



Communicating with Policy Makers

Isaac Northrop

Vice President of Government Affairs

Ockerman Consulting

Advocacy 101, Am I lobbying or advocating?

- Lobbying defined: seek to *influence* (a politician or public official) on an issue.
 - In Ohio this is very narrow and involves asking an elected official to support or oppose a particular bill. “Please vote FOR HB 100. Please vote AGAINST SB 200.”
- Advocacy can be lobbying, but is much broader. It includes educating policymakers, without asking them to support or oppose a particular measure.
 - “Representative Smith, infant mortality is at an all time high in our county and the state needs to enact policies to counter that trend.”
- Advocacy is typically 90% educating and discussing issues and 10% lobbying!

Why is Advocacy & Lobbying important to you?

- 'No man's life, liberty, or property are safe while the legislature is in session' –Gideon Tucker
- In Ohio we have a 'Part-time legislature' that in practice operates more than many would believe a part-time legislature would.
- Legislators make decisions based upon a variety of factors, most crucial of those factors is the information they are presented...this means we must have a seat at the table and educate lawmakers from the perspective of Public Health.

Getting started

- A relationship with a legislator is like any other partnership. Trust is essential and takes time.
- Be proactive and reach out, don't wait until you need something.
 - If you know who your legislator will be even before the election, you can start talking to them before they are seated in Columbus.
 - Use natural opportunities like county fairs, political dinners, ribbon cuttings, etc. as a way to introduce yourself!
- Start with your background, and the background of your health district.
 - Invite them to tour your office.
 - Explain what a health district does, your programs, how you are funded, your local partners, etc.
 - Dispel myths about public health (it's not just needles and masks!)
 - Present data and anecdotal examples of how public health benefits their constituents. Talk about the people you serve!
 - Leave your initial meeting with an understanding that the legislator can call you any time they have questions about legislation or need assistance with a constituent.

Getting started-continued

- Do you know who your Senator and Representative is?
 - If not, use the legislative website and follow the steps from module 3!
- Steps to begin cultivating a relationship
 - Reach out for a meeting or have a first interaction
 - You can reach out to them directly if you have their contact info or reach out to their Statehouse office seeking an introductory meeting either in their district or in Columbus.
 - Consider reaching out through a mutual friend or perhaps board member. A warm introduction is always preferable.
 - The first time you meet is NOT the time for 'an ask'. Just focus on getting to know each other, professionally and personally. You can ask about their family, what they are working on at the Statehouse, or even share information with them about what you are seeing in your shared constituency.
 - Attempt to build rapport with them with the ultimate goal of building trust and establishing yourself as a credible resource and local expert for all things public health. This will likely take time and not occur after your first meeting but keep that goal in-mind.

Keeping relationships fresh

- As you begin to know your legislator better and develop the relationship, look for opportunities to be allies and be helpful to them.
 - This can take shape in a variety of ways including but not limited to supplying them with information and resources, inviting them to your events and board meetings or attending their events. Include them on your email distribution lists so they become acclimated to receiving information from you.
 - Keep apprised on what's going on in Columbus so you know what to discuss with them. AOHC is a resource to help with this!
 - Get to know their staff.
 - Work to have monthly or quarterly meetings with your legislators.

Moving from acquaintance to trusted partner

- Maintaining a good relationship with your legislator is critical and invaluable – we DO NOT want to only be interacting with them during times of need or during times of high-tension.
- Look to keep them updated on what you are hearing locally or globally. They, like all of us, have extremely busy schedules and are not always fully up-to-date with all current happenings!
 - They will appreciate your efforts to keep them 'in the know' with relevant information. For example, make them aware of upcoming clinics. Share you CHA's, CHIP's and annual reports with them. And if there is a disease outbreak or event in your district, give them the heads up before they hear about it in the news.
 - Feel free to share your positions on legislation with them or offer suggestions for ways they can improve the health of their constituents.
 - Keep a regular cadence of communication.

Tips

- Research your legislator's background. Try to determine their past experiences with public health (Were they a trustee, county commissioner, or city council member? Are they a business owner whose business was regulated by public health? Do they have a public health degree or professional experience in health care?).

Tips

- Consider being introduced through a mutual friend or partner.
 - Do they have relationships with your board members?
 - Is there a partner at the chamber of commerce or other local agency like an ADAMH board that can introduce you or even attend the first meeting with you?
 - Consider utilizing these partners and local coalitions to strengthen your ongoing relationship with your legislators.

Tips

- To the extent you can, avoid political discussions. Public health is not a red or blue issue.
- Have an elevator speech ready to go. If you bump into your legislator and have five minutes to talk to them, what will you say?

Tips

- Unless otherwise determined through your research, assume the legislator knows very little about public health, or may even have misunderstandings about public health.
- Avoid acronyms!



Questions?

Contact

Isaac Northrop

440-812-9268

isaac@ockermanconsulting.com

Aaron Ockerman

614-581-8238

aaron@ockermanconsulting.com