

BUILDING AND MAINTAINING RELATIONSHIPS WITH ELECTED OFFICIALS

Relationships with elected officials and other civic leaders are key to developing and maintaining support for your Main Street program or the plans and projects in your district that need public support. Whether you are connecting with local, state, or federal officials, use the tips below to initiate the conversation and to foster long-term engagement to keep Main Street top of mind.

FIRST STEPS TO CONNECT

Find Your Elected Official: If you are unsure who represents you and how to contact them, use an online tool to identify all your elected officials and their basic contact information.

Tip: For state and federal officials, contact or copy staff members on your outreach. Place a call to the office and ask for the email of the scheduler or the staff person who works in economic development or preservation issues.

Leverage Grasstops Connections: Are your board, funders, or other local leaders connected to the elected official? An introductory email from someone who already has a relationship with the elected official can help focus attention on your issue.

DO

- Always be prepared, persistent and polite.
- Pre-plan meetings with your team to understand speaking roles and timing.
- Invite the elected official and staff to district events.
- Attend Town Halls and other forums the official is hosting.
- Acknowledge their contributions and support.
- Send your newsletters and annual reports to remind them of your accomplishments.
- Be flexible – schedules change frequently.

INITIATE THE CONVERSATION

- Before you reach out, craft your message. (links to that doc)
- Think about the best way to connect:
 - A **brief email** is appropriate to request a meeting or draw attention to an issue.
 - **Outreach by phone** is effective to register your support for a bill or request co-sponsorship.
 - **Formal letters** are sometimes appropriate to outline details of a request, but regular mail can be a slow way to correspond. Consider emailing your letter as a PDF attachment.
- If you don't hear back, send a polite follow-up - but don't pester.
- Once a relationship is initiated, consider the following Dos and Don'ts of maintaining the relationship:

DON'T

- Lie or state more than you know. It's ok to say "I'll find out and get back to you."
- Become defensive or argumentative.
- Ignore staff members – staff are an invaluable resource.
- Lose focus on the issue at hand with other political issues. Remember, you are representing your organization – not your personal interests. Pull the conversation back to the issue if needed.
- Surprise or embarrass the official – particularly in public forums.
- Become discouraged. Relationship building is a long-term strategy.

LEARN MORE!

Contact us at mainstreetadvocacy@savingplaces.org.
Check out mainstreet.org for additional resources.