

Establishing Relationships with Elected Officials

Now that you know who the key players are in the political process, you need to *get to know* your own elected officials, their staff, and legislative leaders. As a child advocate, your contacts will have a much greater impact if you build genuine personal relationships *before* you need to ask your legislators for something. This also means getting to know candidates before they are even elected to office. For more specific information on electoral advocacy and building relationships with candidates, check out Partnership for Children's electoral advocacy guide:

The first step in establishing relationships with your own legislators is to know who they are. Using your 9-digit zip code, you can look up your state and federal elected officials by going to: <http://www.votesmart.org/>

Tips on Establishing Relationships with Elected Officials

#1

Do some homework. Get to know legislators by researching their own personal background as well as important factors in the district. Some key questions to consider are:

- **What is the candidate or official's political party? What are his or her key issues?**
- **What is his/her political philosophy? (fiscal or social conservative?)**
- **What are the primary influential factors in his/her district (Labor? Business? Religion?)**
- **What other groups are strong supporters of your candidate or elected official?**
- **Does s/he have a personal connection to your issue?**

#2

Introduce yourself. Write, call, or visit legislators and their staff to introduce yourself. Let them know who you represent and volunteer to keep them informed about your issues and their impact on your community and on the legislator's own district.

#3

Ask to have your name added to the legislator's mailing list. Many legislators send out regular newsletters to their constituents which can provide useful information about recent happenings at the state capitol as well as insight into the legislator's priority issues.

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know the people

Establishing Relationships, continued

- #4 Educate your legislators.** Keep legislators informed on the needs of children by sending articles, newsletters, and research about programs that are good for children. Be a reliable and honest source of information.
- #5 Invite them to Events.** Make sure the legislator receives notice of and invitations to special events. This serves as a reminder of your group's role in the community.
- #6 Arrange Site Visits.** Invite legislators and even their spouses to tour your program or facilities. Show them exactly what you do and how it contributes to community well-being. Legislators may have misconceptions about the population your program serves. Site visits can be an opportunity for individuals to tell their personal stories to lawmakers.
- #7 Attend social and political events where legislators will be present.** Events are an opportunity to get acquainted with legislators and make them aware of you as an active member of your community without lobbying them directly on your issue.
- #8 Work on Campaigns.** Helping on a future lawmaker's campaign for office builds a relationship from the very beginning. When candidates appreciate your support in electing them to office, they're also likely to be attentive to your issues and concerns once elected. For more tips on electoral advocacy, check out Partnership for Children's electoral advocacy toolkit at www.pfc.org.