Hey, Government: Listen Up!

Capturing the Attention of Our Representatives

October 23, 2015 | Cathleen DeLoach: Associate Project Manager, Government Affairs
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Agenda

• Why do we want to be heard?
• Who do we want to listen?
• How do we do it?
• What’s next?
• Questions?
• Bio
Everyone wants to be heard

- What you have to say is important
- Someone needs to hear it

https://youtu.be/TP8RB7UZHKI
Why?

Why do we want to talk to a bunch of politicians and why should it matter if they listen?

• We live in a country with a REPRESENTATIVE form of government
• Our taxes pay for 535 congressional members to represent our interest
• These representatives have the potential to draft bills that can affect every aspect of our life
• We have a responsibility to inform these representatives which bills to support that ultimately become laws
Well, how does a bill become law?

- Legislators draft bills
- Other legislators vote on bill
- President or Governor signs bill into law

https://youtu.be/tyeJ55o3EI0
Who do we want to listen?

• The President
• The Governor
• Your two US Senators
• Your US Representative in the House
• Your representatives in your state legislature
• Other state officials
• Local government officials
Who are our representatives?

Federal Level
Two chambers of Congress: Senate and House of Representatives

You have two Senators
• Find your US Senator here: http://www.senate.gov/senators/contact/

You have one Representative in the House
• Find your US Representative here: http://www.house.gov/representatives/find/
Who are our representatives?

State Level

For all other state and local officials:
https://www.usa.gov/elected-officials
Set up a meeting

- Research official’s availability
- Send written invite
- Arrive early with flexibility
Research official’s schedule

Contact official’s office

- Decide which office you prefer to visit
- Check official’s travel plans
- Narrow down three possibilities – suggest 3 options
Send request for a meeting

Proposing official request for a meeting

- Email or fax official request
- Include information about your meeting – your issue, what group you are with, how many people will be in your group, etc.
- Don’t be afraid of meeting with a staffer!
Day of meeting

In the official’s office

- Arrive early
- Be flexible (time is a CRAZY thing!)
- Distribute BRIEF information sheets
- Small non-monetary gifts from district are greatly appreciated
How do you do it?

- Define your “ask”
- Keep message short and sweet
- Make message personal and local
- Ensure representative knows why message is important to THEM
The royal road to a man's heart is to talk to him about the things he treasures most.

— Dale Carnegie —

• RESEARCH!
• All politics is local
• Make a connection through a shared interest
How do we go about making ourselves heard?

Determine your “ASK”

- What EXACTLY are you asking for?
- Is it “measurable”?
- Make sure you have a consensus on your “ask”
- Develop your elevator speech
How do we do it?

Keep message short and sweet

• Know the issue! Or have expert on hand to get “technical”
• Create your 90 second elevator speech
• Draft 7 to 10 sentences that explain your position
• If asked to elaborate, include personal stories that are less than 30 seconds long
• Handouts and flyers should be no longer than 1 page
Let official know why issue is important to them

How does the issue relate to the representative - examples

- This issue affects mental well being
- This issue affects health
- This issue affects the environment - plant and animal life
- This issue affects business interests
It’s a numbers game!

• Collect letters, postcards, and signatures from EVERY constituent you can!
• Back up facts with statistics on how many are affected
• The higher the numbers, the better!
What’s Next?

How do we follow up?

• Send thank notes promptly that mention meeting
• Answer questions or follow up on items you might not have had answers for earlier
• Regroup and report: share experiences with fellow advocates
• Follow or track legislation: send updates to representative when there is movement
What’s Next?

How to track legislation:

• Federal legislation: www.Congress.gov
• State or local legislation: check state or local government websites
• Sign up for Google Alerts
• Send updates to officials to show them you’re watching
What’s Next?

Invite officials to your community events

But make sure it’s an event you expect a large crowd
What you should take away from this presentation:

Lessons Learned

- Your opinion is important
- Keep it Short and Sweet
- Numbers Matter
- Cathleen is the best presenter EVER!
Questions?
Cathleen DeLoach has been with the National Fire Protection Association since 2011. She has almost 20 years of governmental experience, working in both local and federal governments, and government relations offices. Before joining NFPA, she worked for the Council of the District of Columbia, and in various congressional offices (both House and Senate) over a 10 year span. She completed her undergraduate degree in Political Science at Howard University and is currently in a Congressional and Presidential graduate studies program at Catholic University. She lives with her husband and two dogs, Zeus and Chelsea, in Fort Washington, Maryland.
Thank You