

Tips for Effectively Influencing Legislators

1. Legislators live in the world of concretes. Talk in those same terms! Change your issues from abstractions (“It’s our democratic right...”) to examples of practical effects on you and other members of the community (“House Bill 4959 would negatively impact consumers by...”).
2. Remember that legislators don’t hold all the cards. They want something from you, too: your vote, campaign contributions, news of what’s happening in your district, and your good recommendations to other constituents.
3. If you’re a member of a local organization or service group, get your group’s leaders and other members involved. Board members are often prominent local figures who may have connections to legislators.
4. Legislators get inundated with information, so use a well-written fact sheet — a one or two-page summary containing the essentials of the issue — to educate them about your position.
5. Tell your legislators what you want them to do. Don’t just complain and leave, thinking your message has been heard. Offer the legislator the solution that you’d like to see enacted. (“We’d like your support for a bill with these provisions...”)
6. Find and recruit your natural allies in your efforts, such as prominent collectors, members of tasting groups, owners of restaurants or other local businesses that cater to a wine crowd, etc.
7. Always thank your legislator!

How to Interact with Elected Officials at the Local and State Levels

Communication with elected officials is an essential ingredient of successful lobbying and advocacy. The type of communication you choose depends entirely on your individual preference; however, choosing more than one mode of communication is usually more effective in getting your point across.

Tips for letter writing:

- Be sure to use the correct address and salutation.
- Type or write your letter clearly.
- Use your own stationery; it adds a personal touch.
- Keep your message focused and be as specific as possible.
- Know your facts, but be brief.
- If you can, find out how your legislator voted on this issue in the past.
- Conclude your letter with “thank you”.
- Don’t use a threatening, condescending, or intimidating tone.

Tips for phone calls:

- Ask to speak with the legislator, if possible. Be prepared to set up a return call.
- If that's impossible, ask to speak with aide handling this issue.
- Know what you want to say and be brief about it.
- Leave your contact information.
- Follow up the phone call with a brief letter of thanks, a concise summary of your position, and additional information if requested.

Tips for a meeting:

- Always employ K.I.S.S. (Keep it Short and Simple)!
- Be on time, patient, and polite.
- Have your facts straight.
- Have an information packet to give to the legislator, with a short fact sheet on the issue, your most important arguments, and other documents or editorials backing up what you're asking for.
- LISTEN to what the legislator asks or says, and tailor your argument to their concerns about the issue.
- If you go as a group, introduce each group member and state their connection to the district of the legislator.
- Offer to be a resource for the legislator.
- Look to other constituents for information.
- Before you leave, say "thank you."
- Continue your relationship with the legislator.
- Provide opportunities for positive publicity.

Dos and Don'ts of Communication:

- Do be clear and concise.
- Do refer to specific pieces of legislation, preferably by bill number.
- Do use a personal touch.
- Do be polite and respectful.
- Don't use long and rambling discourse.
- Don't be negative, sarcastic or threatening.
- Don't use e-mail or fax, if at all possible.