

Letters and Conversations:
Health Policy Dialogues to Change
Hearts & Influence Votes
Toolkit ©

Teresa Garrett, DNP RN PHNA-BC
University of Utah College of Nursing
10 South 2000 East #3665
Salt Lake City, Utah 84112
801.585.9622

teresa.garrett@nurs.utah.edu

Table of Contents

Tips and Tricks for...

Connecting with Policy Makers.....4

Nonprofit and Government Types.....6

Calling Policy Makers.....8

Emailing Policy Makers.....10

Writing a Meaningful Thank You Note.....13

Writing a Letter to the Editor or

Opinion Editorial.....15

Social Media-izing with Policy Makers.....18

References & Resources.....21

Tips and Tricks for Connecting with Policy Makers

Policy makers enjoy hearing from their constituents. They keep track of the comments and suggestions they have received and will respect your point of view if it is:

- Polite: Think honey and vinegar
 - Courteous: One message at a time
 - Listen: Seek first to understand...
 - Concise: And then be understood
 - Informed: Always be evidence & science based
 - Timely: Make sure the issue is before them
 - Truthful: Honesty is always...
 - Respectful: Use their title, they earned it
-
- Wash, rinse and repeat

When and why should I contact a policy maker?

- Its' all about relationships...
 - Relationship follow the voting idiom – early and often.
- In general, whenever you feel the need to connect with them and share your knowledge, experience and opinion about a current issue.
- Think carefully about timing – is this an introductory visit and/or a issue specific discussions:
 - Get to know your local council representative or mayor at a local event.
 - Share your knowledge in short, fact-based soundbites.
 - State legislators have more time in the interim than during the session.

- Take a lesson from our preparedness partners – the time to share business cards is not during a disaster, an election or a critical vote; it's before.
 - Get to know your elected official when they are not in session, in a committee meeting, avoid the grocery store or at the capitol.
 - Visit them at their home, their office or a local favorite spot.
 - Ask for 20 minutes of their time to share a lemonade:
 - Tell them about yourself
 - Share your expertise
 - Tell them thank you for their commitment to XYZ
 - Ask how you can be helpful going forward
 - Send a hand-written thank you note!
 - The next time you see them – re-introduce yourself, remind them of the last time you met and how you helped them.

- Now that you know your policy maker, it is easier to connect with them when there is a hot-button issue you want to discuss. Moreover, you are a known entity so when your email or phone number pops up, you are a known, credible entity – they will pick up the phone or answer your email. And that's when you get to make a difference.

- Remember; always send a *handwritten* thank you note...

Tips and Tricks for Nonprofit and Government Types

Let's get this one done and over with – everyone has the right, the responsibility, and the privilege, to talk with elected policy officials. After all, they're elected to serve the people and *you* are 'the people'. No employer can tell you what to do, and not do, in your free time, with your own resources, and with your own opinion. Phew, that was a lot of Oxford commas.

1. What, who me, can I be a lobbyist, can I lobby? The answer that question is, frankly, yes and no. For the most part, citizen activists wanting to engage in politics lean on their advocacy skills.
 - A lobbyist is generally defined as a person who tries to influence government action on behalf of another person for *compensation*.
 - The National Conference of State Legislators has a great database for understanding the ins and outs of lobbying, state-by-state: www.ncsl.org/ethics
2. So, what is advocacy then? It's pretty much what the rest of us do, either on behalf of ourselves or an organization we are part of, to try and make the world a better place.
 - Advocacy leans on the approach of education and awareness building around a particular issue.
3. Wait just a doggone minute – I work for a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization!
 - So live your mission and get out the door! It is your legal and ethical right to advocate for your cause. World peace is what we are all after, right?
 - Just don't endorse a candidate or a particular piece of legislation in the name of the organization– stick to the issues and on making things better.

4. What if I work for a local, state or federal government agency?
 - Make sure you know the rules of the road for your agency.
 - Remember that *no one* can take away your right to free speech.

5. What CAN I do?
 - Use your own stuff – phone, tablet, laptop, email address
 - Use your own time – lunch, break, take a day off!
 - Speak for yourself – unless your employer gives you the 2 thumbs up
 - Get creative – you just got an email from your favorite advocacy organization saying *Call Now!* to influence a vote. If you wait until you get home, it will be too late. What to do? Grab your phone, take a walk on a public sidewalk and make the call, send the email or whizz off a text.
 - Boom, just like that, you have been a responsible advocate!

Tips and Tricks for Calling Policy Makers

1. Will they answer the phone? Yes, and it might be voice mail. Practice what you are going to say before you make the call. This will matter if they answer, or if they voice mail you.
 - Local Policy Maker – you are probably calling their office, remember they are part-time, and if necessary, leave a polite message.
 - State Legislator – either an office or cell (surprisingly, many legislators give their cell number on the web), leave a polite message. Utah legislators only have staff (an intern) during the session.
 - Federal Sen/Reps – when calling their office, you will rarely get through to the member and the person answering the phone is usually an intern/staffer. Ask to speak to the staff liaison covering the category (e.g., health, environment, air quality). Sometimes, if there are many calls about an issue (think Affordable Care Act), you will leave a message.

2. What should I say?
 - State your name, identify how you are connected to them and leave a call back number:
 - My name is _____, I live in ____, ____. I am a constituent/I live in your neighborhood/I live in your county/I live in Utah and I am a registered voter (you vote, right?).
 - Make your ask, state the title of the bill or issue:
 - I would appreciate your voting for/against SB 509 Adding Lead to Spring Water.
 - Always give the bill number and the title – remember they look at a lot of stuff!

- State the evidence for your position
 - Give them 3 REAL facts (short, sweet, evidence based)
 - Example: Lead is a dangerous substance particularly for children and pregnant women, low levels of lead in the water can increase the risk for heart disease, adding lead to the water will negatively impact our tourism and business recruitment prospects.
- How does this affect you personally?
 - In 2-3 sentences, tell your story.
- Thank you for your time and commitment to the people who live in _____ (town, city, county, state)
- Restate your name and phone number
 - Again, my name is _____, my phone number is _____ and I would be happy to answer any further questions you might have.
- Finally, *don't say anything else until you are sure you have disconnected the call!* (This is not the time to start yelling at your dog or the driver in front of you, just sayin'.)

3. Following up

- Please don't call back every day on the same issue – one call per issue!
- It doesn't do any good to ask for something and then not watch the process. Keep track of how your policy maker votes on your issue:
 - Send them a thank you note if you like what they did, or,
 - Send them a thank you note for considering your side of the issue if you do not like what they did.

Tips and Tricks for Emailing Policy Makers

1. Will they read my email? Well, let me be clear. *Someone* will read your email! Depending on the quality of your email, your strategy and the subject line, they might just 'count' your email. So, if it's worth your time to send, make sure it is worth their time to read.
 - Local Policy Makers – depends on the time of year and the number of emails they are receiving.
 - State Legislator – depends on the time of year, the number of emails they are receiving about an issue and if they have staff or an intern.
 - Federal Rep/Sens –Emails are usually reviewed, logged and tallied by issue and request, by a staff person. You will most likely receive an automatic response thanking you for your email submission. Sometimes you will receive a personalized response telling you about their vote or position.
2. Should I use a template from someone else, like a national organization or advocacy group?
 - Yes, maybe, if you alter it and it speaks to/about you.
 - Always change the subject line.
 - Generally, once a policy maker figures out it's the 168th time they have received the same email, they stop reading them.
 - PROOFREAD before you hit send, ask someone else to read your message, proofread again. Remember, you want to be credible, evidence based and courteous. Okay, now hit send...

3. What should I say?

Subject Line:

- Getting it right in the subject line is the key to getting your email opened. Many policy makers only look at emails that they receive from actual constituents, even though they may receive hundreds on any given topic.
- Example Subj Line: Constituent, SB 509 Adding Lead to Spring Water, VOTE NO

Body of the Email:

- Start with a salutation – Dear Rep/Sen/Council Person XYZ
- State your name and how you are connected to them
 - My name is _____, I live in ____, __. I am a constituent/I live in your neighborhood/I live in your county/I live in Utah and I am a registered voter (you vote, right?).
- Make your ask, state the title of the bill or issue:
 - I would appreciate your voting for/against SB 509 Adding Lead to Spring Water.
- State the evidence for your position
- Give them 3 REAL facts (short, sweet, evidence based)
 - Lead is a dangerous substance particularly for children and pregnant women, low levels of lead in the water can increase the risk for heart disease, adding lead to the water will negatively affect our tourism and business recruitment prospects.
- How does this affect you personally?
 - In 2-3 sentences, tell your story.
 - Give them your phone number if they want to discuss the issue
- Thank you for your time and commitment to the people who live in _____ .
- Finish up with your name, physical address, email address and a phone number

- PROOFREAD before you hit send, ask someone else to read your message, proofread again. Remember, you want to be credible, evidence based and courteous. Okay, now hit send...

4. An example for your consideration:

Subject line: Constituent Request, Vote Yes on SB102
Suicide Prevention

Email: Rep Iknowucare, Data shows that over 90% of people who survive a suicide attempt receive the help they need and do not die from another attempt. Unless they attempt with a firearm (87% fatality rate). This issue has affected my family and me. You can help to remove the lethal means of suicide by voting for SB102 and implementing Red Flag Orders. Your vote would help save lives. Respectfully,

Ima Voter

1234 A Avenue

Some City, State 99999

imavoter@gmail.com

5. Following Up

- Remember, one email per issue!
- Keep track of how your policy maker votes on your issue:
 - Send them a thank you note if you like what they did, or,
 - Send them a thank you note for considering your side of the issue if you do not like what they did.

Tips and Tricks for Writing A Meaningful Thank You Note

Speaking of thank you notes, thank you for making it this far in this short and sweet guide to the advocacy process. I am grateful that you have taken the time to review the first 9 pages and are interested in knowing more about how to write a thank you note. Your time is valuable and using it well will make a difference in your advocacy success. Should you have additional questions, please don't hesitate to reach out. I'm happy to be of assistance in this important work.

1. Thank you notes are incredibly valuable, particularly when they are handwritten and timely.
2. Thank you notes (TYNs) have several objectives – yep, they are as strategic as your visit or phone call.
 - Serve as a reminder of the conversation with one quick sentence.
 - Tell the receiver that you are grateful for their time, talent and treasure.
 - Send the message that you are watching – particularly if you are thanking them for doing some you asked them to do, like vote one way or another on an issue.
 - Give you a chance to have the last word!
3. Wait; did you say 'handwritten' - as in using a pen and paper?
 - Indeed, the first step to writing a successful thank you note is purchasing a set of thank you note cards. Not the cute ones that you used to write to your Grandmother for your birthday present. Take a chance on a set of professionally printed note cards with your name and all those letters you've

earned after it. You can still use them to thank your Dad or favorite Auntie.

- During busy advocacy times, I keep blank TYNs with me at all times and write notes when the meeting is fresh on my mind.
- The One and Only Exception: Send electronic TYNs to your federal delegation. A lovely handwritten note will spend a lot of time with the US Postal Service being tested for Anthrax and other nasty things before it is forwarded to the respective office. So, I give you permission to email this crowd. Make sure you email the staff person who was in the room so you know someone at least looks at it.

4. What should I say?

- Start with a respectful salutation – Dear Councilor ABC/Senator MNO/Rep XYZ
- Begin with the 2 most powerful words in the English language and express your thanks – Thank you...then add a few details...
- Remind them of your ask...
- Say thank you, again, and,
- End with sincere regards, your name, contact information and include your business card.

5. Here's an example:

- Thank you for taking the time to meet/speak/correspond with me. The passage of XYZ is very important to my community and me. I hope I can count on your support. I appreciate your time and willingness to listen. Should you have further questions, please feel free to connect. My contact information is enclosed.

Warm regards,

Your Voting Constituent

Tips and Tricks for Writing A Letter to the Editor or Opinion/Editorial

1. Engage in the 4th Estate? Is this still a thing?
 - A pithy, well crafted, evidence based letter to the editor (LTE) or opinion editorial (Op-Ed) can indeed influence hearts, change minds and sway votes. Believe it or not, the LTE section is the most widely read part of any newspaper. This is true of the on-line newspaper environment, too.
 - People still read the LTEs and Op-Eds, comment on them, and write new LTEs based on what their reaction to what is published.
 - Politicians track what is trending in the LTE department – because policy makers pay attention to public opinion!
 - LTEs and Op-Eds are a fantastic way to engage public opinion, reach a large audience and influence broad public thinking about public health issues.
2. What's the difference?
 - A Letter to the Editor is generally 250 words or less and focuses on a single topic.
 - Opinion Editorials are generally 500-600 words and broader in scope.
 - Every newspaper has set criteria, so check the rules of engagement first – this website www.50states/news is a great state-by-state resource.

3. Where do I start? Here are the 5 basic steps to every LTE with an example:
 - Step 1: What's the point of your LTE? Name this in your first sentence
 - Measles is coming back and you can do something to stop it in its tracks
 - Step 2: Why does this matter? Tie to a current event, tell a story, make it compelling!
 - Measles impacts the very young, the vulnerable and can cause deafness
 - Step 3: How do we know it matters? Support your issue with data/evidence
 - All babies under the age of 15 months are unprotected
 - Step 4: What should be done? Propose a solution and state why it will work
 - Learn about your vaccination status because the vaccine is 97% effective
 - Step 5: Action! What do you want people/policy makers to do?
 - Make sure all children have had 2 doses of the MMR vaccine
4. Be credible – if you hyperlink references/sources throughout the LTE, those links often transfer over to the on-line edition and just like that, the public is even more informed.
5. Think about the timing of your LTE/Op-Ed. Do you want to try to be published the Sunday paper?
 - Some newspapers have different guidelines about Sunday editions.
 - Time your editorial with a public hearing, an action, an election, or event that will boost your chances of publication.

6. Before you hit submit, PROOFREAD before you hit send, ask someone else to read your LTE, proofread again. Remember, you want to be credible, evidence based and courteous. Okay, now hit send...
7. Once you have submitted, be sure to pay attention to the editorial pages. You might just find a pleasant surprise one morning! Editors won't always let you know that your letter has been accepted.
 - Got published? Social media the heck out of your success!
8. Ready to give an Op-Ed a try?
 - You've got more words to work with, can take on a bigger issue, and bring in more resources.
 - Use a lifeline and phone/find a friend to help you.
 - Remember that Op-Eds are for expressing your opinion, so don't be shy about doing that in 750 words.
 - Search the opinion page for recent Op-Eds on your topic. If the editor just did an entire Sunday section on climate change, you need to wait a few months before submitting on clean air initiatives. Wait, that might be a great follow-up LTE. See where I'm going here?
 - There are lots of resources on the world wide web to help you be a stellar LTE and Op-Ed writer. Take a gander at the References, Resources, Websites and Tools page.

Tips and Tricks for Social Media-izing with Policy Makers

Texting, Facebooking, Instagramming, Tweeting, Resistbotting, and What-Evers-Next-ing

It's all the rage; everyone's doing it; and the hip kids think it's the bees knees; you're not a cool cat if you don't jump into the deep end; it's only rock and roll, but I like it.

1. Is there an advantage to using the latest social media method to connect with policy makers?
 - Phone calls, letters and emails still carry the day and phone calls are the best.
 - Think of a phone call as a 'political action swear jar'.
 - If you complain about something on social media, you need to make a phone call about it!
2. Social media can draw others into the conversation.
 - It's in the public eye
 - Other people read and see your comment
 - It just might spark an interesting conversation, you just never know
3. What's popular?
 - Most policy makers have a Facebook presence
 - Some have Instagram accounts
 - Many have Twitter accounts with varying degrees of activity
 - Fun fact – if it's a busy account, the person has probably hired someone to manage the process for them

4. What is Resistbot?

- A free service that turns texts, Facebook Messenger and Twitter tweets into short letters (160 characters at a time) and then automatically faxes or emails elected officials
- It can also automatically sends your letter to a local paper
- Check it out! www.resist.bot

5. So, should I do it?

- Texting a policy maker is helpful if you have a relationship with them
- Mass texts are wildly unpopular with Utah's legislators and I doubt they are hip in your state.
 - Think twice about doing it, unless they have said you should...
- Policy makers generally love being mentioned and tagged in social media. It shows they are interacting with their constituents, out and about in the community, and learning about issues.

References, Resources Websites & Tools

DeSalvo KB, Wang YC, Harris A, Auerbach J, Koo D, & O'Carroll P. (2017). Public Health 3.0: A Call to Action for Public Health to Meet the Challenges of the 21st Century. *Prev Chronic Dis*, 14:170017. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5888/pcd14.170017>

Ellsworth, E (2016). *Call the Halls: Contacting your Representatives the Smart Way*. Downloaded from <https://gumroad.com/l/callthehallsguide> on 1/31/2019.

Stephens, Bret (2017). Tips for aspiring op-ed writers. The New York Times August 26, 2017, Section A, page 17, downloaded from <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/25/opinion/tips-for-aspiring-op-ed-writers.html>

APHA Advocacy for Public Policy:

<https://apha.org/policies-and-advocacy/advocacy-for-public-health>

This is a great website to follow national trends, find example letters to the editor, sign up for Action Alerts, follow coalition letters, comments and briefs and stay up-to-date on important federal legislative activities.

Media Matters: The Complete Guide to Getting Positive Media Attention: https://www.advocacyandcommunication.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/ACS_Media_Guide-1.pdf

This is a spiffy toolkit full of ideas, templates and tools for attracting attention to your issue, including tips for working with the media, writing press releases and hosting a press conference.

Action Utah: <http://www.actionutah.org/>

A nonpartisan community advocacy organization dedicated to providing tools, education and advocacy opportunities to make civic engagement easy.

National Association of County & City Health Officials Policy Statements & Letters:

<https://www.naccho.org/advocacy/activities>

This website is chock full of resources on a variety of public health topics, from access to health services to tobacco to workforce development.

National Council of State Legislatures: [ncsl.org](http://www.ncsl.org)

A great resource for legislative initiative ideas, templates and sample legislation that has passed in other states. NCSL also has a fantastic state-by-state database for ethics and lobbying statutes.

National Education Association, Writing Effective Letters to the Editor: <http://www.nea.org/home/19683.htm>

A quick list of things to remember, include being brief, to the point, personal, asking for action and being polite and professional.

Top 75 Public Health Blogs and Websites to Follow in 2019: https://blog.feedspot.com/public_health_blogs/

Yep, a list of the best listservs, sites and blogs on the web. Very comprehensive and searchable.

Trust for America's Health: <https://www.tfah.org/>

TFAH is a nonpartisan public health policy, research and advocacy organization with state level data on obesity, emergency preparedness, public health funding, national health priorities and the drug, alcohol and suicide crises.

Public Health Indicator Based Information System (IBIS):

<https://ibis.health.utah.gov/>

Utah's very own and very, very good website with amazing statistical numerical data, contextual information on the health status of Utahns and the state of the health care system. An awesome and amazing resource. If you are in luck, your state health department has this, too.



**KEEP
CALM
AND**

**FIND YOUR
INNER
ADVOCATE**

www.99designs.com