

# LEGISLATIVE RELATIONSHIPS





## *Building a Relationship With your Lawmaker*

It is crucial that our lawmakers hear from us regularly and that we build and maintain relationships with the lawmaker and the members of his/her staff. Frequently, this is done by making a call regarding a legislative ask, or delivering petitions, but here are some other ways to keep in touch with our elected officials:

- If you're a new Legislative Ambassador ask you ACT! Lead if there are any upcoming meetings with your Federal lawmaker you can attend.
- Set up an intro meeting with your state lawmakers or attend one of their office hours to begin building your relationship with them.
- Follow up all meetings with a thank you note or email.
- Send a card for special events to your lawmaker(s):
  - ◊ Your Lawmaker's birthday
  - ◊ Thanksgiving
  - ◊ New Year's/ Winter Holidays
- Drop off/ email new ACS CAN reports/information:
  - ◊ How Do You Measure Up (End of Summer)
  - ◊ Annual Accomplishments Report (Spring)
  - ◊ Fact Sheets/ Development on campaign issues
  - ◊ Share exciting updates
- Did your Letter to the Editor get published? Share a copy with your relevant lawmaker(s)
- Thank them for co-sponsoring a bill, for taking a public stance, or after a big win
  - ◊ This could be via email, phone call, or written note
- Did your lawmaker support your ask? Invite them to an upcoming Relay or Strides event and ask them to talk about it!
- Attend a town hall meeting wearing ACS CAN gear---don't forget to snap a photo!
  - ◊ Find one near you at [www.townhallproject.com](http://www.townhallproject.com)
- Ask your lawmaker's Health Aide/ Chief of Staff to grab coffee and get to know them better.
- Ask them how you can be helpful to them on pertinent issues
- Visit your lawmakers' local offices when they're not in session or when you know they're in town
- Invite them to join you at ACS CAN events in your area: Lobby Days, Interest Meetings, Hope Lodge outings whenever appropriate.

# Beginning the Relationship



If you can't do an in office visit or attend coffee hours to introduce yourself to your legislator, a snail mail letter to their office, addressed directly to the lawmaker, is the second best option.

## **Tips:**

- Keep it to 2 or 3 paragraphs
- Include your contact information in your signature so they can contact you if needed
- Run the final version past GRM for a second set of eyes.

## **Talking Points you could include:**

- Introduce yourself as a volunteer with the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network (ACS CAN) and a constituent. Make sure to include the town you live in.
- Share with them a little about why you are volunteering with ACS CAN.
- This is a great time to share with them your connection to cancer
- Share a little about yourself and what motivates you
- Let them know you are available in their community as a resource for cancer related policies.
- Don't worry...if they ask you a question you don't know the answer to, Melissa will be able to find you the answer.

## **Suggested Talking Points:**

- Talk about a recent bill/initiative the lawmaker has supported.
- Congratulate them on returning to office, entering office, or a recent community award.
- Thank them for speaking at an event you attended.
- Make it personal!



# *Building a Relationship With your Lawmaker—The Meeting*

Meeting in person with your elected officials is the single most important grassroots action you can take to fight for the issues you care about.

## **A Few Things to Keep in Mind for Your Meetings...**

While no meeting ever follows an exact script, below are some reminders and tips and tricks you can use when sitting down face to face with lawmakers and/or their staff.

- **THANK THEM FOR THEIR PAST SUPPORT.** We want to thank the lawmakers for making many of our issues a top priority, from whether we're meeting with a state legislator or a federal delegation member be sure to thank those who have already signed on to cosponsor our priority issues. Because of them we are in a much stronger position to help improve the lives of cancer patients and survivors.
- **REITERATE ACS CAN'S BIPARTISAN SPIRIT.** We work best when we work together to solve tough issues, like finding new treatment options for cancer patients, making support services for patients and survivors readily accessible, or removing barriers to accessing cancer screenings. Everything you are talking about with your lawmaker needs both sides of the aisle to work with us on, together.
- **STATE THE PURPOSE OF YOUR MEETING.** Let them know you're there as a volunteer for ACS CAN in their district. Remind them that we are all touched by cancer, and that more than 600,000 Americans are likely to die this year from the disease.
- **REMEMBER TO PERSONALIZE YOUR DISCUSSION.** Let them know your connection whether it be a cancer treatment breakthrough, access to quality of life services, or cancer screening story. How has cancer touched your life? Lawmakers hear from professional lobbyists all day, every day. They don't need to hear a lot of statistics from you, so just memorize one fact that you think will be persuasive to them.
- **LET US KNOW THE OUTCOME.** Whether you get a yes, no, or a maybe, ACS CAN's staff wants to know how your meeting went. Please be sure to log into the Ambassador Action Center and let us know the result of your meeting.

## **Tips and Tricks:**

- **Stay on message:** Your group's power stems from being able to deliver the same unified message in many legislative offices. Sending a different message is counterproductive & unfair to your fellow advocates. Unsympathetic legislators will try to sidetrack you by introducing other issues in your conversation.
- **Show up on time:** Punctuality conveys professionalism, confidence & urgency. Keep in mind that your legislators might be late to meetings & remain flexible.
- **Dress for success:** Legislatures are formal institutions. Dress conservatively.

# The Meeting



- Avoid Gushing: You have scheduled a meeting as a credible source of information from the district. Don't distract legislators from that role by being either overly complimentary or verbally abusive.
- It's ok to say "I don't know": If you don't know the answer to a question that your representative asks, tell them you will get back to them with the requested information & be sure to follow-up.
- Staff matter: No matter who you meet with in a legislative office, it is an opportunity to develop a relationship. Staff can be your best ally within the legislative office.
- Follow up: Immediately send a thank-you note, & stay informed on the progress of your issue. Thank the office if the lawmaker votes the way you would like, & request an explanation if he does not deliver on any promises made.

## The Meeting:

Legislative meetings are very brief—usually no more than 15 minutes or so. That means you have to get right to your issues and story and then make a clear request. If you have multiple people in your group assign one person to begin the meeting and one person to end it.

In your meeting, remember the 3 parts:

- HOOK (who you are) Everyone should briefly introduce themselves at the start of the meeting. This is your chance to remind the legislator that you are constituents. Consider sharing a few unique personal details.
- LINE (why you care & why they should care) Provide the legislator with local stories or a strong argument. Lawmakers especially appreciate real-life examples that put a face on an issue.
- SINKER (your request or ask) Stay on message. Make a clear request of the legislator or the staff. Ask for a commitment & then listen carefully to the response. Remember to thank them before you leave.

After the meeting – meet with your group to compare and identify any follow-up work that needs to take place, such as sending requested info. Get business cards from any staff you meet with and send a thank you note.



# *Building a Relationship With your Lawmaker—The Letter*

Even in this age of technology, a written letter remains one of the most effective ways to communicate with your elected officials.

## **A Few Things to Keep in Mind for Your Letter...**

- Titles matter: Please address the lawmaker by the correct title, for example: Senator Baker or Representative Allen.
- Where you live: State that you are a constituent and provide your street address at the beginning of any piece of correspondence. This is critical; lawmakers are under no real obligation to consider the requests of citizens who are not their constituents.
- Why you're writing: Do state your opposition to or support for a bill by number early in the letter. This will help clarify your position & aid in routing your letter to the correct staff and/or the correct bill file.
- Make it personal: Don't get so caught up in explaining the legislation or providing local statistics that you forget to talk about your cancer story and your connection to the issue. They can look up facts and figures. What they need to hear is how this issue has impacted your life or the life of someone you love.

# *Building a Relationship With your Lawmaker—The Email*



With email, it is even more important that you signal your constituent status early. The success of the email will be determined by the personalized local information it conveys.

## **A Few Things to Keep in Mind for Your Email...**

- Who you are: Put your name and address at the top of every message: you might even consider putting your name & address in the subject line so it is the first thing read.
- Do personalize your e-mail: Customize any email that is provided by an interest group with your own personal stories & local statistics. Create a unique message even if you are participating in a larger action on-line – but remember to keep the request exactly as it is provided to stay on message.
- Do be brief: There is not a lot of patience among lawmakers or their staff for scrolling down through lengthy emails. Make sure your email is personalized, but you probably do not have more than a few paragraphs to get the job done.
- Do be clear about your request: You do not want your lawmaker to simply care about a given issue – you want him or her to take a specific action on that issue. If you write to your federal elected officials, your email is likely to be circulated among staff. Make it absolutely clear what your request is & if you are sending email as part of a coordinated interest group campaign, stay on message. A good idea is to begin & end your email with a statement of your request.
- Do proofread your e-mail or have someone else proofread it for you.
- Relationship first: Do consider establishing a relationship with your legislator through a face-to-face meeting or letter before beginning to send e-mail: Email can be an extremely timely & powerful way for you to communicate with your local legislative offices after they have met you & recognize you as a voter from the district with important insights on an issue. Once they know who you are, your email has a much better chance of commanding more than a cursory glance by the intern.



# *Building a Relationship With your Lawmaker—The Phone*

An effective phone call is concise, yet gets the message across. Be civil & avoid the tendency to ramble.

## **A Few Things to Keep in Mind for Your Phone Call...**

- Be nice: Start the call by greeting the staffer answering the phone.
- Who you are: State your name and home address establishing you are a constituent.
- Make your position/ask clear: State your position and refer to a bill by its official number, i.e., “I would like Senator Jones to vote in support of SB 6.”
- Ask for follow-up: This lets the office know that you are serious about your request & just might be watching when the vote is taken.
- Live is better than recording: Place your call during business hours when possible. There is no guarantee that your message will be properly recorded if you leave a message on voice mail.
- Relationship first: Do consider establishing a relationship with your legislator through a face-to-face meeting before placing a call if possible.