

COMMUNICATING WITH ELECTED OFFICIALS

Most people don't take the time to contact their elected officials, so just a few connections on a specific topic can really make an impact. A message from a fellow elected official or city staff carries significant weight. Your communication with elected officials supports the League's work in Salem and on federal issues in Washington, D.C. **It can change the way they vote.**

Writing, e-mailing, faxing, calling and face-to-face meetings are all effective ways to communicate your message to elected officials.

The following communication tips will assist you in working with elected officials (local elected officials, state legislators, the governor or Oregon's congressional delegation).

Delivering the Message

- **Get to know** your legislators, U.S. Senators and Representatives, and their staff to determine the best way to communicate with them.
 - **Provide feedback to the League** about what you learned.
 - **Calling** is very effective when you need to get your message across quickly.
 - **Meeting** with elected officials is an essential part of your advocacy efforts. Like you, elected officials have busy schedules so it is important to get your message across concisely and quickly. As a general rule, they often have more time to meet when they are home in their districts or when the Legislature or Congress is not in session.
 - **Writing** is a formal way to remind other elected officials that they are accountable for the choices they make and that their decisions have a direct impact on your shared constituents.
 - **E-mailing and faxing** are more immediate ways to contact elected officials quickly and in writing. Not all elected officials prefer to communicate through e-mail, so faxing may be a better alternative. Find out what works best for them. To be on the safe side, you can always do both.
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Calling Elected Officials

DO

- **Ask to speak** with the elected official directly. If they are not available, ask to speak with the appropriate staff person who is working on the issue. Staff has the elected official's ear and is often very knowledgeable about the details of your issue. Be sure to take down the name of the staff person you talked with. It is important to thank the staff person. At times they can be your greatest ally.
- **Know what you want to say** and be brief. Cover your main points early in the conversation.
- **Leave your name**, city and telephone number. This will make it easier for staff to get back to you with information on the issue.
- **Ask the elected official** for their position on the issue. If you talk with staff, let them know that you need them to get back to you with the elected official's position.
- **Thank** them for their time and ask if you can provide additional information or be helpful in any way.
- **Follow up** your phone call with a brief thank you note, a concise summary of your position, and additional information if needed.
- **Give feedback to the League** about what you learned. You can use the feedback link on the Hometown Voices web page, or contact the League directly.

DON'T

- **Bluff.** If you are asked a question that you cannot answer, say that you will get back to them and then follow up in a timely manner.
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Meeting with Elected Officials

DO

- **Call first** for an appointment. Explain the purpose of your visit.
- **Bring with you any relevant materials** to leave with the elected official such as your business card.
- **Be respectfully tenacious** and do not get discouraged.
- **Make the appointment convenient**, such as setting it up at the elected official's office.
- **Ask to meet directly** with the elected official. If they are unable to meet with you, schedule an appointment with the staff handling the issue. This often happens with our congressional delegation. If you meet with staff, be clear that you want them to get back to you with the position of the elected official.
- **Arrive on time.**
- **Be efficient and articulate.** The meeting should be brief and concise. If you are with a group of people, you may want to designate one spokesperson.
- **Be direct** by asking at the end of the meeting, "Will you support or oppose...?" Their answer will help determine your future strategy.
- **Write a thank you** letter to the elected official or staff promptly after your meeting. Even if the elected official did not support your position, let them know that you appreciate their consideration, and explain why you think they should reconsider their position. Reiterate the impact the issue will have on your community.
- **Follow up** with the elected official, even if you meet with staff, and provide additional information as appropriate. Ask if you can be helpful in any way.
- **Schedule another meeting** or set a standing meeting if necessary.
- **Give feedback to the League** about what you learned using the Hometown Voices web page feedback link, or by contacting the League directly.

DON'T

- **Get defensive** if the elected official does not support your position. You understand probably better than anyone the difficult job they are doing. Condescending, threatening or intimidating communications will alienate the elected official and you'll be working with them on many future issues.
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Writing, E-mailing or Faxing Elected Officials

DO

- **Use the correct address and salutation**, i.e. Dear Senator_____.
- **Type or write clearly.** Be sure to include your return address in the letter or e-mail.
- **Confirm** you have the correct address, e-mail or fax number. The Hometown Voices web page has contact information for state legislators, candidates, the governor and Oregon's congressional delegation.
- **State** your position in the first sentence (or subject line on an e-mail). Keep your message focused.
- **Be brief.** Explain what you are asking them to do and why.
- **Use your own words** and city stationery. Form letters are often discarded as impersonal and do not carry much weight.
- **Give specific examples** of how the issue affects your community.
- **Know the facts** to ensure you are giving credible information. If you can, find out how the elected official voted on this or similar issues in the past.
- **Be timely.** The elected official needs time to consider or act on your request.
- **Respond quickly to the League's Action Alerts.** Many issues are time sensitive.
- **Be persistent.** Do not be satisfied with a status report on the bill or issue. Tactfully illicit a more specific response.
- **Say thank you**, but keep the pressure on. Even if the elected official does not support your position, let them know that you appreciate their consideration, and explain why you think they should vote differently. Reiterate the impact the issue will have on your community and remind them that they are accountable at home for the decision they make.
- **Follow up** and ask if you can provide additional information or be helpful in any way.
- **Request that the elected official respond** to your communication with their position on the issue.
- **Give feedback to the League** about what you learned and copy the League on your communication. The Hometown Voices web page has a quick and easy feedback link, or contact the League directly.

DON'T

- **Use a negative tone.** Condescending, threatening or intimidating communications will alienate the elected official. You'll be working with them on many issues in the future.
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