

Advocacy Toolkit

Writing Your Elected Officials and Representatives

Writing a letter to your elected officials and representatives offers you the opportunity to give more information that you could in a phone call. It can also be an effective strategy for following up on a phone call, visit, or email.

The disadvantage to writing letters is you are not directly interacting with the elected official or representative, and therefore, they do not have the opportunity to ask questions, state their position, or respond to a specific request. For these reasons, you might consider following your letter with a phone call or visit for more interaction.

Follow these basic steps for writing your letter:

1. **Begin by stating that you are a constituent.** If you voted for them, let them know that as well. Make sure that you write your return address on the envelope, so that the legislator's office staff knows immediately that you are a constituent.
2. **Personalize your letter.** Research consistently shows that handwritten letters have the most impact. If you are basing your letter on a form letter, rewrite it, or at least retype it. Photocopies of generic letters are the least effective. In making your case on the issue, use personal examples.
3. **Use the news.** Watch news stories in your local community that you can use to illustrate your point. Use a local news item as a springboard for your issue.
4. **Local, local, local.** Make a strong connection between the issue and your local community which is represented. Again, use local examples that illustrate why your issue is important and why your position is a strong one.
5. **Acknowledge past support.** If the elected official or representative has supported your issues in the past, acknowledge this—but don't take it for granted that the support will continue. Give reasons why they should continue or intensify his or her support.
6. **Brevity.** Keep your letter brief—one to one and half pages at the most. Make sure that supporting information that you leave behind is brief as well.
7. **Strength in numbers.** Persuade a like-minded friend, family member, or colleague to write a letter as well. Again, quantity is critical. Elected officials pay attention to issues when they believe that many of their constituents care about that issue.
8. **Report your letter.** When you are part of a grassroots lobbying effort, your participation is helpful only if the people mobilizing the effort know about it. Let them know that you wrote the letter, and what you intend to do to follow up.
9. **Follow up.** In the letter, ask your elected official or representative for a response. To get a better picture of your legislator's position, consider following your letter with a phone call or visit.
10. **Communicate more than once.** Again, quantity is as important, if not more important, than quality in grassroots advocacy. One letter will not gain influence. As you monitor the issue, communicate with your elected officials or representatives through phone calls, additional letters, e-mail, or visits to ask for specific support or action as appropriate to the process.