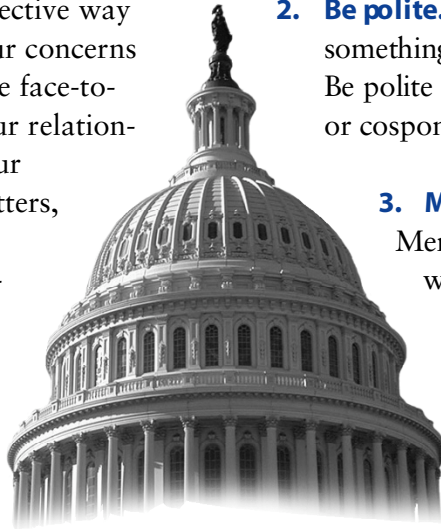


Communicating with Congress

Emails, Letters, Faxes, and Phone Calls

In-person lobby visits are the most effective way for you as a constituent to convey your concerns to your legislators. In addition to these face-to-face meetings, other ways to build your relationship and share your concerns with your elected officials are through emails, letters, faxes, and phone calls. Congressional offices receive thousands of communications a month. How can you increase the chance that your message will get noticed?



1. Individualize your message.

Congressional staff say that all communication is important, but messages with some personal content are more effective. Form or mass-produced messages have less effect than individualized messages. If you have time, personalize the message by adding your own voice. One personalized message carries more weight than 10 form postcards or letters.

2. Be polite. Ask, don't tell, your legislator to do something. Staff tend to dismiss angry constituents. Be polite and thank your legislator for a previous vote or cosponsorship to increase your persuasiveness.

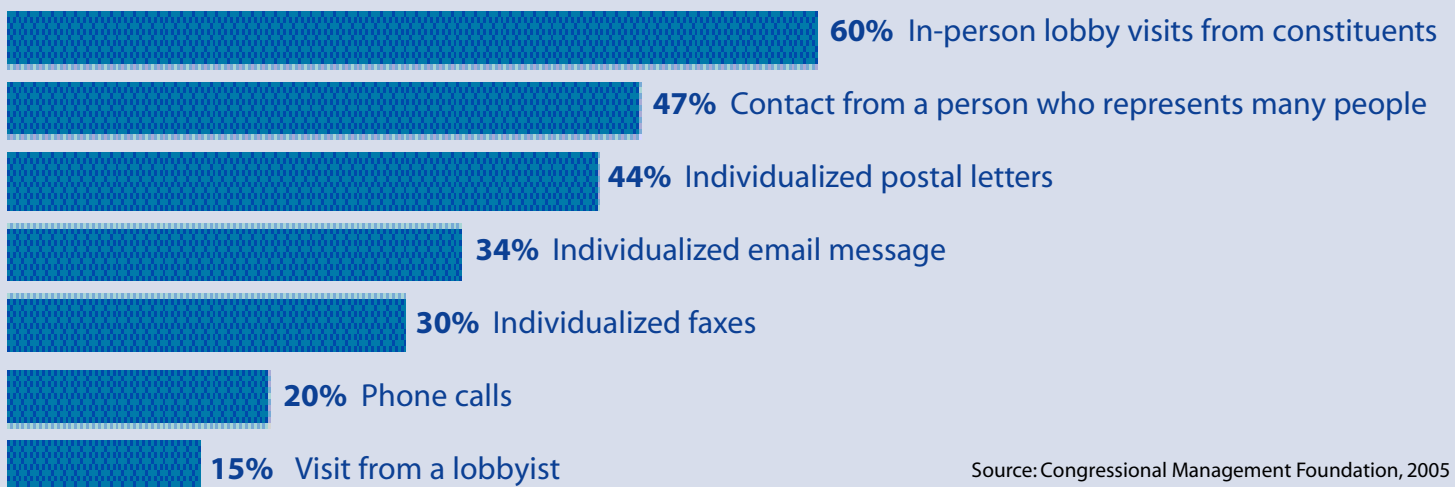
3. Make a specific request and be concise.

Mention a bill number or name, if possible. "I would like Rep. John Doe to cosponsor H.R. 1234, the Alternative Energy Act," is more effective than saying "I would like Rep. John Doe to support the environment." Try to keep your message to one or two paragraphs; staff are too busy to read messages that are several pages long.

4. Include your postal address, and contact only your own representative and senators. It is tempting to write other legislators who are key decision makers. However, most offices discard messages from non-constituents. Include your postal address, especially in emails, to show that you are a constituent.

More...

Congressional staff who think the following strategies have a lot of influence on a legislator who is undecided on an issue



Source: Congressional Management Foundation, 2005
www.cmfweb.org

- 5. **Send emails and faxes, when possible.** As a result of the anthrax attacks in 2001, all postal letters to Congress are first sent to Ohio to be irradiated, delaying delivery by as much as three to five weeks. Phone calls are the least effective method of communication, except when a vote on your issue is scheduled within a day or two.
- 6. **Make your message timely.** If you know a vote is approaching, try to email your representative and senators at least one to two weeks in advance. Letters take longer. On some issues, such as the war in Iraq and oil prices, there might not be impending votes, but legislators still need to hear from their constituents to gauge where the electorate stands.
- 7. **Encourage others in your congressional district or state to contact your legislators about the same issue.** Your message is important, but organizing a letter-writing campaign with your family and friends on a specific topic multiplies the impact of your efforts. Including a community leader such as a clergy member, elected official, or businessperson as a voice in the campaign will increase the chances of a message generating attention. Writing a letter on a company or organization's letterhead will get increased attention.

- 8. **“Adopt” an issue.** Maximize your influence by writing your legislators about only one or two issues and no more than once every few weeks. Focusing your communications on one or two issues can make you an “expert” in the eyes of the office.
- 9. **Capitalize on the local angle.** Include a newspaper article (or cut and paste it for an email). For example, if you are writing your member of Congress about rising energy prices, clip and send an article about oil companies' profits along with a quote from a resident who is unable to afford rising gas and energy costs.

Emails, letters, faxes, and phone calls are important ways to express your views and begin to build relationships with your members of Congress. Another approach is to write letters to the editor of your local newspaper. If you include your legislator's name, your letter will likely get noticed by his or her staff.

To find the contact information for your members of Congress, go to www.fcnl.org, click on “Contact Congress” in the left column, and then enter your ZIP code.

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“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

~Margaret Mead



Do you want to lobby your members of Congress but are intimidated or just need some helpful guidance? Download this free one-page flyer by going to www.fcnl.org and clicking on “Grassroots Toolkit” on the left column and then scroll down the page.