

Lobbying Legislators

Simple tips for effective communication



10. **Be in the .01 percent.** At least six times a year, contact your lawmaker by letter, phone, email, or office visit. Contacting your lawmaker several times a year will make you more active than 99.9 percent of citizens and therefore 99.9 percent more effective.
9. **Don't burn bridges.** No matter what the outcome, always write a thank-you note to the lawmaker. Your adversary on one issue may be your ally on the next.
8. **Educate your lawmaker.** A great way to describe the importance of an issue to your lawmaker is to show him or her up close and personal. Invite your lawmaker to your office or an appropriate space to discuss the issue and to answer any questions that he or she may have. Most state lawmakers are not full time and value any opportunity to learn about an issue.
7. **Flexibility is key.** Compromises are often necessary. Evaluate what you can realistically achieve now, and work on the rest later. Be patient and remember that some decisions may take months.
6. **Give and take.** Responsibility from you and commitment from your lawmaker go hand-in-hand. The more responsibility you assume, the more support you can expect from your lawmaker.
5. **There's power in numbers.** This is true for financial support as well as communication. Remind your lawmaker of how many people in your organization share your opinion.
4. **Reach out.** Include your lawmaker on mailing lists for county newsletters, and make sure that you are on their mailing lists as well.
3. **Be nosy.** Ask your lawmaker to state their position, and if it aligns with yours, ask what you can do to strengthen and garner support. If their position is different than yours, ask what information and show of support would be necessary to change that position.
2. **Use examples.** Explain the logic of your position in terms that are relatable— jobs, cost, how many people will be affected, etc. Have detailed information you can give to explain yourself. In all communications, be sure to include the bill number and/or name of the legislation or regulations, as well as your name, postal and email addresses, and home and office phone numbers.
1. **Don't waste time.** Get to your point fast and stay focused on the issue. If you keep your visit to no longer than 15 minutes, lawmakers will appreciate your consideration for their busy schedules.

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Know...

Yourself. Be aware of your own personal prejudices or biases so you can maintain objectivity by anticipating your own response in a given situation.

Your organization. If you are speaking on its behalf you'll want to be a credible representative. Be fully aware of your organization's positions and their development as well as the relationship it maintains with other organizations and with the legislature.

Your legislator. Make an attempt to understand the basis of your legislator's positions which may include his or her:

- record on related legislation;
- party, position, and tenure in legislative and political structure;
- constituent pressures;
- general predispositions;
- responsiveness to various kinds of personal interviews

Your issue. Phrase an argument in your own words and don't be surprised if it appears that you are more knowledgeable on your issue than the individual you are lobbying. No one can be expected to address every question or matter of concern regarding an issue, so don't hesitate to admit your lack of knowledge on a particular point. Be willing to pursue the answer and report back.

Your opposition. It is preferable to anticipate the opposition and answer their arguments positively before those arguments surface publicly.

Your resources. If you have any questions about a particular issue or need assistance preparing for a meeting with your legislator, please contact a member of the Association staff. The Association develops a number of tools and resources to assist county leaders with their advocacy efforts, many of which are available at our website, www.alabamacounties.org.

Mind Your P's and Q's

Social Media Etiquette in Legislative Advocacy

The Association of County Commissions of Alabama (ACCA) is constantly working to improve its advocacy outreach. Doing so allows the organization to further contribute to legislative conversations by promoting changes policy that can improve the operation of county government. The same is true for Alabama's 67 county governments. If used effectively, advocacy efforts at the county level provide local leaders an additional avenue to help improve the lives of their constituents.

Over the years, the strategies for effective legislative advocacy have drastically evolved.

Today, social media tools such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and blogs are powerful vehicles in promoting legislative advocacy to a large audience. The use of social media platforms along with effective messaging can be used to demonstrate that county leaders have a strong and united voice, and are active participants in advancing county government.

The main social media sites are especially designed to help individuals, organizations, and governments facilitate relationship building and stakeholder engagement. Social media's open and interactive environment offers an easy and low-cost way to mobilize supporters, foster dialogue with large audiences, and attract attention to legislative issues that might otherwise be ignored by traditional media outlets.

But beware: social media can also be a double-edged sword—because for elected officials, it represents the ultimate in government transparency. To avoid any major blunders, governments, public officials, and communications officers need to not only get familiar with using social media...but get good at it.

In many ways, social media etiquette for legislative advocacy is intuitive, but here are a few easy tips and ideas to make good use of social media during the legislative advocacy process:

1. **Keep your posts positive or neutral.** If you don't share the same political view or agenda as the elected official you visit, you can still share your work with constituents—even if the visit wasn't positive for your issue or for county government. Here are a few ways to stay positive in the midst of a not so positive legislative interaction:

- Express gratitude for the person's time
- Share that you personally lobbied them on a particular issue
- Acknowledge that more work needs to be done in your state

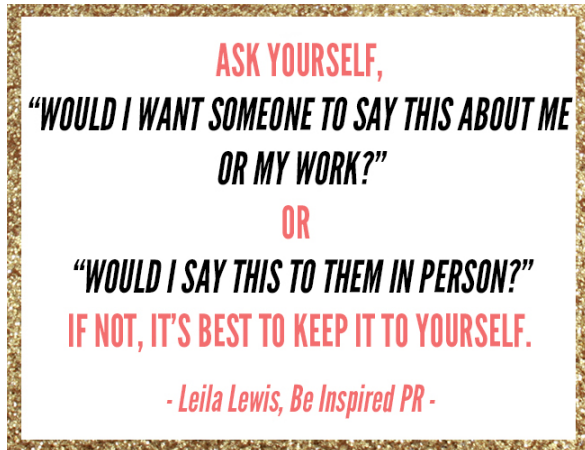
Remember: your social media posts should be about policy, not politics. Like Momma always said, "If you don't have anything nice to say, don't say anything at all."

2. **Know how to reach your elected official on social media.** Most elected leaders have Twitter accounts or Facebook pages. You can usually find it on the official's website or through a quick Google search. Use that username in your Twitter or Facebook messages. This is proper social media etiquette, and also gives the account holder a notice that he or she has been mentioned in someone else's post.

For example, on Twitter you might say: *"Had a great meeting today with @SenSmith and staff. He supports a long-term plan to support local road and bridge programs!"*

Or on Facebook, you would say: *“Joined colleagues this a.m. in meeting with Senator Richard Smith’s office to ask that he cosponsor SB 111. I hope we can count on his support.”*

NOTE: The ACCA keeps a list a contact list for all elected officials in the state of Alabama. Contact an ACCA staffer if you need assistance identifying your representative on social media.



3. Check in with the official’s office before you post a message about your visit. It’s good etiquette and relationship-building to let the elected official or staff know that you may use social media to share highlights of the visit. It also gives the office advanced notice, and they can look for your posts in case they want to share or retweet on their own sites.

4. Ask before you share a photo of an official or staffers. Many elected officials office have a policy – official or unofficial – for social media use. Some like to retweet and share photos and messages from their constituents. Others prefer to only push out headlines or key messages and not retweet or share messages

from visitors. Take time to look at the elected official’s Facebook and/or Twitter page before your visit and get a feel for how the office uses social media.

While elected officials typically aren’t camera-shy, their staffers may not be used to having photos taken—let alone shared on social media sites. However, sharing photos of you and your colleagues outside the office or in front of the Statehouse is a great way to highlight your visit and your work. You can post photos to Twitter or Facebook to increase engagement. Research has shown that Tweets with photos get 18 percent more clicks, 89 percent more favorited, and 150 percent more retweets!

5. Use the best hashtag. If you are involved an advocacy campaign, use the commonly accepted hashtag for that campaign in all the messages you post about your legislative visits, so that others interested in this issue can easily search and follow related tweets. For example, **#AlabamaCounties** and **#67Counties1Voice** is the hashtag for the ACCA; **#DRIVEAlabama** is the hashtag for the DRIVE Alabama campaign; and **#ALpolitics** is the hashtag for all matters related to the Alabama political scene.

6. Keep your messages short and generic for maximum sharing and retweeting potential. Facebook allows you to share a large number of characters, while Twitter only allows you to share up to 140 characters. But research shows that the messages most likely to get shared and retweeted are between 100-120 characters. Break your thought into 2-3 posts if you need to express something lengthier.

And in order to increase your shares and retweets, avoid writing in first-person. Instead experiment with keeping the words more generic. Write in a way that could sound like it was coming from someone else.

7. Link your social media posts related to county government to the Association of County Commissions of Alabama. Also use social media to connect with other individuals, organizations, and coalitions that you want to update or invite to share your message.