. Make it easy for them to help you.
- Don't overstay your welcome. Watch for clues that tell you the legislator needs to move on, or better yet initiate your own departure.
- Thank them for their time. Follow up immediately with letters to reinforce your message and extend your appreciation, and keep your name in the forefront of their minds.

Making phone calls...

- Be willing to speak to an aide. They're usually in the office; legislators often aren't.
- As with in-person meetings, have your agenda ready, and be well-prepared. Be brief.
- Ask if you can forward your fact sheet for their future reference. Both hearing and seeing your information leaves a more lasting impression.
- Be sure to leave the phone number that's best to reach you if they have are follow up questions—work, home, or cell—but not all three unless asked.
- Be brief and to the point when leaving voicemail messages; yours is one of dozens they will receive.

Sending emails...

- You've heard it before: be brief.
- In the first paragraph mention the bill number, the relevant section, and your position. Don't make them wade through a build-up to get to the reason for your message.
- If appropriate, attach a fact sheet (see above).
- They'll have your e-mail address but also include a phone number.

Timing is everything

Watch for alerts from WLA that target when to send messages to key legislators on particular bills. Your Senator or Representative may hold a committee or leadership position that's important to the success or failure of WLA issues.

A Word for Public Employees...

Depending on your agency and your position there may be restrictions on contacting legislators on work time. Familiarize yourself with Public Disclosure Commission guidelines, find out your local rules on lobbying and follow them. Remember that there are no restrictions on what you do on your own time away from work.

Speak Softly and Carry a Big Constituency

As constituents, you have incredible presence. You are from the home district, you vote and you care enough to speak out on a particular issue. The fact that you travel to Olympia and state your position gives you power. With persistence, patience and passion, you can make a difference. The challenge is yours.

As Margaret Mead said, "Never doubt that a group of committed citizens can change the world; indeed that is the only thing that ever has."