

## Reaching Out to Decision-Makers

Advocacy is all about action — action aimed at persuading decision-makers to support your point of view. Speaking out on important issues — in person, on the phone, via letters, faxes, or emails, as an individual or in a group — is essential to successful advocacy. Make the most of the opportunity to express your views to decision-makers at all levels of government and administration. These tips apply to communication with any decision-maker, whether it is a federal legislator, state representative, school board president, or CEO from a pharmacy chain's corporate headquarters.

- ▶ Do your homework. Find out who the key decision-makers are — those who can make a difference on your issue of concern. Learn as much as possible about the issue.
- ▶ Choose the means of communicating that is most comfortable for you and most effective in influencing the decision-maker. There are many ways to make your views known. The important thing is to take action.
- ▶ Be specific about what you want to achieve. What do you want the decision-maker to do?
- ▶ Have a clear, focused purpose for your action. Address one issue at a time. And use the facts. The more prepared you are, the more persuasive you can be. And, if possible, mention the benefits to the decision-maker of following your suggested course of action.
- ▶ With legislators, communicate as a constituent. Show the legislator or official how his or her constituency is specifically affected by or concerned about the issue. With other decision-makers, make clear how you are affected by the issue — as a consumer, neighbor, parent in the school community, etc.
- ▶ Be courteous and reliable. Don't promise what you cannot deliver in terms of help or information. In communications, include your contact information. Always follow up on requests for additional materials or further clarification.
- ▶ On visits, bring others along — a diverse group of constituents or groups is more influential than just one person. With other forms of communication, do outreach to increase the number of contacts about the issue directed at the decision maker.
- ▶ Remember the *Ten Commandments of Advocacy* (included at the back of this section of the toolkit) — a good guideline for contacts with decision-makers.

## TIPS FOR CALLING LEGISLATORS

Often the decision-maker on a Plan A issue will be a legislator. Here are some tips for getting in touch with them. Most legislative offices keep track of calls from constituents on various issues and report the number of calls they get to the legislators themselves on a regular basis. Calling your legislator's office to register your opinion is an important way to advocate for the issues you care about.

- ▶ **Calling a Member of Congress:** Call the US Capitol Switchboard at 202 224 3121 and ask to be connected to your legislator's office. You may also call the member of Congress outside of Washington in their district office (check the local phone book for those numbers).
- ▶ **Calling a State or Local Legislator:** Information on contacting state and local officials can be found online at [www.statelocalgov.net](http://www.statelocalgov.net).
- ▶ Give your name and address to the person answering the phone so that it is clear you are a constituent.
- ▶ Clearly explain your position on the issue (only address one issue per call) and what you would like the legislator to do (vote for or against a bill, etc.).
- ▶ If you have questions or want additional information, ask to speak with the staff person who works on the issue you are concerned about (for example: "May I speak with the staff person who works on family planning issues?").

## TIPS FOR MAKING A PERSONAL VISIT TO A LEGISLATOR

Meeting with a member of Congress, a state or local legislator, or a staff member is an effective way to convey a message about a specific issue or legislative matter. Face-to-face meetings are important ways to build relationships with your elected officials and their staff.

- ▶ Call ahead to the legislator's office to make an appointment. Ask to speak to the scheduler.
- ▶ Often you will have to fax a written request. Include the number of people joining you and what issues you want to discuss.
- ▶ Be prompt. If the legislator or official is late, be patient and flexible.
- ▶ Don't be disappointed if your meeting is with a staff person or if your meeting starts with the public official and ends with staff. There is great value in educating and building a relationship with the key staff people on your issues — they play a vital role in decision-making in the legislative process.

- ▶ Bring some succinct written materials outlining your position and leave them with the person you are visiting.
- ▶ Follow up on the meeting with a thank-you letter outlining what was covered and reiterate your main message on the issue. Include more materials such as a Plan A fact sheet if that might be helpful.

## TIPS FOR FOLLOWING UP ON A VISIT

- ▶ **Meeting Report:** After your visit, make sure to write a brief summary of what took place. It should include the following:
  - ▶ Date, time, and name of person with whom you met
  - ▶ Questions asked by the legislator or staff person
  - ▶ Follow-up materials or information requested
  - ▶ Any comments gathered concerning the legislator’s willingness to support the issue on which you were advocating

Keep this information for future reference, and share it with any concerned coalition partners you might be working with. If you need additional materials for follow up, contact NCJW’s Washington office ([action@ncjwdc.org](mailto:action@ncjwdc.org)) or any of the organizations listed in the *Resources* section of this toolkit.

- ▶ **Thank-You Letter:** It is very important to write a thank-you letter to the individual(s) with whom you met. This letter serves both as a courtesy and as a written reminder of what took place at the meeting. This letter should include:
  - ▶ Date and time of the visit
  - ▶ General “Thank you for your time”
  - ▶ Issues discussed and why they are important to you
  - ▶ Reminder of the action you are asking the legislator to take (e.g. if the person with whom you spoke made a commitment to co-sponsor, support, or oppose a specific piece of legislation, you should express your gratitude and remind him or her of this commitment)

- ▶ Follow-up materials (if during your visit, the individual with whom you met requested additional information or materials, you should include this information in the letter or provide him or her with an idea of when to expect the information)
- ▶ Signatures and contact information for everyone who made the visit
- ▶ This letter should be faxed or emailed to ensure a timely delivery.

## TIPS FOR WRITING TO PUBLIC OFFICIALS

Like phone calls, legislative offices keep track of emails from constituents on various issues and report the numbers to the legislators on a regular basis. Sending an email to your member of Congress, state legislator, or local official is another crucial way to advocate for the issues you care about.

- ▶ Email is an easy and efficient way to send a message to your legislators. Be sure to sign up for the Plan A campaign on the NCJW website, [www.ncjw.org](http://www.ncjw.org). Use it to send a pre-written letter to decision-makers on selected topics relating to Plan A. (You may edit the pre-written letter when it appears on your screen.) NCJW will send you periodic alerts asking you to take action. (Note: currently, letters sent through the NCJW website are sent only to federal legislators. Visit your state or local official's website to contact them via email.)
- ▶ If you are writing a letter of your own, it is best to send it by email or fax. You may need to call the legislative office or look on their website (US Senate: [www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov); US House of Representatives: [www.house.gov](http://www.house.gov); state or locality websites: [www.statelocalgov.net](http://www.statelocalgov.net)) to find the email address or fax number. Letters sent through the post office go through a rigorous and lengthy security process once they arrive at Congress, slowing delivery by several days or more. The same may be true for local legislative offices, which is why email or fax is preferable.
- ▶ Clearly state your purpose at the beginning of your letter, including the bill name and number and what you would like the legislator to do.
- ▶ When possible, include personal examples of why you support or oppose the particular issue.
- ▶ Address only one issue in each letter and keep your message short and succinct.
- ▶ Unless you are an official NCJW spokesperson, your letters should be sent by you as an individual and not in the name of the organization.

## TIPS FOR SENDING EMAILS

When addressing an email to a public official, follow the same suggestions as for a printed letter. For the subject line of your email, identify your message by topic or bill number.

The body of your message should use this format:

Your Name  
Address  
City, State Zip Code

Dear [Title] [Last Name],

Insert your message here...

### Addressing Correspondence to a US Senator

The Honorable [Full Name]  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator [Last Name]:

### Addressing Correspondence to a US Representative

The Honorable [Full Name]  
House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr./Mrs./Ms. [Last Name]:

### Addressing Correspondence to a State or Local Official

The Honorable [Full Name]  
[Your State Name] State [Senate or Assembly/House of Representatives]  
State Capitol Building Room \_\_\_\_\_  
City, State, ZIP Code

Dear Representative/Senator/Assemblyman [Last Name]:

## CONGRESSIONAL STAFF ROLES

Each member of Congress has staff to assist her or him with legislative work. To be effective in communicating with Congress, it is helpful to know the titles and principal functions of key staff. Often, meeting with a key staffer can be even more effective than meeting with a member in person. Congressional staffers are policy experts in their fields and often wield significant influence in shaping their bosses' legislative priorities.

### Appointment Secretary/Scheduler

The appointment secretary/scheduler is usually responsible for allocating the senator or representative's time among the many demands that arise from congressional responsibilities, staff requirements, and constituent requests. The appointment secretary may also be responsible for making necessary travel arrangements, arranging speaking dates, visits to the district, etc. This is the staff person you should contact to arrange a personal visit with your legislator or a member of his or her staff.

### Chief of Staff

The chief of staff (CoS) reports directly to the member of Congress. She or he usually has overall responsibility for evaluating the political outcomes of various legislative proposals and constituent requests. The CoS is usually the person in charge of overall office operations, including the assignment of work and the supervision of key staff.

### Legislative Director

The legislative director (LD) is usually the staff person who monitors the legislative schedule and makes recommendations regarding the pros and cons of particular issues. If you schedule a visit with your member of Congress, it is possible that the LD or a legislative aide will also be present during the meeting.

### Legislative Aide/Assistant

The legislative aide/assistant (LA) is responsible for legislative analysis and has expertise in specific areas. Depending on the responsibilities and interests of the member of Congress, an office may have a different LA for women's issues, education, welfare, etc. This is the person you should speak with if you call a congressional office with questions or for additional information about a particular issue.

## STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT RESOURCES

On many of the issues related to the Plan A campaign, your state and local governments may prove to be more relevant than the federal government. Make sure to also keep track of what your local or state school boards have on their agendas, especially relating to comprehensive sexuality education.

As with scheduling a meeting with a member of Congress, you may end up meeting with a staff person. Keep in mind that these meetings are as important as meeting with the legislator.

- ▶ A directory of official state, county, and local government websites can be found online at [www.statelocalgov.net](http://www.statelocalgov.net).
- ▶ The Library of Congress state and local government resource page can be found online at [www.loc.gov/rr/news/stategov/stategov.html](http://www.loc.gov/rr/news/stategov/stategov.html).
- ▶ For specific information about your county government (which often plays a key role in the staffing and supply of public health facilities), visit the website of the National Association of Counties: [www.naco.org](http://www.naco.org).
- ▶ The National School Boards Association offers resources to find out how to keep up with your local school board. It can be found online at [www.nsba.org/site/index.asp](http://www.nsba.org/site/index.asp).