

# CALL TO ACTIONS & COMMUNICATING WITH ELECTED OFFICIALS

The OEA is skilled in carefully timing our communication around issues and legislation that require immediate attention. The most important part of this program is your participation.

## **Calls to Action Help Prepare You for Your Meeting**

Calls to action are issued by mail, telephone, fax or e-mail. They will describe the issue at hand and the College's position, give clear instructions for contacting your legislator and include a request for feedback to the OEA office.

Unless otherwise instructed, use the communication method you are most comfortable with to communicate quickly and effectively. Although it may not be feasible to schedule a meeting with a legislator on short notice, face-to-face contact is the most effective means of communication.

It is imperative that the OEA receive any information about the position of your legislator.

## **Face-to-Face**

Personal visits are the most effective form of lobbying. Always introduce yourself and let them know where you live in their district.

Below are some specific suggestions to consider when meeting with an elected official.

- **Plan your visit carefully.** Make an appointment by contacting the legislator's staff and let them know what you wish to discuss. Be clear about what it is you want to achieve and have a mental agenda.
- **Be Patient**  
It isn't uncommon for a legislator to be detained because of constant demands on his/her schedule.
- **Be a Good Listener**  
It's important to the legislator to have his/her view heard. Their comments and questions should provide insight for follow-up materials.
- **Be Responsive**  
Express to the legislator your willingness to get more information if he/she expresses interest or asks questions you're not prepared to answer.
- **Keep it Short**  
Keep it short and to the point. Close the meeting quickly by summarizing key points. Always be sure to thank the legislator for his or her time.
- **Send a Follow-up Letter**  
It's important to send a thank-you letter to the legislator and any staff who assisted you during your visit.
- **Contact the OEA**

Communicate with the OEA by submitting a [Legislator Contact Form](#) or by telephone.

## **By Telephone**

Telephone contact may be the most sensible form of communication due to the timing of calls to action. Below are some suggestions for making effective contact via telephone:

- **Be Prepared**  
Be sure to have the appropriate information in front of you, such as the bill number or subject matter and be familiar with the key points of your position.
- **Be Considerate**  
Be considerate and friendly to the legislator's staff. You may not be able to speak with the legislator on your initial call. Most incoming calls are received by legislative aides or the legislator's administrative assistant. These staff members are usually well informed and should be treated with the same respect you would give the legislator.
- **Follow Up**  
Once you have had a phone conversation with the legislator, send a follow-up note restating the University's position and thanking them for his/her consideration. When appropriate, send the staff a thank you note as well.
- **Contact Us**  
Contact the Advocates staff. Communicate with the Advocates staff by sending a Legislator Contact Form.

## By Letter Writing

Below are some simple guidelines to follow when sending letters to members of the General Assembly:

- **Use Personalized Stationery**  
Stationery should always include your name, return address and a phone number if you wish to receive a response. College employees are prohibited from using stationery printed at the expense of the college.
- **Include the Bill Number**  
Include the bill number of the subject matter. When writing about a particular piece of legislation always include the bill number, title and subject matter.
- **Keep it Short and Simple**  
Express your opinion clearly and strongly but don't be threatening or offensive. Cover one topic per letter and state your message within the first two paragraphs. Subsequent paragraphs can be used to expand on your position but should be kept to a minimum.
- **Use Your Own Words**  
Use the call to action issued by the OEA as a guide, but don't copy the text verbatim. Use a personal touch by mentioning something unique to the legislator and your district. Form letters have not proven to be effective.
- **Ask for a Specific Reply**  
Respectfully request the legislator's support on the issue and a follow-up letter stating his/her position or response.
- **Copy the OEA**  
Forward a copy of your written correspondence and any response you receive from the legislator.

## How to Address An Elected Official

### Governor

The Honorable (John J. Smith) Governor of Tennessee  
State Capitol Building  
Nashville, TN 37203  
Dear Governor (Smith);

### Senator

The Honorable (first and last name)  
Tennessee Senate  
State Capitol Building  
Nashville, TN 37203  
Dear Senator (last name)

### House of Representatives

The Honorable (first and last name)  
Iowa House of Representatives  
State Capitol Building  
Des Moines, IA 50319  
Dear Representative (last name):  
How to address a legislator in person  
Senator (last name)  
Representative (last name)

## Communicating with Legislative Staff

Legislative staff should always be treated with the same respect as the legislators themselves. The staff are responsible for setting agendas, conveying messages and orchestrating the legislative calendar. They often do most, if not all, research about current bills and issues.

### Pay special attention to the following items when communicating with staff members:

- **Always be polite.** Go out of your way to introduce yourself and develop a personal relationship.
- **Express your gratitude.** Mention the assistance of the staff when sending follow-up notes.

## Opposing Viewpoints

Legislators will not always share your point of view. They may completely oppose your position and the position of the College. The manner in which you handle this situation may determine the legislators' willingness to accept your position in the future.

Use the following tips to work through opposing views:

- **Thank the legislator.** Express your gratitude to the legislator or staff member for listening to you and expressing his or her position.
- **Agree to disagree.** Respectfully refute your legislator's arguments and make a few strong points that reflect your position.
- **Be thought provoking.** Ask a few questions that will encourage the legislator to think about your position and help you better understand his or her position.

## Building Personal Relationships

One of the most important tasks of grassroots networking is building or enhancing personal relationships. Communication and effective follow-up is key to enhancing relationships with legislators and their staff.

**Here are some ways to keep the lines of communication open:**

- **Be personal and friendly.** Learn about their professional background, personal interest groups, family, hobbies, etc.
- **Be familiar.** Keep your name and the University of Iowa Advocates in front of your legislators and staff, e.g., send articles, clips and other information about issues of interest.
- **Be gracious.** Thank your legislator for committee and floor votes on your issue and congratulate them for professional and personal achievements, such as committee assignments, etc.
- **Host your legislator.** Invite and escort legislators to University of Iowa Alumni Club meetings and other university events.
- **Be involved.** Become active in your community by volunteering on campaigns and becoming involved in community issues.