

# COMMUNICATIONS

Your success as an SPA rests heavily on your ability to maintain communications with decision-makers, the Washington office, and sections – your grassroots. Much of today’s communication consists of email and web interaction. Be sure to stay on top of the latest news and information by regularly checking email and filtering appropriate information to sections. And, be sure to utilize the NCJW website, [www.ncjw.org](http://www.ncjw.org), to communicate with federal legislators.

At times, however, it is preferable to use alternate means of communication, including the phone or fax. Making a personal call – either to a section leader or a decision-maker – can often be perceived as more thoughtful or urgent. Also, some legislators at both the state and federal level prefer to receive faxes with NCJW’s position on an issue. If you know your legislator prefers this, be sure to fax any position papers or letters in addition to sending emails.

The Washington office utilizes several different methods of communication with SPAs – emailed action alerts, communication via the [NCJWSPA@shamash.org](mailto:NCJWSPA@shamash.org) listserv, and monthly or bi-monthly publication of *SPAction*, which provides legislative updates, SPA network news, and information about upcoming events. Be sure to read all communications from the Washington office, and when appropriate, share it with your sections. And, if there is something you would like to share with your sister SPAs, please use the SPA listserv or email the Washington office for possible inclusion in an upcoming edition of *SPAction*.

## COMMUNICATION WITH SECTIONS

One of your first tasks as SPA is to write a letter to the section presidents in your state introducing yourself and letting them know that you are available as a resource. It is a good idea to modify the letter and send it out yearly as new section presidents take office. Continued communication with your sections is crucial so that sections can take an active role in advocacy efforts in your state and so that your advocacy program is responsive to section needs and interests.

### HOW TO:

Here are some ideas on how to maintain effective communication with sections:

- ▶ **Emails** are the best way to keep sections informed and updated about legislative news. Please develop and circulate your own NCJW alerts about state legislative issues. You can base them on state alerts sent out by other groups, but you should personalize them to NCJW. Please **do not** forward federal alerts from NCJW – rather, urge members from your state to sign up directly with NCJW to receive time-sensitive federal alerts at <http://action.ncjw.org/ncjw/join.html>. **Under no circumstances** should you ever forward an alert about a federal issue from another organization to your list.
- ▶ **Phone calls** should be used to follow up on action alerts when time is of the essence, or when you want to establish more personal contacts. Also, if you

have members who do not have access to email, you may want to establish a phone tree to alert them about important issues.

- ▶ **Articles** should be written and placed in section bulletins regularly. They are a cost-effective way of reaching the state-wide NCJW membership. *Remember to obtain bulletin deadlines from sections at the start of the club year.*
- ▶ **Scheduled section visits**, or opportunities to speak at a section board or general meeting, are effective ways to highlight SPA activities and advocacy priorities.
- ▶ **SPA Newsletters** are another way of keeping sections informed of SPA issues and priorities. And, sections will often use segments of the newsletters for their bulletins.

## TO WHOM:

- ▶ You should be sure to regularly communicate with the following:
  - Section presidents (receives copies of everything you send to section leaders)
  - Section vice president of public affairs and other leaders who deal with advocacy and issues
  - Section vice president of community service (if appropriate)
  - SPA Committee in your state
  - Washington office and SPA coordinator(s) should all receive copies of everything you send to sections
  - NCJW board members residing in your state
  - Commissioners for the sections in your state
  - Section vice president of publicity and/or bulletin editor

## WHEN:

Here are some tips on when you should communicate with those listed above:

- ▶ Before a legislative session, solicit section input on upcoming legislation and issues.
- ▶ During a legislative session, keep sections up-to-date with regular updates and action alerts.
- ▶ Regularly schedule SPA meetings, when possible, to provide an opportunity to reach the sections through their appointed SPA committee representative.

- ▶ Follow up on action alerts to ensure that sections have taken appropriate action and to determine if further action would be helpful.
- ▶ State Legislative Institute, a state version of Washington Institute, provides an ideal opportunity for personal contact with and direct feedback to and from section membership.

## **IN A SINGLE SECTION STATE**

Single section state SPAs face a unique situation. In some ways, your task is easier because you only have to focus on one section. In other ways, it is more complicated. Lines of responsibility and accountability are more difficult to separate between section officers and the nationally appointed SPA and thus require early clarification to ensure success and cooperation.

***Work closely with the Vice President of Public Affairs.*** In a single section state, the two of you in many ways *job share*. In a state with multiple sections, the SPA has a distinct role, that of coordinating all state efforts. In a single section state, this is not necessary. In reality, you and the VP public affairs share a similar job description. You *must negotiate in advance* which responsibilities are yours and which are those of the VP – this needs to be a mutual decision so that you are not duplicating each other's efforts nor causing unnecessary conflict.

Some possible job divisions include:

- ▶ The SPA handles federal and state advocacy while the VP does local advocacy.
- ▶ The SPA attends state coalition meetings, while the VP coordinates grassroots activity needs generated by the coalition.
- ▶ The SPA works on developing an advocacy presence with legislators outside of the section's district while the VP concentrates on those representing the section's district.

Regardless of how you divide responsibilities, ***be clear and specific and communicate regularly.*** As SPA, you will be the primary contact with the Washington office. You will therefore need to have clear and open lines of communication with the VP public affairs. Keep each other up to date on what you are doing to fulfill your responsibilities. ***If you work together, you can be twice as effective.***

## **COMMUNICATIONS WITH COMMUNITY LEADERS & PUBLIC OFFICIALS**

Contacts – the more you have, the more effective you'll be! The more interest you show in public officials and other community leaders and the more you communicate with them, the more receptive they will be and the harder it will be for them to say "no" when NCJW needs their support.

Be sure to keep the Washington office informed about your contacts to enable more effective communication in our federal advocacy efforts.

### **STATE & LOCAL OFFICIALS**

- ▶ The general rule is that each section should develop and maintain contact with locally elected officials. SPAs should coordinate contact for officials appointed or elected state-wide.
- ▶ It may be helpful to assign SPA committee members from each section to develop relationships with local legislators.

### **NON-ELECTED LEADERS & OFFICIALS**

It is critical to remember that it is not only elected officials who can help you achieve your advocacy goals and identify issues. Consider the impact you can make when the following types of individuals are familiar with NCJW's work and advocacy priorities:

- ▶ Officers of other Jewish organizations – many Jewish organizations have legislative action committees
- ▶ Officers and activists from other women's organizations
- ▶ Leaders and activists from special interest groups, such as Planned Parenthood, etc. Even if NCJW's primary legislative focus does not match theirs right now, you never know when you might need their help.
- ▶ Academia from local universities who are also active in the community. Such individuals often wield great influence.
- ▶ Staff in governmental offices and departments as well as state legislative staffers
- ▶ Any special commissions, i.e., Commission on the Status of Women, etc.

The list of people who might help achieve NCJW advocacy goals and whom, in return, NCJW can help, is endless. Not everyone can help all the time, but you never know until you ask. Often, the person who says “no” once might in fact say “yes” on another occasion. Be persistent!