

HOW TO BUILD A RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR LEGISLATOR

Why Build a Relationship?

When it comes to the programs they fund, legislators need to know how a program is working and what impact it is having. That story is best told by local people because no paid lobbyist in Madison can make as compelling case about what impact the program is having locally.

Having an ongoing relationship with your legislator allows you to remind them all year long, not just during the budget season (every two years), that the money they've invested in the tobacco control program is having a positive impact on the people in the district and the state.

Communication is the basis for a good relationship with your legislator. There are many different ways and avenues to communicate with your legislator. The ideas listed below are good starting points. Once you have established a rapport and relationship, communication between you and the legislator can become more regular and casual.

Who Is My Legislator?

Find out who your legislators are at <http://waml.legis.state.wi.us/>

Getting to Know Your Legislator

Before running into your legislator or setting up a time to meet, it is helpful to know what their work background is as well as hobbies and interests they may have. You may have some things in common with them and that can be helpful conversation starters. If you have a newly elected legislator, or don't know him or her well, here are some tips to starting the communication.

- Do some background reading about your legislator: <http://www.legis.state.wi.us/>
- The Wheeler Report is also a good resource: <http://www.thewheelerreport.com>
- Contact our advocacy partners, American Heart Association, American Lung Association, and American Cancer Society. All these organizations have regular contact with lawmakers and can share what they have gleaned from the legislator about their feelings on the tobacco control and prevention program.

- Attend events in the district. Lawmakers love to be seen at a variety of events. Often times you can keep track of where they're going to be in the community by keeping an eye on the local paper.
- Ask a legislator to come and speak to your service club, union, or coalition.
- Drop by during office hours that they hold in the district to introduce yourself, nothing more. But you may want to be prepared if they ask questions.

Keeping the Dialogue Going

Remember that your goal is developing a long term relationship with legislators. Regular in-person meetings between constituents and legislators are critical, but also think about ways to communicate with them between meetings:

- Invite legislators to appropriate coalition meetings and events.
- Send monthly/quarterly newspaper clippings about your work.
- Add them to your newsletter mailing list.

General Reminders

- Take the long view of this relationship. You will likely interact on many issues over the years.
- Threatening, bluffing, misrepresenting information, or talking badly about people who disagree with you is not constructive.
- You are much more likely to build a good relationship by staying positive and focused on public interest.
- Don't minimize the importance of the legislator's staff – we want them to understand our work, too.