



## Tips for Communicating With Members of Congress

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## General Tips for Using this Guide

- When communicating legislative information, particularly a call-to-action with large employer members, it may be most effective to include the contacts for the corporate government affairs department in addition to the key coalition member representative for the corporation. Large corporation members have very segregated decision-making hierarchy, so the Human Resource personnel, who are typically the coalition member representatives, have very little involvement with government affairs-related activities of the corporation.
- Encourage the use of anecdotes and stories impacting the company, which usually carry more importance with legislators than just general statements about an issue.
- Develop a corporate government affairs contact list (lobbyist) for coalition legislative activities. However, continue to include your original, HR member contacts on your government affairs transmissions as well. Everyone needs to be in the loop.
- When sending a call-to-action letter to a Member of Congress or to a Congressional Standing Committee, there are two approaches to take as a coalition representing numerous employer/corporations:
  - 1) If you have specific employer support, the letter can be undersigned by all supporting employers.
  - 2) If you have been unable to garner substantial employer member support, perhaps the topic is controversial, provide your employer members with coverage by sending a more innocuous letter undersigned by just the coalition.
- E-mail and fax to their Washington D.C. office is the quickest and most efficient way to communicate with Members of Congress.
- Do some research in advance to find out, for example, who is the health care aide/staffer for your coalition's Representative or Senator. This type of information can be quickly determined by calling the Member's Washington D.C. office.
- Call or write a letter to introduce yourself as the representative of business coalition which represents several of the Member's employer constituents. Establishing this relationship in advance can really help to open doors when you actually have an issue or concern that needs to be brought to the Member's attention.
- In requesting a district office appointment, it would be helpful to first review the House/Senate calendar to identify when your Member will be in the district or state during a recess or district work period.

## Tips for Conducting Legislative Advocacy as a Non-profit

It has come to our attention that some of our members have misconceptions about what they can and cannot do in terms of federal legislative advocacy as non-profit, 501(c)3 and 501(c)6 organizations. Several members of NBCH's Government Affairs Committee oversee active coalition policy advocacy programs at both the state and federal level, so they are quite knowledgeable about federal and state lobbying/advocacy rules. The Committee thought it would be helpful to provide a basic primer on lobbying as a non-profit, and also provided some of their best resources, listed below, that can help you better understand and keep-up with state and federal lobbying laws. **Ultimately, we would like for all of our members to maximize their rights and capabilities to interact with their elected officials.**

- 1) **OMB Watch:** [www.ombwatch.org](http://www.ombwatch.org). The first national research effort designed to investigate the public policy role of nonprofit organizations exempt under 501(c)(3) of the tax code, which are called charities. The goals of the research are to determine nonprofits level of involvement in public policy issues, and to identify factors that motivate their involvement as well as impede them.
- 2) **The Independent Sector (IS):** <http://www.independentsector.org/programs/gr/lobbyguide.html>. An organization which promotes policies that enable the charitable community to engage with public officials on a nonpartisan basis, particularly policies to protect advocacy rights of nonprofits and to promote tax incentives for charitable giving. The IS has published a thorough and inexpensive book, *The Nonprofit Lobbying Guide*, which demonstrates the many ways nonprofits can use lobbying to advance their causes in federal, state, and local legislatures.
- 3) **Alliance for Justice:** <http://www.afj.org/nonprofit/about/faq/lobbying.html>. Provides helpful web-based presentations and other resources to help train non-profit organizations about their options relative to federal and state legislative advocacy. NBCH staff and GAC members have participated in these web casts and found them to be quite informative.
- 4) **The Advocacy Institute:** [www.advocacy.org](http://www.advocacy.org). The Advocacy Institute is a US-based international organization whose mission is to make social justice leadership strategic, effective and sustainable.
- 5) **Charity Lobbying in the Public Interest:** [www.clpi.org](http://www.clpi.org). The only organization whose focus is entirely on encouraging 501(c)(3) nonprofits to understand the importance of lobbying and speaking out on behalf of their constituents, causes and communities.
- 6) **National Council of Nonprofit Associations:** [www.ncna.org](http://www.ncna.org). Educates nonprofit members and policy makers about charities'

lobbying rights and responsibilities and encourage them to be more active in advocacy and lobbying activities.

### **Basic IRS Rules on Lobbying by 501(c)(3) Organizations**

According to the Internal Revenue Code:

- nonprofit organizations with 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status are organized "for charitable, religious, educational, or scientific purposes," (IRS Tax Code) and these organizations are subject to the rule that lobbying cannot be a substantial part of their activities.
- The organization's articles [constitution, by-laws] may not "expressly empower it to devote more than an insubstantial part of its activities to attempting to influence legislation by propaganda."
- 501(c)(3) organizations may not directly or indirectly participate in political campaigns by supporting or endorsing candidates for public office or by publishing or distributing statements on behalf of a candidate's campaign.
- 501(c)(3) organizations may lobby as long as that lobbying remains an insubstantial part of their activities.

**In *"How--and Why--to Influence Public Policy"* published by the Center for Community Change, lobbying is defined as follows:**

#### **Direct Lobbying**

Direct lobbying is communicating your views to a legislator or a staff member of any other government employee who may help develop the legislation. To be lobbying, you must communicate a view on a "specific legislative proposal." Even if there is no bill, you would engage in lobbying if you ask a legislator to take an action that would require legislation, such as funding an agency.

Significantly, if you ask your organization's members to lobby for a bill, that also is considered direct--not grassroots--lobbying. People are considered members if they contribute more than a nominal amount of time or money. If a newsletter article that goes to both members and non-members urges them to take action, the amount you would need to allocate to grassroots lobbying would be only the percentage of non-members who received your newsletter.

However, if you simply tell people about a specific piece of legislation and your position on it but you don't encourage them to contact their legislators, this is not considered to be lobbying.

Direct lobbying also involves trying to influence the public on referenda and ballot initiatives. In these cases, the public are, in essence, the legislators.

### **Grassroots Lobbying**

Grassroots lobbying is trying to influence the public to express a particular view to their legislators about a specific legislative proposal. A communication is considered lobbying (a "grassroots call to action") if it states that the readers should contact a legislator, or if it provides the legislator's address and/or telephone number, or provides a post card or petition that the person can use.

It is also considered a lobbying communication if you simply identify legislators who are opposed to or undecided about your view of the legislation, or identify that person's legislators, or state who is on the committee that will vote on the legislation. (This is called "indirect encouragement.") Simply identifying a bill's sponsor (the "Istook amendment") is not considered indirect encouragement.

Organizations that send out frequent "calls to action" urging their members to contact their legislators, organizations that employ an outside lobbyist or lobbying firm, and organizations that lobby through their employees should consult Section 501(h) of the Internal Revenue Tax Code for reporting rules and procedures.

#### **Tips on E-mailing Congress**

E-mail and fax are the quickest and most efficient way to communicate with Members of Congress. Due to increased security, regular mail often takes considerably longer than usual to reach Members' Capitol Hill and district/state offices. Generally, the same technical guidelines apply with e-mail as with writing letters to Congress. You may e-mail your senators and representatives directly on their official websites. Go to [www.house.gov](http://www.house.gov) or [www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov). Office fax numbers also can be found for specific Members at these website. Obviously, priority is given to constituent correspondence.

**Additionally, there are easy and direct ways to e-mail Members which are now publicly available:**

- 1) C-SPAN.org's Congressional Information Center website provides free contact information for federal, state and local elected officials.  
<http://www3.capwiz.com/c-span/home/>**
- 2) Congress.org is a free service of Capitol Advantage, a private, non-partisan company that specializes in facilitating civic participation.**

**Congress.org allows users to identify and contact elected leaders.**  
<http://www.congress.org/congressorg/directory/congdir.tt?command=congdir>

### **Tips on Writing Congress**

Like e-mail, letters are a popular choice of communication with a congressional office. If you decide to write a letter, this list of helpful suggestions will improve the effectiveness of the letter. Please keep in mind that the same rules apply to e-mail letters:

1. Your purpose for writing should be stated in the first paragraph of the letter. If your letter pertains to a specific piece of legislation, identify it accordingly, e.g., House bill: H. R. \_\_\_\_\_, Senate bill: S. \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Be courteous, to the point, and include key information, using examples to support your position, perhaps the impact of the legislation on the constituency you represent, i.e. business/health coalitions.
3. Address only one issue in each letter; and, if possible, keep the letter to one page.

### **Addressing Correspondence:**

#### **To a Senator:**

The Honorable (full name)  
\_\_(Rm.#)\_\_(name of)Senate Office Building  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator:

#### **To a Representative:**

The Honorable (full name)  
\_\_(Rm.#)\_\_(name of)House Office Building  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative:

**Note:** When writing to the Chair of a Committee or the Speaker of the House, it is proper to address them as:

Dear Mr. Chairman or Madam Chairwoman:

or Dear Mr. Speaker:

## **Tips on Telephoning Congress**

Telephoning your Member also is a viable option, though unless you have an established relationship with the Member or a specific staff person, this means of communication can prove to be challenging.

To contact your Members by phone, you may call the [U.S. Capitol Switchboard at \(202\)224-3121](#) and ask to be directly connected to your Senator or Representative's office or you can find the phone number on the Members official congressional website.

Remember that telephone calls are usually taken by a staff member, not the member of Congress. Ask to speak with the aide who handles the issue about which you wish to comment. Again, it helps to do some research in advance to find out, for example, who is the health care staffer and to call or write a letter to introduce you as the representative of business coalition which represents several of the Member's employer constituents. Establishing this relationship in advance can really help to open doors when you actually have an issue or concern that needs to be brought to a Member's attention. As you know, many of our issues are quite complex requiring a detailed explanation of our position, so it helps to have a willing ear in your Member's office.

If you simply are making an "initial cold call" without establishing a foundation/relationship with a Member's office, first identifying yourself, tell the aide you would like to leave a brief message, such as: "Please tell Senator/Representative (Name) that I support/oppose (S.\_\_\_\_/H.R.\_\_\_\_)." You will also want to state reasons for your support or opposition to the bill. Additionally, ask for your Member's position on the bill or issue. You may also request a written response to your telephone call.

## **Congressional Staff Roles**

Each member of Congress has staff to assist him/her during a term in office. To be most effective in communicating with Congress, it is helpful to know the titles and principal functions of key staff.

### **Commonly Used Titles:**

- **Administrative Assistant or Chief of Staff:**  
The Administrative Assistant reports directly to the member of Congress. He/she usually has overall responsibility for evaluating the political outcome of various legislative proposals and constituent requests. The Admin. Asst. is usually the person in charge of overall office operations, including the assignment of work and the supervision of key staff.
- **Legislative Director, Senior Legislative Assistant, or Legislative Coordinator:**

The Legislative Director is usually the staff person who monitors the legislative schedule and makes recommendations regarding the pros and cons of particular issues. In some congressional offices there are several Legislative Assistants and responsibilities are assigned to staff with particular expertise in specific areas. For example, depending on the responsibilities and interests of the member, an office may include a different Legislative Assistant for **health issues**, environmental matters, taxes, etc.

- **Press Secretary or Communications Director:**  
The Press Secretary's responsibility is to build and maintain open and effective lines of communication between the member, his/her constituency, and the general public. The Press Secretary is expected to know the benefits, demands, and special requirements of both print and electronic media, and how to most effectively promote the member's views or position on specific issues.
- **Appointment Secretary, Personal Secretary, or Scheduler:**  
The Appointment Secretary is usually responsible for allocating a member'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.

### **Tips for a Congressional Office Visit**

Visiting a member in person is an excellent way to build a personal relationship with your member, though this option has many challenges, namely in that it often is difficult to get an appointment with a Member, particularly in the district office. In requesting a district office appointment, it would be helpful to first review the House/Senate calendar to identify when your Member will be in the district or state during a recess or district work period. Make your appointment request accordingly.

**House Schedule 110<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session:**

[http://www.house.gov/house/House\\_Calendar.shtml](http://www.house.gov/house/House_Calendar.shtml)

**Senate Schedule 110<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session:**

[http://www.senate.gov/pagelayout/legislative/d\\_three\\_sections\\_w ith\\_teasers/calendars.htm](http://www.senate.gov/pagelayout/legislative/d_three_sections_w ith_teasers/calendars.htm)

### **Tips on Communicating with Standing Committees**

Due to the high volume and complexity of its work, Congress divides its tasks among approximately 250 committees and sub committees. The House and Senate each have their own committee system, which are similar. Within

chamber guidelines, however, each committee adopts its own rules; thus, there is considerable variation among panels.

Standing committees generally have legislative jurisdiction. Subcommittees handle specific areas of the committee's work. Select and joint committees generally handle oversight or housekeeping responsibilities.

The chair of each committee and a majority of its members represent the majority party. The chair primarily controls a committee's business. Each party assigns its own members to committees, and each committee distributes its members among its subcommittees. Both chambers place limits on the number and types of panels any one Member may serve on and chair.

Committees receive varying levels of operating funds and employ varying numbers of aides. Each hires its own staff. The majority party controls most committee staff and resources, but a portion is shared with the minority.

Several thousand bills and resolutions are referred to committees during each 2-year Congress. Committees select a small percentage for consideration, and those not addressed often receive no further action. The bills that committees report help to set the Senate and House agenda.

When a committee or subcommittee favors a measure, it usually takes four actions. First, it asks relevant executive agencies for written comments on the measure. Second, it holds hearings to gather information and views from non-committee experts. At committee hearings, these witnesses summarize submitted statements and then respond to questions from the committee members. Third, a committee meets to perfect the measure through amendments, and non-committee members sometimes attempt to influence the language. Fourth, when language is agreed upon, the committee sends the measure back to the full Senate or House, usually along with a written report describing its purposes and provisions.

A committee's influence extends to its enactment of bills into law. A committee that considers a measure will manage the full floor deliberation on it. Also, its members will be appointed to any conference committee created to reconcile its version of a bill with the version passed by the other chamber.

In the Senate, other types of committees deal with the confirmation or rejection of presidential nominees. Committee hearings that focus on the implementation and investigation of programs are known as oversight hearings, whereas committee investigations examine allegations of wrongdoing. (Source: [www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov))

### **Senate Standing Committees**

Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry  
Appropriations  
Armed Services  
Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs  
Budget

Commerce, Science, and Transportation  
Energy and Natural Resources  
Environment and Public Works  
Finance  
Foreign Relations  
Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions  
Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs  
Judiciary  
Rules and Administration  
Small Business and Entrepreneurship  
Veterans Affairs

**Special, Select, and Other**

Indian Affairs  
Select Committee on Ethics  
Select Committee on Intelligence  
Special Committee on Aging

**Joint**

Joint Committee on Printing  
Joint Committee on Taxation  
Joint Committee on the Library  
Joint Economic Committee

**House Standing Committees**

- Committee on Agriculture
- Committee on Appropriations
- Committee on Armed Services
- Committee on the Budget
- Committee on Education and the Workforce
- Committee on Energy and Commerce
- Committee on Financial Services
- Committee on Government Reform
- Committee on Homeland Security
- Committee on House Administration
- Committee on International Relations
- Committee on the Judiciary
- Committee on Resources
- Committee on Rules
- Committee on Science
- Committee on Small Business
- Committee on Standards of Official Conduct
- Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
- Committee on Veterans' Affairs
- Committee on Ways and Means
- Joint Economic Committee
- Joint Committee on Printing
- Joint Committee on Taxation
- House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence

## How to Use NBCH Legislative Resources

NBCH staff frequently distributes issue fact sheets, federal legislative and health care industry updates to its coalition membership. Many coalition members, in turn, use these materials to provide additional services to their employer members and as a way to solicit interest and feedback from their employers about particular issues.

- These materials always are made available in the Word format to maximize member flexibility so that the document content can be customized to meet the needs of each member coalition and their employer interests.
- Materials also are archived on the [NBCH.org Government Relations website](#) or the [Members Only](#) section of NBCH.org so that coalitions can easily access information as it is needed.

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