

Citizen Advocacy 101

Excerpted from Citizens in Action: How to Influence Government

Effective Phone Calls

When to Call

A phone communication works particularly well for certain circumstances, such as:

- Short and urgent messages, such as “vote yes” or “vote no” on a bill that is being considered in the near future
- Direct communications with staff people with whom you’ve developed a relationship
- Following up on previous communications with the office (such as e-mails or meetings)
- Setting up meetings with staff or following up on meeting requests with members
- Press or media inquiries

Phone communications generally aren’t a good way to introduce a new idea, although if this is your only option you should certainly use it.

Developing Your Talking Points

When calling about a particular issue, always be ready to provide basic information, such as a bill number and title, if you are asking the official to support a specific bill.

If you are calling as part of a coordinated campaign, be sure to carefully review the organization’s talking points but also be prepared to explain your position in your own words. It is always abundantly clear to staff when constituents call as part of a coordinated campaign and aren’t really sure what they’re talking about. Make sure the message you are delivering is your own, not anyone else’s.

Always Ask for a Response

As with written communications, the key to effective communication by phone is ensuring that someone actually thinks about what you have to say. Some offices tally phone messages from people seeking to “express their opinion” on a topic, but it’s not always the best way to ensure that your message is heard and carefully considered.