

**COMMUNICATING WITH YOUR STATE & LOCAL**  
**ELECTED OFFICIALS:**  
**A Tutorial in Effective Grassroots Lobbying**

Communicating with your state and local elected officials is very similar to communicating with your federal elected officials. However, there are some differences, one of which is staff size. While the staff of a U.S. Senator or Representative can be as large as 15 to 20 people, very often an elected official of a small town or county may be as small as 1! In fact in some localities, when you call your elected official, you may find that he or she answers the phone. This is good for grassroots outreach, as it puts you even closer to the individual who is representing you.

Your state and local elected officials are also typically closer in proximity to the constituents they represent. While federal legislators are often in Washington, DC, your state and local elected officials are always “back at home.” Use this fact when discussing pertinent issues with them. Demonstrate how the issue will directly impact your community and the people who live within it.

The information below will help you as you work with your state and local elected officials to educate them on the issues of radical Islam.

**Question:     What can I do to help ACT! for America? I know nothing about the political or legislative process and have never met with my elected officials before.**

**Answer:** You can do a lot to help – and it’s easy to do so. Grassroots lobbying is a simple concept. It is people communicating their thoughts on issues of concern to their elected officials. Every day people, just like you! An effective grassroots lobbying network consists of many people, each playing a different role in working to achieve the final goal. Some people never become involved with grassroots efforts because they simply don’t believe that they will make any difference or because they don’t know how to go about expressing their views. Nothing could be further from the truth. People are power – and nowhere more so than in our political environment.

It is important to remember that, for elected officials, constituent input has a big impact on how they act on various issues – and this applies to all elected officials, from the local government in your home community, to your state representatives, to your Members of Congress in Washington, DC. The individuals who matter the most to an elected official are the ones who put him or her in office to begin with – and THAT’S YOU! Therefore, it is YOU who are extremely critical component to achieving the goals of ACT! for America. That’s why it is so important that ACT! for America has a grassroots base that is not just passionate about the issues concerning radical Islam, but one that is also ready to contact their elected officials in a timely manner on vital issues.

**Question: What are some overall tips that I should keep in mind when preparing to become an effective grassroots lobbyist?**

**Answer:** There are several general tips to keep in mind which will help you in your lobbying efforts:

1. You are trying to influence your elected official on a limited number of items at a time – preferably only one or two per contact. Stick to the subject during your communication, whether written or oral.
2. Always remember that as a grassroots member of ACT! for America, you are attempting to build an on-going relationship with your elected official. Don't alienate him or her! Treat him or her as you would want to be treated. You never know when he or she may be just the person we need to swing an issue our way.

**Question: How do I best communicate with my elected officials?**

**Answer:** There are three ways to communicate with your elected officials, in writing (letter or e-mail), by phone, or in person. Which one is most effective will depend upon the issue at hand, and how much time you have until the elected official needs to take action on the issue. We'll review each method below.

### **In Writing**

Elected officials often read some of their mail personally. Again, this is especially so in small cities and counties where the official probably will not have a large staff.

In order to ensure the greatest impact, try to avoid “form” letters and write the letter in your own words. Also, write the letter on your own letterhead, if at all possible. That will eliminate any doubt about your name and address and will establish that you are, indeed, a constituent.

### **Tips to Remember:**

1. **Personalize Your Letter** – Use your personal or business (if applicable) stationary/letterhead when ending a written letter. That will establish that you are a constituent and eliminate any doubt about your name and address.
2. **Target the Official** – Write to the elected official who represents your neighborhood or state. You carry greater clout as you and your family have a vote in his/her re-election.
3. **Be Specific** – Refer to a specific bill number and title, or a specific local ordinance, for example. Try to focus on one topic per letter whenever possible.

4. **Acknowledge His/Her Position** – If you are aware of how your elected official has assisted in the past, acknowledge that in your letter. If his/her position agrees with you – don't spare the praise! When it conflict, be courteous, but do not hesitate to state your opinion.
5. **Illustrate the Local Impact** – Personalize and localize your written correspondence. Mention the impact that the elected official's action will have on you, your family, your business, or your community.
6. **Ask for His/Her support** – Re-enforce your position. Let your elected official know that you want your views considered in his/her final decision.
7. **Ask for His/Her response** – Ask your elected official to state his/her position to the issue in a letter or e-mail reply.

## **Phone**

Telephone calls are very useful for constituent input, particularly when you are dealing with a time-sensitive issue – as is often the case. When reaching out to local government officials, you may indeed have him or her answer the phone directly. If so, great! Courteously explain the reason for your call, whether it is to schedule a meeting, or register your thoughts or concerns about an issue.

Phone calls can also be a good way to learn about an elected official's position on a particular issue. Don't be afraid to ask where he or she stands and to expect an answer!

### **Tips to Remember:**

1. **Ask to Speak with the Elected Official** – If he or she is in a meeting, as for a return call, or ask to speak with the appropriate staff person.
2. **Be Specific** – Provide the bill number, or reference the legislative issue you are there to discuss.
3. **State your Position** – Let the staff person or elected official know your views on the issue/legislation, how it affects you personally, and the impact it has on your community. Remember...PERSONALIZE and LOCALIZE the issue whenever you can.
4. **Learn the Official's Position** – Ask your elected official or his/her staff for their support on the issue. Don't be shy about asking where your elected official stands on the issue. The response from staff can be given verbally during your discussion or you may request either a return phone call or letter from your state or local elected official. The odds of receiving a call directly from your representative increases as the size of your town or locality decreases.

## **In Person**

Without a doubt, meeting an elected official, or his or her staff face-to-face is the best way to present your views. While it may be difficult to arrange a one-on-one meeting with an elected official, it is ALWAYS worth the effort. If the official is unavailable, you can still meet with staff in his/her office. Arranging group meetings can improve your chances of meeting with the elected official in person. However, always remember to make arrangements by calling his/her office where the meeting is to take place well in advance. Try to avoid just dropping in. Like you, elected officials and their staff are very busy people and appreciate consideration of an appointment.

Another way to meet with your elected official is to invite him/her to address an audience – perhaps your local Chapter meeting – or cluster several nearby chapters into one big meeting for the event.

### **Tips to Remember:**

1. **Schedule an Appointment**
2. **Come Prepared**
3. **Arrive on Time**
4. **Link the Issue to Interest at Home**
5. **Do Not Be Intimidated**
6. **Stay on Message**

## **FAQs**

The following are some frequently asked questions about grassroots lobbying.

### **1. WHY DO ELECTED OFFICIALS MAKE AN APPOINTMENT AND THEN FAIL TO SHOW UP?**

Elected officials often have many meetings on their schedules at the same time. Often unexpected meetings pop up at the last minute. It is also important to keep in mind that you are not the only constituent who wants the Member's ear. Lastly, elected officials at all levels do have a personal/family life, just like us. Emergencies do occur. Don't be discouraged, communication with the Member's office is important.

### **2. WHY BOTHER TO MEET WITH A STAFFER IF THE ELECTED OFFICIAL CAN'T MEET?**

Aides to elected officials are their "eyes and ears," and many times they are the experts on certain issues. Elected officials cannot possibly know everything there is to know about every issue. They rely on their staff to keep them informed and

educated on a wide range of issues. It is of utmost importance to get to know the staff of an elected official. Building a good relationship with staff leads to a good relationship with the elected official. Staffers remember you as experts on particular issues and often call upon you to make comments and recommendations on legislative/policy matters.

**3. IF THE ELECTED OFFICIAL CAN'T MAKE THE MEETING, SHOULD I RESCHEDULE WITH HIM/HER?**

If the elected official is unable to attend your scheduled meeting, ask to see the staffer who works on the particular issue, if applicable. At that time, present your concerns to him/her and leave him/her any information you may have brought. Ask the staffer if it would be possible to reschedule the meeting with the elected official for another time.

**4. HOW DO I GET THE ELECTED OFFICIAL TO FOCUS ON OUR ISSUES IF HE IS TALKING ABOUT OTHER THINGS?**

A good way to bring the conversation back to your agenda is to tell the elected official that what he/she is talking about is important, however politely remind him/her that you know his/her time is limited and that you are there to discuss an issue that is just as important to the community. Keep bringing the conversation back to your "important issue(s)."

**5. ARE LETTERS EVEN READ BY ELECTED OFFICIALS?**

Elected officials at the state level typically do not read every letter that comes into the office, as there is simply not enough time. Instead, a staffer often will bring a compelling letter or letters to the official's attention. In smaller communities, however, where there is limited or no staff, there is a larger likelihood that your letters will be read directly by your elected official. Comments and sentiments from constituent letters are a definite factor in determining a Member's stand on an issue.

**6. SHOULD YOU EVEN BOTHER TO SEND IN MASS-GENERATED LETTERS ON AN ISSUE?**

As with grassroots lobbying overall, there is power in numbers. State and local elected officials and their staffs do not like opening mail for hours as it takes up their already limited time. In certain circumstances, this approach can be effective as it definitely gets the attention of the elected official. Often offices keep a tally on pro and con letters/e-mails. Again, this kind of communication is a factor in how the Member will vote on an issue.

**7. WHAT IF YOU DO NOT EVER HEAR BACK FROM YOUR ELECTED OFFICIAL AFTER YOU WRITE?**

In larger offices, such as state representatives, it can take a week to a month to hear back from an elected official's office on an issue of concern to you, because of the bulk of the mail received. Often you will already know what the elected official's vote on the issue is before you receive an official response. If you have not heard back from the elected official's office in a reasonable amount of time (a month) – give the office a call and let them know that you called or wrote in and haven't received a response yet. Many times the aides are swamped with work. Elected officials do realize how important it is to respond to constituent comments and requests. Many offices have strict rules on the time in which a letter can go without a response.

**8. IS IT OK TO SEND LETTERS TO ELECTED OFFICIALS TO DO NOT REPRESENT YOUR COMMUNITY/DISTRICT/STATE?**

It is not wise to send letters to elected officials who do not represent you. Their time is limited and they are responsible only to their constituents. Typically, the correspondence will be referred to the correct elected official.

**9. WHY DOES MY ELECTED OFFICIAL'S OFFICE ASK FOR MY ADDRESS WHEN I CALL IN A COMMENT? I DON'T WANT TO BE SENT JUNK MAIL!**

Giving your address to an elected official's office after you have called in comments or a request is important for two reasons. First, it allows the office to document your concerns. You want to be on the record. Second, it allows the office to send you a response. You want to know the elected official's position and have it in writing. Most offices will not use your name for "junk mail" purposes. Anything that is mailed from the office is paid out of a budget which is limited. You may, however, receive a Newsletter from a state or local elected official about matters you have previously communicated to him/her about, or about things happening in your community.

**10. WILL MY COMMUNICATION WITH MY ELECTED OFFICIAL MATTER IN THE LONG RUN?**

Any communication with your elected officials matters! All elected officials rely on constituents to educate them on issues – otherwise they have no way of knowing how legislation may affect an industry, individual businesses, or the community in general.

**11. WHERE DO I GET INFORMATION/STATISTICS ON AN ISSUE TO GIVE TO MY ELECTED OFFICIAL?**

You can refer to the ACT! for America website for much information on radical Islam. Also, reach out to your Chapter Leaders for information on the overall issue, and particular help that we need at all levels of government.

**12. WHY IS IT THAT SOMETIMES MY ELECTED OFFICIAL CAN'T MEET WITH ME UNTIL A MONTH AFTER I ASK FOR A MEETING? I'M HIS/HER CONSTITUENT – I VOTE FOR HIM/HER. DOESN'T THAT MEAN ANYTHING?**

Elected officials representing larger constituencies, such as state representatives or Governors are asked to meet with individual constituents, lobbyists, and government/administration officials every day. When the legislature is in session, it can be extremely difficult to get an appointment. It is important to be flexible and plan ahead if you wish to meet with a Member of Congress.

Elected officials in smaller, local governments, however, are typically more accessible although their schedules, as well, can be very busy.

**13. WHY DO ELECTED OFFICIALS HAVE OTHER PEOPLE (STAFFERS) SIT IN ON OUR MEETING?**

Staff members and aides to elected officials are usually the experts on certain issues. Elected officials rely upon the staffers to research comments and request made in a meeting. Elected officials often ask their staff how to vote on issues.

**14. HOW DO WE KNOW THE ELECTED OFFICIAL WILL DO (OR FOLLOW UP ON) WHAT THEY SAY THEY'LL DO?**

After you have had a meeting with an elected official, follow-up with the staff member who sat in on the meeting (and there will most always be a staffer present, especially with members of the state and federal legislature). Make clear to the staffer what you are requesting and tell him/her that you would like to know where the elected official stands on the issue discussed.

**15. WHY DOES IT TAKE MEMBERS SO LONG TO RESPOND TO LETTERS, E-MAILS, OR PHONE CALLS?**

In offices of elected officials -- especially those of state and federal legislatures -- issues and agendas are in a constant state of flux. As a result, it can sometimes take a while to get a response from an office. This is especially true if the issue of concern is under consideration at the exact time that you write or call – or, conversely, if the issue is *not* expected to receive committee or floor consideration any time soon.

**16. IF I KNOW THE ELECTED OFFICIAL NEVER VOTES OUR WAY,  
WHY EVEN BOTHER TO GO SEE HIM/HER OR WRITE/CONTACT  
HIM/HER?**

Communication is key to a relationship. There is generally one issue out there that can serve as a point of agreement between you and an elected official. Keeping the line of communication open can help you out when that one issue does come up. Furthermore, if you listen to an opponent's side of an issue, you are better able to develop your own arguments in support of your position.