



Senior Leadership Advocacy Training

Tips for Relationship Building with Legislators and Policy Makers

Know your legislators and policy makers.

- Review the “My Elected Officials” form and enter their contact information in your phone/contacts.
- Review committee assignments for legislators to determine who is well positioned to help with your issue priorities.
- Get to know where legislators stand on aging issues, particularly on priority issues identified by the Commission on Aging’s annual policy priorities.
- Work with the constituents of key legislators to help the Commission on Aging develop a relationship. Legislators are more likely to pay attention to a legislative issue if they hear from constituents – residents of their district.
- Develop a game-plan to get to know the elected officials for your area. Prioritize those who are in leadership, serve on key committees, have a demonstrated interest in your issues, or where you may be able to leverage an existing relationship. You may want to use “power mapping” to help lay out a plan for building relationships (see power mapping handout).
- Get to know the legislator’s staff and cultivate a relationship with them. They are the gatekeepers and may play a key role in providing you with access – or not.
- Identify the administrators who oversee the key county or state programs that are related to your advocacy goals. For example, County Department on Aging Director, mental health administrator, etc. They play a key role in developing annual budgets and setting policy. If you can win their support for a budget initiative or policy change, you are ahead of the game.

Communicate Often

- Become a “go to” resource for your legislator. If you have a new resource to share, a new report relevant to your issues, or if there is media coverage relevant to your legislative priorities, send it to your legislators with a personal note. This helps establish you as a credible resource.
- If you have a training or other event that may be of interest to the legislator or their constituents, send an email with a personal note.
- Support the Commission on Aging and Advocacy Committee in identifying opportunities for them to communicate and share information.
- If your legislator takes a position or has to make a vote on an issue that is important to you, reach out early and ask for an opportunity to meet or schedule a call to share your perspective and learn about their view.
- If your legislator is supportive of a Commission on Aging priority, be sure to send a thank you and support others to do so. Personal notes are especially effective. If it is high priority issue, consider issuing a press release to publicly express appreciation. Social media provides another venue to express appreciation.

Host a Gathering in the District

- Invite individual legislators to meet with the Commission on Aging. Be sure to include constituents. This could be a coffee hosted by a family that lives in the district, or it could be at the MCDA office or meeting venue.
- Have a few participants speak and share brief personal stories that help to support the need for pending legislation, your policy priorities or budget initiatives. Have a brief takeaway with the story and a photo.
- Briefly share information about how the MCDA can be a resource for the legislator’s constituents.
- Make time for the legislator to talk and provide an update on what is happening in the Legislature or locally.
- Make a specific request and try to get a commitment.
- Take pictures with the legislator and your group. These can be sent with a thank you note and posted on social media – be sure to tag the legislator and thank them for meeting.
- Thank the legislator for their time and send personal notes to follow up and express your appreciation.
- Debrief and identify the next steps to build the relationship and to advance your issue.