



## Effective Advocacy 101

Remember that advocacy is, above all, about *building relationships*. Far more important than any particular piece of information you share, is simply getting to know the legislators and their staff members on a personal basis and letting them know that you are a real person who cares about these issues.

### STEP ONE: FIGURING OUT WHAT YOU WANT

Before deciding to call, write, or visit an elected official to share your views, you should know what you want from your elected representatives. In fact, asking for something specific is sometimes the only way to get an elected official's attention. Your goal is to force someone in the office to think about you and your issues for longer than 5 minutes – making the “ask” helps you achieve that goal.

### STEP TWO: WHOM SHOULD YOU ASK?

Communicating effectively depends on your ability to communicate your message to the right person. You have set up meetings with your own elected officials, so be sure to identify yourself as a constituent at the beginning of the meeting.

#### *Be a resource for your legislator*

Legislators can't know everything about every topic, so you can be a resource for them on bicycling and walking issues. And if they ask question that you can't answer, let them know you will get the answer for them ASAP. Make a note of the question on your meeting report form and either you or MBPF can follow up.

#### *Staff Contact Can Have Advantages over Legislative Contact*

All legislators have assistants who help with schedule and clerical support, and many have staff members who do deep policy work. You can often get more time with a legislative assistant and have a more in depth conversation.

### STEP THREE: DELIVERING YOUR MESSAGE

The five minute rule: Keep your message to five minutes, whether it's a five-minute presentation in a meeting or five minutes worth of text that a staff person must read. Chances are you'll only have five minutes to make your point. Be prepared to do so!

In many cases, especially if you meet a legislator in the hall or between meetings, you may only have 30 seconds. Shake hands, smile, tell the legislator who you are, where you are from, and that you are here for Bicycle Day at the Capitol. Through your attitude and your very presence at the Capitol you are communicating that this is an important issue to you--and that is our most important message.

#### *The importance of personal messages*

Remember that you are important to your elected officials because you are a constituent, not because you're part of a statewide network or involved in a campaign. Your message should be focused on a personal level –why you find fulfillment in what you do and the



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real people you help. Statistics are useful, but only if they relate directly to what you or your program is doing in the community. Think of a brief, positive story telling how these issues have personally touched your life.

*Think about WHO should ask, based on what you know about the audience*

There may be someone involved in your issue that has a good relationship with a member or staff. Or, there may be someone who is just generally better suited to deliver your message, for example a business person may be well-suited to speak to a more conservative member, while an activist might be better suited to a more liberal member. A constituent who lives in the legislator's district is almost always more effective than a non-constituent.

*Know when to change course*

There's being specific and then there's being stubborn. Be prepared to change course and ask for something else –like attending an event or putting an article in your newsletter. You may just find that getting the office involved on a smaller level yields more interest and engagement in the future.

### **STEP FOUR: FOLLOWING UP**

The sad truth is that many offices will ignore your first request for a specific action. Frankly, they have so many people asking for so many things that they want to know that you're serious about your request before spending resources. The way to demonstrate that you are serious is to ask again. By asking again, you demonstrate that you really are serious, and you'll keep asking until you get an answer!

After any meeting, extended phone call, or any other interaction where the office staff or member went out of their way to help you out, be sure to send a thank you note. Even a quick email message the following day can make a real impression. Not many people take this simple step –you'll stand out positively if you do so!