



BOYS & GIRLS CLUBS
CALIFORNIA ALLIANCE

RECOMMENDED GUIDELINES FOR CONTACTING YOUR ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES

One of the most important skills you can learn in grassroots advocacy is how to communicate effectively with your elected representatives. How you go about exercising your channels of communication — and how often — will directly influence your odds for success. Simply taking the time to stay in contact with your elected representatives and their staff people, will build relationships that can pay significant dividends when you need your voice heard.

WRITING AN EFFECTIVE LETTER TO YOUR ELECTED REPRESENTATIVE

1. Identify yourself early in the letter, including the fact that you are a constituent and that you are writing on behalf of other individuals, if applicable.
2. Give the reason for your letter and refer to the specific legislation or policy in the first or second paragraph.
3. Explain how the issue in question directly affects your organization.
4. Try to use as many relevant facts as possible and back them up with sources, if available.
5. Be specific about the action you want your elected representative to take, whether it's voting one way or another, expressing views on an issue, or sending you information.
6. While you should make all the relevant key points in your letter, try to keep it as short as possible. Furthermore, you should concentrate on only one issue in your letter, rather than addressing a number of different ones.
7. It is not always necessary to type your correspondence to your legislators. If your letter is handwritten, make sure it is legible and, if possible, use either personal or business stationery that indicates your return address and telephone number.

CALLING YOUR ELECTED REPRESENTATIVE'S OFFICE

While it is best to express your views through written correspondence, time sensitive situations may arise that warrant a phone call to your representative's office. When calling, try to apply the relevant letter-writing guidelines (detailed above), and also consider the following suggestions.

1. Unless you are a personal friend of the legislator, it is not necessary to speak directly with him or her. You can leave a message about your concerns with the individual who answers the phone, or better yet, with the appropriate staff member.
2. Try not to argue, just express your opinions. Say why you feel the way you do and state what action you want your legislator to take.
3. Seek assurances that the message will be brought to the attention of your elected, and request a response in writing.

4. It is very important when calling the office to remember two cardinal rules: Be sure to give your full name and address; and, keep your call short and to the point.

MEETING WITH YOUR ELECTED REPRESENTATIVE

1. It is best to write or call ahead to arrange for an appointment. You should list several alternate dates, the purpose of your meeting, what group you are representing, and how many individuals will be in attendance.
2. You should be well prepared to present your case, both orally and in writing. Assume that the elected representative knows few details about the issue when you prepare your presentation. Plan to spend about five to seven minutes briefing the elected on the issue — providing background information, stating what the legislation will do, and giving specifics about its impact on you, your community, and the rest of the constituents. Prepare a succinct, one-page "talking points" document for your elected, in addition to in-depth briefing materials for his or her staff members. Be prepared to answer any questions that might logically arise, but don't be afraid to say, "I don't know," or "I'll have to get back to you with that information."
3. Be sympathetic to the time demands made on the elected representative. The first way to do this, of course, is by arriving at your appointment on time.
4. If it is not possible to meet with the elected directly, it is often just as effective to meet with the staff member who handles such issues. Most elected rely heavily on their staff for information and guidance on what position to take. If you can convince the appropriate staff member to see things your way, it is very likely that you will succeed in your mission.
5. Do not get into heated arguments, no matter how much you may disagree with what the elected or staff member is saying. If your discussion reaches that point, it is very unlikely that you will be able to convince others of the wisdom of your viewpoint. Don't ever jeopardize a good relationship; in the future you may need each other's help.
6. Always follow-up promptly after your meeting. Send any information you promised to provide and a "thank you" letter recapping the important points of your meeting and detailing any required next steps.
7. Once you have established a channel of communication with an elected, keep it open by periodically writing with new information on this and other pertinent issues, or even by just sending a note that says, "You're doing a great job! Keep up the good work!"



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GRASSROOTS ADVOCACY & GOVERNMENT RELATIONS TIPS

1. Identify your local elected representatives and their key staff members.

<i>Elected Representatives</i>	<i>Key Staff Members</i>
U.S. Congress	District Liaisons
State Senators & Assembly Members	Chief of Staff, Policy Directors, District Liaisons
Board of Supervisors	District Director
City Council	District Director, City Manager, Department Directors
School Board	Superintendent

2. Invite elected representatives to events. During public comments at events always introduce elected officials or their staff representatives.
3. Attend their events. Participate in their events. Ask for recognition at their events.
4. Engage on Social Media: ***Post, Like & Share***
5. In many cases your elected representatives have the largest megaphone in your communities. Ask for their support promoting your organization and your events.
6. Some local elected representatives have some discretionary funding available.
7. Don't undervalue the significance of meeting and having relationships with staff.
8. In meetings with elected representatives and their staff; limit the amount of paper you give them. One-page "talking points" documents are most effective.
9. Your elected representatives know the largest donors in your communities.
10. When making your case to an elected representative; emphasize the greater public interest to their district.
11. Ask for what you need; elected representatives have a lot of constituents.
12. All politics is local.
13. No one wins every time.