



WATER ENVIRONMENT FEDERATION
**WATER ADVOCATES
PROGRAM**

GRASSROOTS GUIDE & TOOLKIT

Water Environment Federation Water Advocates Program

Grassroots Guide & Toolkit

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WEF believes that engaging as many people as possible in fact-based advocacy is the best way to ensure budgets, laws, policies, services and practices meet the needs of our nation. We are committed to gathering the facts, educating decision-makers, and advocating for the best interests of the water sector. There are many ways to advocate, but one of the most successful is via grassroots membership-driven advocacy. The united voice of many is a powerful tool for influencing decision-makers and the public about important issues.

What is Advocacy?

The act or process of supporting a cause or proposal.

– Merriam Webster Dictionary

WEF has developed this Water Advocates Grassroots Guide and Toolkit. This manual focuses on legislative grassroots advocacy directed primarily at the U.S. Congress. However, many of the recommendations in the guide also can apply to advocacy efforts before state and local bodies of government.

Grassroots advocacy is the systematic effort to affect public policy by influencing the views of policy-makers whether in a legislature, local government, government agency, or anywhere decisions are made that affect citizens and businesses. Grassroots advocacy is nothing more than the organized and intensive exercise of a citizen's constitutional right to petition the government. In fact, grassroots advocacy makes an important contribution to effective and responsive government by making vital information available to public officials who cannot possibly know the full impact of every law and regulation that comes before them.

It is crucial to remember that *all* legislators – on the federal, state, and local levels – are politicians whose continued success depends on their ability to satisfy voting constituents. Re-election, recognition, and status are powerful motivators. Effective grassroots advocacy can wield as much influence on these outcomes as the biggest corporation or trade association.

WEF members help defeat rider to ban CSO and wet weather bypassing

A groundswell of grassroots opposition from water professionals successfully defeated a rider to the FY16 EPA Appropriations bill that would have forbidden wet weather bypassing and combined sewer overflows (CSOs) in the Great Lakes watershed. The grassroots advocacy was critical in building support among leading Senators and Representatives to strip the unfunded mandate from the final bill.

The U.S. Senate's version of the FY16 appropriations bill contained a policy rider requiring all CSOs in the Great Lakes watershed to be eliminated, including overflows discharged in compliance with a CSO Long Term Control Plan (LTCP) or consent decrees. The rider also would have required Water Resource Recovery Facilities (WRRFs) to eliminate discharges of blended effluent that otherwise meet standards established in a National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit during peak wet weather events. A survey of Great Lakes WRRF estimated the cost-of-compliance to the policy rider exceeded \$72 billion in the Great Lakes region. Since there was no funding attached to the rider to assist agencies with compliance, it was a federal unfunded mandate.

Using the WEF Water Advocates program and direct grassroots advocacy by local water professionals, WEF built a coalition of members that aggressively lobbied Congress in opposition to this policy rider because it had the potential to be extremely costly, requiring massive infrastructure expansion, ratepayer increases, and reopening of consent decrees and/or LTCPs. Countless letters from local constituents of members of Congress and more than 45 letters from public agencies and organizations opposed to the policy rider were sent to Congress.

The final version compromise language in the FY16 appropriations bill will require some additional reporting for CSO events only, but no changes to the Clean Water Act requirements or additional fines. Members of Congress reported that the grassroots opposition to the policy rider was critical in influencing their decision to push congressional leaders to strip the rider from the final bill.

Can WEF, WEF Members, and Member Associations lobby?

Yes. Federal laws exist to encourage lobbying within certain specified limits. Lobbying is one of the most effective vehicles for shaping public policy. Individuals and organizations simply need to understand what constitutes lobbying under the law, and what the limits are in order to lobby. The 1st Amendment of the Bill of Rights protects your right to advocate before governmental bodies. Lobbyists who are paid by organizations to advocate on behalf of those organizations must register and report their activities to Congress, but individuals acting on behalf of their own interests do not have restrictions upon their advocacy activities. If individuals are advocating for their employers, they are not required to report their lobbying activities as long as their pay directly for those activities does not exceed \$50,000 per year. In all cases, there are no restrictions on advocating, just reporting requirements for certain individuals and organizations. The Lobbying Discloser Act (2 U.S.C., Chapter 26) more thoroughly defines lobbying activities if you are interested in learning more.

What is lobbying?

The U.S. Internal Revenue Service defines lobbying as the attempt to influence the passage, defeat, introduction or amendment of specific legislation, including bills introduced by a federal, state or local legislative body, bond issues, referenda, constitutional amendments, and Senate confirmation votes on executive branch nominees.

For 501(c)(3) organizations that elect to be governed by the “safe harbor” expenditure test (see below), IRS regulations define two types of lobbying communications:

Direct lobbying – In general, any attempt to influence any legislation through communication with a legislator, an employee of a legislative body, or other government official, that:

1. refers to specific legislation; and
2. reflects a view on such legislation.

Grassroots lobbying – Any attempt to influence any legislation through an attempt to affect the opinions of the general public or any segment thereof. A grassroots lobbying communication is one that:

1. refers to specific legislation;
2. reflects a view on that legislation; and
3. encourages the recipient to take action with respect to the legislation.

The IRS allows for certain exceptions to the definitions of lobbying, such as nonpartisan analysis or research. In addition, the regulations allow a 501(c)(3) to count certain communications as direct lobbying (vs. grassroots lobbying) if they encourage the organization members, rather than the general public, to take action.

Any activity that does not meet these criteria is regarded as advocacy, which 501(c)(3) organizations may conduct without limit. The IRS does not view attempts to influence administrative rules, regulations, or other executive branch actions as lobbying. *Be advised*, however, that if your organization engages in these activities, whether at the federal or state level, it may be subject to other federal and/or state registration and reporting requirements.

How much lobbying is too much?

The law makes it very clear how much a 501(c)(3) organization can spend on lobbying - up to \$1 million depending on the size of the organization – if the 501(h) “safe harbor” election is made. Generally, organizations that make the 501(h) election may spend 20% of the first \$500,000 of their annual expenditures on lobbying (\$100,000), 15% of the next \$500,000, and so on, up to \$1 million.

WEF's Water Advocates Program

Like any other political strategy, the effectiveness of a grassroots movement is largely dependent on the coordination and orchestration of the process by the planners and decision-makers. This is your handbook for the successful design and deployment of your grassroots campaign. The information below is offered as an introduction to the grassroots advocacy process.

Overview

The designers of America's governing structure described a government of the people, by the people, and for the people. These familiar phrases are appealing today, but do most Americans feel that the promise of the nation's founders is as alive today as they believe it was in the 1780s? Surveys of current public opinion indicate that too many American citizens believe "special interest groups" have excessive influence when the Congress determines the policies by which laws are passed and people are led. In the 21st century, one still hears the frequent call for a return to the time when the public interest exerted more power than private interests.

The truth is that at no time in America's history has the individual citizen's access to their government been greater. Every American, as an individual or by joining a group, is provided nearly unlimited access to government institutions and the people who run them. The methods for access are available. Unfortunately, too few citizens, groups, private companies, and industries know about these methods of access or how to use them productively in order to be heard by the officials elected or appointed to serve them.

Since the early 1980s, public attitudes toward participation in government have changed. Increasingly, individual citizens, working alone and in groups, in both the public and private sectors, have chosen to participate in what has been termed the "grassroots constituency involvement." In ever greater numbers, they are involved in the making of public policy, the conduct of government, and the process of politics. The numbers participating are still far too small, but the trend is improving.

Campaign finance and lobbying reforms promise to alter the balance of power and change the conduct of the decision-making process in Washington and the state capitals. Increased disclosure requirements for professional lobbyists and new rules governing contributions to campaigns are certain to open the policy-making process, especially to groups of individuals from the Congressional and state legislative districts where their representatives are elected.

For the individual, these reforms mean there is greater opportunity for their voices to be heard on Capitol Hill and in state capitals. For advocacy groups, it's a chance to realign their efforts on a newly invigorated front. For corporate America, it means a significant rethinking of the strategies and even the tools used to pursue their particular policy interests.

How well you, your organization, or company is prepared to perform under the new rules of battle will – to a large degree – determine your success in advancing your political and public-policy agenda. It could be argued that the playing field is being leveled, that having money alone is no longer as important as having popular support. But the truth is that, as always, those who are most decisive in their approach, who understand how the procedures work, and who work in teams are the ones who will ultimately prevail in Washington and the state capitals.

Glossary of Grassroots Terms

Before beginning grassroots work, it is important that everyone is using the same terms to mean the same things. Consider these definitions as possibilities when describing the different aspects of grassroots work:

1. **Grassroots:** The basic source of support (*Webster's*). From the ground up.
2. **Grassroots Advocacy/Lobbying:** A distinctive approach to public participation. Engaging everyday people, not legislative professionals, in shaping public policy.
3. **Grass-tops Advocacy:** Focuses on a lower volume/higher quality approach to grassroots advocacy in which more personal relationships are established and leveraged.
4. **501(c)(3) Civic Engagement:** Legally permissible, nonpartisan activities, including voter registration, voter education and Get Out The Vote (GOTV), designed to increase voter participation or more fully inform the electorate.
5. **Grassroots Targeting:** Identifying and prioritizing your “targets” based on the combination of strategic importance, grassroots resources, and potential impact.
6. **Grassroots Resources:** The things you have “to play with” in grassroots work – your assets. These can include things such as staff, money, and time, but also include lists, events, people, partnerships, communication vehicles, and more.
7. **Base:** Those closest or most committed to your group or issue; those already convinced and most likely to support you.
8. **Grassroots Advocates/Volunteers:** People who agree to participate in grassroots activities, either advocating for an issue or becoming involved in a non-partisan civic engagement campaign.
9. **Engaging Your Base:** Specific tasks to connect with and excite your base, and gain their commitment to volunteer or take action in an ongoing manner.
10. **Mobilizing:** Activating grassroots advocates/volunteers in a specific action on a specific timeline to influence a legislative issue or voter turnout.
11. **Grassroots Organizing:** Building a permanent infrastructure for grassroots advocates/volunteers to take collective action; developing local volunteer leadership.
12. **External and Internal Messages:** External messages are the messages our members deliver to policy makers or the general public. Internal messages are the messages we use to recruit and engage our base to participate in grassroots efforts.

Quick Tips for Effective Advocacy:

Successful advocacy campaigns have several key components. These quick tips are intended to help you get started. To build a long-term, successful advocacy campaign, we suggest you draw on the more detailed toolkit items that follow.

- **Know the facts:** To gain and maintain credibility, it is critical that you have the all of the facts on both sides of any issue. Having this information at your fingertips will help you in conversations with government officials, the media, other advocates, and the general public.
- **Use the facts:** Any position you take should be grounded in the facts. It is often helpful to put your facts into one-pagers that you can distribute.
- **Have clear and concise message:** Government officials, the press and the general public do not have time for long-winded conversations or documents – you need to get to your point quickly and concisely. And remember to watch out for the jargon and acronyms used in different fields – you want everyone to understand the issues you are raising.
- **Nurture relationships and work collaboratively:** Advocacy is a joint venture- you need to find your allies and work with them. Your chances of success are much greater when there are large numbers of organizations and people on your side. Whenever possible, be sure you and your allies have consistent data and the same messages.
- **Engage the public:** Use the media, social media, petitions, letters, e-mails and other grassroots strategies to engage the public as you can. Remember numbers speak loudly to elected officials!
- **Make your voice heard!** Advocacy is not the place for being shy. Make sure you spread the word – through meetings with government officials, press conferences, letters, petitions, rallies, and phone calls. And don't forget to talk about what you are advocating for at dinner parties and social events – you never know who can become a useful ally.
- **Say “thank you”:** Remember that everyone is busy and their time is valuable. Keep your meetings short and thank the official afterwards. When your advocacy is a success, always thank everyone who helped you achieve your victory!

Steps to Create a Successful Long-term Grassroots Program

- Establish Advocacy/Outreach Goals
 - Identify priorities, think through positions (must be data-driven – research and analyze)
 - Identify key messages
 - Determine available resources and set realistic goals
 - Identify a timeline

- Define Key Audiences
 - Decide who you ultimately want to influence
 - Develop elected official/media list
 - Research and understand public officials
 - Understand the impact of an online audience versus in-person audience

- Create Advocacy Outreach Plan
 - Determine how to recruit more members and support
 - Determine how and when to reach target audiences to achieve desired results
 - Understand the political climate and political calendar
 - Consider timing/media appetite
 - Utilize all effective media (*i.e.*, develop social media plan)

- Build Coalitions and Relationships
 - Understand stakeholders and form coalitions; identify and understand those that may be adverse
 - Meet with business community (Chambers of Commerce)
 - Meet with regulators
 - Meet with community leaders

- Develop/Utilize WEF Toolkit Materials
 - Press Kits
 - Press Releases
 - Op-ed Articles
 - Byline Articles
 - Letters to the Editor
 - Newsletters/E-Newsletters
 - Brochures
 - Public Service Announcements (PSAs)
 - Website
 - Social Media
 - Fact sheets
 - PowerPoint presentation template(s)
 - Media Guide

- Implement Plan
 - Elected official contact – phone calls, letters and visits
 - Media Outreach
 - Newsletters
 - Local/State Event PowerPoint Presentations

- Analyze/evaluate implementation, reach and impact
 - Post-Market Study of Outreach Efforts

The Benefits of Grassroots Organizing

Since grassroots organizing is time- and labor-intensive, many organizations remain skeptical about whether it is worth the effort. Consider the following points to help “sell” organizing.

1. **Influence Policy:** Impact state or federal policies by generating personal contacts – calls, letters, meetings, etc., – with state legislators or members of Congress.
2. **Maximize Voter Turnout:** Grassroots organizing is the most effective way for nonprofit organizations to engage in permissible nonpartisan voter engagement efforts including voter registration, education, and Get Out the Vote.
3. **Demonstrate Power:** A strong and engaged base of grassroots volunteers is a concrete demonstration of power!
4. **Complement Traditional Strategies:** Grassroots strategies do not replace traditional lobbying, communications, and media efforts, but they do complement them, providing cover and support for lobbyists and volunteers for campaigns.
5. **Energize:** Grassroots organizing creates a sense of energy, excitement, and momentum that can strengthen an organization or voter engagement campaign.
6. **Provide Antidote to Cynicism:** Grassroots puts a “human face” on an issue which helps counteract the deep cynicism and apathy many people feel about advocacy, politics, and government.
7. **Work Cost-effectively:** Grassroots organizing relies predominantly on volunteers and therefore offers a more cost-effective way to impact public policy and engage voters.
8. **Maximize Advantages:** Effective grassroots organizing only requires compelling issues/messages to organize around and people to organize. We have the issues and we have the people! Organizing allows us to take advantage of both.
9. **Win:** Grassroots tactics can make the critical difference when it comes to passing a policy agenda, stopping hostile legislation, or maximizing voter turnout. Organizations and campaigns that ignore grassroots organizing have been losing more and more in recent years.
10. **Build Long-term Capacity:** Recruiting and engaging a base to influence policy and maximize voter turnout on an ongoing basis prevents constantly reinventing the wheel.
11. **Raise Funds:** A motivated base of grassroots volunteers can dramatically expand your organization’s ability to raise financial resources.
12. **Grow Membership:** Aggressive grassroots organizing around issues or voter engagement can help attract new members who are drawn to the energy, enthusiasm, and results.

Finding Your Elected Officials

Armed with your home address and zip code, you can identify your elected officials using the web or the telephone. Some resources are listed below:

- <https://www.whitehouse.gov/contact/write-or-call>
- <http://www.senate.gov/senators/contact/>
- <http://www.house.gov/representatives/find/>
- www.whoismyrepresentative.com
- <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/members/map>
- <https://www.epa.gov/aboutepa/mailing-addresses-and-phone-numbers>

Ten Tips for Calling Your Legislator

Making a phone call to your legislator is quick, easy, and can be done at a moment's notice, making it an attractive method for legislative contact. For these same reasons, it is critical that the phone call be effective. You don't need to be an expert on the issue in order to be persuasive; you just need to give your personal perspective. Follow these ten steps for an effective call to your legislator.

1. **Plan:** Before you make the call, **plan** what you are going to say. Your phone call will be very brief, so keep your message simple and to-the-point. Take a moment to think about it – you might even want to make some notes – and you'll find that your call goes more smoothly than if you were to call "off the cuff". Know your request (for example, vote for a specific bill) in as few words as possible.
2. **Message:** After identifying (and possibly writing down) your request, think about a **key point** or personal story that supports your position.
3. **Call:** Make the **call**. If your legislator is in your home district on specific days or on weekends, call when he or she is in your home district. There is more time and less distraction, and your position as a constituent will be enhanced if you are talking on "home turf".
4. **Staff or Message:** You may not be able to reach your legislator if you are calling his or her office during the legislative session. Be prepared to talk to one of the legislator's **staff** or to leave a **message** instead. Make sure you get the staff person's full name, and treat the staff with the respect.
5. **Constituent:** Begin by stating that you are a **constituent**. Legislators are most responsive to the people who can keep them in office – their constituents.
6. **Persuade:** Get to the point. Following your plan, state the reason for the call. Try to get the legislator to state their position on the issue, and try to **persuade** them using the points you developed.
7. **Thank:** If the legislator agrees to support your issue, **thank** him or her. Regardless of their position, thank the legislator taking the time to talk to you. Say that you will be tracking the issue.
8. **Recruit** a like-minded friend, family member, or colleague to make a call as well. Particularly with phone calls, quantity is critical. Legislators pay attention to issues when they believe that many of their constituents care about that issue.
9. **Report** your call. When you are part of a grassroots lobbying effort, your participation is helpful only if the people mobilizing the effort know about it. If appropriate, let your agency or employer know you made the call.
10. **Call Back:** Call more than once. Quantity is as important, if not more important, than quality in grassroots advocacy, because a high number of calls indicates to a legislator that many people in a district care about an issue. As you monitor the issue, **call back** to ask for specific support or action as appropriate to the process.

Ten Steps for Writing Your Legislator

Writing a letter to your legislator offers you the opportunity to give more information that you could in a phone call. It also can be an effective strategy for following up on a phone call, visit, or e-mail. The disadvantage to writing letters is that legislators do not have the opportunity to ask questions, state their positions, or respond to specific requests. For these reasons, you might consider following your letter with a phone call or visit for more interaction. Follow these basic steps for writing your letter.

1. Begin by stating that you are a **constituent**. Make sure that you write your return address on the envelope, so that the legislator's office staff knows immediately that you are a constituent.
2. **Personalize** your letter. Research consistently shows that handwritten letters have the most impact. If you are basing your letter on a form letter, rewrite it, or at least retype it. Photocopies of generic letters are the least effective. In making your case on the issue, use personal examples.
3. **Use the news**. Watch news stories in your local community that you can use to illustrate your point or include a story about what you experience in your work.
4. **Local, local, local**. Make a strong connection between the issue and your local community that the legislator represents. Again, use local examples that illustrate why your issue is important and why your position is a strong one. Don't be afraid to tell your story or talk about your personal experience with the issue.
5. If the legislator has supported your issues in the past, **acknowledge** this – but don't take it for granted that the support will continue. Give reasons why the legislator should continue or intensify his or her support.
6. Show **restraint**. Keep your letter brief – one to one and a half pages at the most. Make sure that supporting information that you leave behind also is brief.
7. **Persuade** a like-minded friend, family member, or colleague to write a letter as well. Legislators pay attention to issues when they believe that many of their constituents care about that issue.
8. **Report** your letter. When you are part of a grassroots lobbying effort, your participation is most helpful when the people mobilizing the effort know about it. If appropriate, let your agency or employer know that you wrote the letter, and what you intend to do to follow up.
9. **Follow up**. In the letter, ask your legislator for a response. To get a better picture of your legislator's position, consider following your letter with a phone call or visit.
10. **Communicate** more than once. Again, quantity is as important, if not more important, than quality in grassroots advocacy. One letter will not gain influence. As you monitor the issue, communicate with the legislator through phone calls, additional letters, e-mail, or visits to ask for specific support or action as appropriate to the process.

Seven Steps for E-mailing Your Legislator

E-mail has changed the way we communicate and in many ways has replaced other forms of communication, such as phone calls or handwritten letters. This technological tool is fast, cheap, and efficient. However, because it is a fast and relatively informal means of communication, many legislators view it as less credible than other methods.

If you use e-mail to communicate with your legislator, you should do so in the context of an ongoing relationship in which you use other methods as the foundation of your communication. To craft an e-mail with impact, follow these steps.

1. **In the subject line of the message, state that you are a constituent** (For example – *Subject: Message from a constituent on xyz issue*). Most legislators have their staff sort and respond to their e-mail, and this strategy will increase the likelihood that your letter is read.
2. **State your request concisely.** View your message as different from an electronic letter. Again, e-mail is less formal and much more brief than traditional written communication. Craft your message accordingly – keep it tight and short.
3. **Provide personal examples and local context.** Use similar principles as those in letter-writing, but in a tighter format. If you are sending a generic e-mail written by a group of which you're a part, insert personal examples in the message.
4. **Persuade a like-minded friend, family member, or colleague to send an e-mail as well.** Again, quantity is critical. Legislators pay attention to issues when they believe that many of their constituents care about that issue. One e-mail is not convincing.
5. **Report your e-mail.** If the e-mail is initiated by an organization, ask if they want you to report your e-mail. Some groups can monitor responses electronically without your having to report, but most want you to let them know. If you persuaded a friend, let them know that that friend will be reporting as well. Make sure that your friend follows through.
6. **Follow up.** Again, because the impact of e-mail varies widely from legislator to legislator, be sure that you are using other methods to communicate with your legislator. Follow your e-mail with a phone call, handwritten letter, or visit.
7. **Communicate more than once.** As with all other forms of communicating with your legislator, view your e-mail as part of an ongoing relationship. Keep in touch and stay tuned into your legislator and his or her position on the issue.

Meeting Your Legislator

A face-to-face meeting with your legislator can be a powerful opportunity to advance your agenda. The meeting also can position you as a reliable expert on your issue and an important ally for your legislator, if it's done right. Follow these steps for a successful visit.

1. **Plan your meeting.** Decide whether you are going alone, or with a group of constituents. If you go as a group, decide who is going to lead the meeting, and what each person is going to contribute to the discussion. This will help eliminate awkward silences or repetitive messages, and will ensure that you hit all the key points you want to cover. You likely will have only 15 or 20 minutes for your meeting, so plan accordingly.
2. **Know your audience.** Do some research about your legislator if you don't know much about him or her. Find out his or her positions on the issues that matter to you.
3. **If there are multiple issues that are important to you, select one that you will discuss for that meeting.** Attempting to persuade a legislator on multiple issues not only weakens your position as a reliable, focused constituent, but it dilutes your impact on each issue.
4. **Define your message.** Focus your comments on one issue. Then, rather than trying to say everything you know or think about that issue, plan two or three observations or arguments that get at the heart of your position.
5. **Make an appointment,** but don't be surprised if it changes. Legislators often have last-minute hearings or committee meetings. Be flexible.
6. **Meet in your home district.** Meetings in the home district are often less hurried than meetings at the capitol, and they provide the "home turf" advantage. Find out when your legislator is in his or her home district, and schedule your appointment then, or if your workplace illustrates your position, invite them to visit you. If this is not possible, travel to the capitol as an alternative.
7. **Once you're in the door, begin by finding something personal that you have in common with the legislator.** Does he or she live on the street where your mother grew up? Are the legislators' kids in your child's class at school? Does something in his or her office suggest an interest that you share, such as fishing, sports, or art? Engage in a little "small talk" to break the ice, but keep it brief.
8. **State the reason for your visit.** Be clear about why you are there, why they should be interested (remember to mention again that you're a constituent, and use local examples), and what you want them to do.
9. **State your case.** Again, keep it concise, focused, and personalized.
10. **Invite comments and questions.** Engage your legislator in dialogue. Don't worry if they ask you something you don't know the answer to – simply tell them you don't know, but that you'll find out for them.
11. **State only what you know.** Don't overstate your case, fudge the facts, or guess.
12. **Ask for a commitment.** If you don't ask your legislator for action, you won't see any. If they decline, encourage them to think about it, and let them know you'll keep in touch.
13. **Have a leave-behind.** Provide your legislator with brief, written information for further reflection. Make sure it contains the local angle for your district.
14. **Report on your visit.** As soon as possible after your visit, jot down notes that record the tone, what was said, and what questions were asked in the meeting. This will help you not only report on your visit, but also build a record of your relationship with your legislator that can inform future dialogue. Let your group know that you made the visit, and report what you covered and what the legislator said. If possible, provide your group a copy of your leave-behind materials as well.
15. **Follow up.** Send a handwritten thank-you note to your legislator. Let him or her know that you appreciated the visit. If you promised to provide additional information, include it, or say when and how it will be sent.
16. **Visit more than once.** Over time, visit with your legislator to continue to discuss the issue and make requests as you have them. Be sure to be a reliable source of information on your issue by delivering what you promise, avoiding overstatement, and communicating clearly.

Ten Tips for “Printable” Letters to the Editor

An underused resource in grassroots advocacy is the local media. Letters to the editor can be powerful vehicles for influencing or inspiring public debate, making the case for your issue, or responding to related events. In addition, elected officials always read the opinion pages of their local papers, because it gives them an idea of what their constituents think. The trick is to write a letter that the editors find compelling enough to print. Use these tips to write a letter that is more likely to get printed.

1. **Capitalize on the hot stories.** Find ways to tie stories in the news with your issue. Open your letter to a reference to the recent event, and then quickly build a logical bridge to your issue.
2. **Keep it brief.** Most Letters to the Editor should be under 250 words. Edit your letter aggressively.
3. **Be clear.** This may seem obvious, but a surprising number of letters that don't get published just plain don't make sense. Avoid jargon, use common vocabulary, and let a few friends or colleagues review the letter for you before you send it.
4. **Use word cues to underscore your point.** For instance, preface your major conclusion with “The important thing is,…” If you have research that makes your case, preface the facts with “Research proves that…”
5. **Don't overlook neighborhood weeklies and smaller papers.** Often these publications have more room for letters, and community papers have very large readerships.
6. **Include a call to action or solution.** If you are illustrating a need or making a case for a specific action, include a line about what people can do to help.
7. **Don't be afraid to toot your own horn.** If you – or your organization – are involved in work that addresses the issue, include that in your letter.
8. **Be passionate, but not poisonous.** There is a difference between “fire in the belly” and righteous indignation. Avoid sarcasm, and if you're angry, cool off a bit before sending a final version.
9. **Use local or personal angles.** All grassroots strategies rely on the local and the personal in an issue. Include this perspective in the letter to illustrate why readers should care about the issue.
10. **Try meeting with editorial boards.** The editorial boards on newspapers often meet with community members, and sometimes will write an editorial based on information they receive from these meetings. Ask for a meeting with your local paper's editorial board, make a case for your issue, and ask the board to support it with an editorial.

Digital Advocacy

Digital advocacy is the use of technology to influence public opinion and/or policy. There are a number of ways to use digital advocacy, and this guide will highlight some of the most popular methods.

Social Media

Social media has upended the way information is shared and consumed, and it also has added a new dynamic to advocacy. Social media conversations are bringing attention to a range of topics and capturing the attention of and influencing legislators and decision-makers at all levels. In fact, a 2015 survey by the Congressional Management Foundation found that social media leads to more meaningful interactions and can influence undecided lawmakers. It's also important to note that 71% of the respondents said social media comments directed to the Member/Senator by "multiple constituents affiliated with a specific group or cause" would have "some" or "a lot" of influence on an undecided lawmaker.

Social media influence and these kinds of interactions inspire action that have real impacts. Federal and state legislation has been introduced—and laws have been passed—as a result of movements born on social media and sustained by digital advocacy.

Here are some things you can do to get started:

- Find and follow your Congress members on social media
- "Mention" or "tag" them specifically in posts related to topics to which you want to direct their attention
 - Example: Funding for water infrastructure is critical to improving our state's economy! @SenJoeQPublic, we need support from you and your colleagues to make this happen!
- Monitor their feeds and look for opportunities to start or advance conversations about topics related to the water sector

Other Forms Of Digital Advocacy

- **Text messaging.** Services such as Resistbot rely on text messaging to involve citizens in the political process. You can use these tools to identify and contact Congress members, and also stay up to date on policy issues.
- **Online/email petitions.** Sites such as change.org help you create petitions and garner awareness and support. These sites offer step-by-step instructions and also offer tools for signature verification.
- **Digital/mobile fundraising.** Sites can help you reach donors and potential donors with just one click. You can even develop campaigns that allow donations through mobile phones.
- **Thunderclap.** Much of the power of social media lies in its ability to spread information quickly to a large number of people. Sites such as Thunderclap capitalize on this and send messages to networks simultaneously.

Congressional Management Foundation Survey (#SocialCongress2015)

<http://www.congressfoundation.org/social-congress-2015>

