



Maine Public Health Association

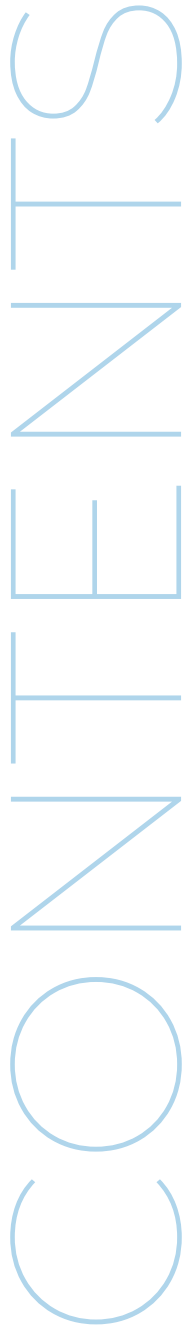


Advocacy
Community of
Practice:
Advocacy Toolkit



2022

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Introduction

Maine Public Health Association offers an Advocacy Community of Practice to its members to support engagement in the policymaking process. The education of elected officials about public health is part of our work and important for advancing evidence-based policies and funding for public health programs.

MPHA's Advocacy Community of Practice offers:

Training on Maine's legislative process

- Priority issue briefings, and discussions about MPHA's policy priorities and strategies
- Opportunities to practice advocacy skills
- Weekly advocacy updates during session and action alerts on priority issues
- Advocacy Toolkit

The Advocacy Community of Practice is a separate member benefit from MPHA's Issue-Based Member Sections; however, participation in both offers enhanced opportunities for professional development and legislative engagement.

RELATIONSHIP BUILDING WITH POLICY MAKERS

Engaging with policy makers, either through lobbying, education, or advocacy, is an opportunity to champion an issue that is important to you and ensure your policy maker has the proper information to make decisions.

Relationship building is an important first step in creating rapport with your policy makers, and the most effective way to influence the stands they take on your issues. Establishing a personal connection – either through shared interests, or people you know in common – is a strong asset and will help the legislator or candidate remember you and your conversation.

Frequency is another important component of relationship building. Communicate with your policy maker often and in various ways – emails, phone calls, written letters, meetings, etc. – but with a purpose.

When and why should I contact a policy maker?

- Connect with your legislators often, but make sure you have a purpose. This can be sharing your knowledge, experience, and opinion about a current issue or one that is important to you and your community.
- Think carefully about timing – is this an introductory visit and/or an issue specific discussion?
 - Get to know your policy maker at local events
 - Share your knowledge in short, fact-based soundbites
 - State legislators have more time in the interim than during the session
- The time to start a relationship 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
 - Ask them to have a lemonade:
 - Tell them about yourself
 - Share your expertise and your work
 - Ask about them and what they think is important
 - Thank them for their commitment to XYZ
 - Ask how you can be helpful moving 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 what you discussed.

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 and credible entity, so when your name or number pops up, they will be more likely to answer your email or pick up the phone.

In building your relationship, it is important to reach out when you are looking for a vote, and to thank them for their work, and their time. Follow-up on any contact with a thank you note and any additional information they may need in a timely manner.

LOBBYING VERSUS ADVOCACY

What is lobbying? Can I lobby? Do I have to be a lobbyist?

“Lobbying” is defined by Maine statute (3 M.R.S.A. § 312-A). It generally refers to communicating directly with an official in the Legislature for the purpose of influencing legislative action, including time spent preparing and submitting oral or written proposals, testimony or analysis concerning any legislative action. It also includes communicating with the Governor for the purpose of influencing the approval or veto of a legislative action.

In order for an activity to be considered lobbying all four of these conditions must be met:

1. Communication with a
2. Government official or employee who participates in forming legislation that
3. Reflects a point of view on
4. Specific legislation (including an appropriation, regulation, administrative action, or executive order)

If one of these elements is not present, it is not lobbying.

You have to register as a lobbyist if you spend more than 8 hours in any calendar month engaging in lobbying and if you are compensated by an employer for the time spent lobbying. Activities during your personal time do not constitute lobbying.

The State of Maine Commission on Governmental Ethics and Election Practices has prepared a [Lobbying FAQ](#), which may be helpful. You can also learn more on the [Commission’s website](#) and at the [National Conference on State Legislators](#).

LOBBYING VERSUS ADVOCACY

What is advocacy, then?

According to the Council of Nonprofits, “advocacy” is however you answer this question: “Who can I talk to today to advance my organization’s mission?”. Advocacy leans on the approach of education and awareness building around a particular issue.

Another definition from the Alliance for Justice:

“While all lobbying is advocacy, not all advocacy is lobbying. Advocacy is any action that speaks in favor of, recommends, argues for a cause, supports, or defends, or pleads on behalf of others. It includes public education, regulatory work, litigation, and work before administrative bodies, lobbying, nonpartisan voter registration, nonpartisan voter education, and more.”

Everyone has the right, the responsibility, and the privilege, to talk with elected policy officials. They are elected to serve the people, and you are “the people.” If you are using your own time, your own resources, and your own opinion, your employer (or grant funder) cannot tell you what to do, or not do. In short, advocating for your mission encompasses just about every form of communications a nonprofit can do. Lobbying, on the other hand, is very narrow.

But wait – I work for a 501(c)(3) non-profit

You have the right to advocate for your cause (see above). If you’re advocating on behalf of your organization or on your organization’s time, stick to the issues and on making things better. Do not endorse a candidate or a specific piece of legislation.

Advocacy by nonprofits isn’t just legal—it’s important, powerful, and fundamental to democracy.

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 no one can take away your right to free speech.

So, 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 a thumbs up
- Get creative – you just got an email from your favorite advocacy agency 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 write a text.

CALLING POLICY MAKERS

It's a big deal for Maine legislators – municipal or state – to hear from their constituents. Even just a few calls about an issue shows them their community cares about a particular issue.

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 you get their voicemail.

- **Local Policy Maker** – you are probably calling their cell phone, remember they are part-time, and if necessary, leave a polite message.
- **State Legislators** – you are probably calling their cell or home phone (surprisingly, many legislators give their personal numbers on the web), remember they are part-time, and if necessary, leave a polite message.
- **Federal Legislators** – when calling their office, you will rarely get through to the elected official, and the person answering the phone is usually an intern/staffer. Ask to speak to the staff liaison covering the issue (e.g., health, environment, air quality). Sometimes, if there are many calls about an issue (e.g., Affordable Care Act), you will leave a message.

CALLING POLICY MAKERS

01

State your name, 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 Maine, and I am a registered voter (you vote, right?). If you have a personal connection to them – through family, friends, work, etc., let them know! It will help them remember you and your conversation.

02

Make your ask: state the title of the bill or issue

- I would appreciate your vote for/against LD ### Bill Title.
- Always give the bill number and title - they look at a lot of stuff!

03

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, even low levels of lead in the water can increase the risk for heart disease, lead in water negatively impacts our tourism and business recruitment prospects.

04

How does this affect you personally?

In 2-3 sentences, tell your story.

05

- Thank them for their 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.)

CALLING POLICY MAKERS

Following Up

- Please don't call back every day on the same issue – one call per issue!
- If they asked for more information, make sure you get that to them in a timely manner, with a note of thanks for taking the time to talk with you.
- 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.

Remember!

It's a big deal for Maine legislators – municipal or state – to hear from their constituents. Even just a few calls about an issue shows them their community cares about a particular issue.

EMAILING POLICY MAKERS

Will they read my email? 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 Legislators – 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.

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.

EMAILING POLICY MAKERS

01

Subject Line

- Getting it right in the subject line is the key to getting your email opened. Policy makers may open emails regardless of who it comes from, but receiving an email from a constituent or lobbyist they have a relationship with carries more weight.
- Example Subject Line: Constituent, LD 509 Adding Lead to Spring Water, VOTE NO

Body of the Email

01

State your name, 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 Maine, and I am a registered voter (you vote, right?). If you have a personal connection to them – through family, friends, work, etc., let them know! It will help them remember you and your conversation.

02

Make your ask: state the title of the bill or issue

- I would appreciate your vote for/against LD ### Bill Title.
- Always give the bill number and title - they look at a lot of stuff!

03

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, even low levels of lead in the water can increase the risk for heart disease, lead in water negatively impacts our tourism and business recruitment prospects.

EMAILING POLICY MAKERS

Body of the Email

04

How does this affect you personally?

In 2-3 sentences, tell your story.

05

- Thank them for their time and commitment to the people who live in ____ (town, city, county, state).
- Finish with your name, physical address, email and 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.

An example for your consideration:

Subject line: Constituent Request, Vote Yes on LD 509 Adding Lead to Spring Water

Email: Dear Rep Iknowucare,

Lead is a dangerous substance particularly for children and pregnant women. Additionally, low levels of lead in the water can increase the risk for heart disease. Aside from public health concerns, lead in the water can also negatively affect our tourism and business recruitment prospects. This issue is of utmost importance to our community's health and wellbeing. I urge you to vote no on LD 509.

Respectfully,

Ima Voter

1234 A Avenue

Some City, State 99999

imavoter@gmail.com

EMAILING POLICY MAKERS

Following Up

- Remember, one email per issue!
- If they reply and ask for more information, be sure to get it to them in a timely manner. Be sure to thank them for their interest and offer to provide any additional information.
- 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.

IN-DISTRICT MEETINGS

An in-district meeting is when you, or a group of constituents, meets with a legislator face-to-face either in the community or virtually.

Scheduling Your Meeting

1. Reach out via email, stating your name and where you live, what you would like to speak with them about, and suggest times or ask for their availability.
2. You may need to follow-up with additional emails or a phone call to schedule the meeting.
3. If the meeting is virtual, offer to set up the virtual meeting space. If needed, examples of free virtual meeting rooms include Zoom (45 min. limit), Google Meet and FreeConferenceCall.com.

Planning Your Meeting

Before your in-district meeting, make sure you have a plan. If it is a group meeting, have a pre-meeting to work through speaking order, talking points, and who will make the ask for commitment. Make sure you know your audience and do research about your candidate/legislator, such as prior voting record.

Before Your Meeting

In the days leading up to the meeting, reach out to the candidate/legislator and any staff to confirm the day and time. Provide them with a list of attendees, their titles, and affiliations, if any. Include a brief agenda with the policies or issues you would like to cover.

IN-DISTRICT MEETINGS

In-district meetings have four main components – the 4 C's.

01

Build Connection

Each person in the meeting should introduce themselves, including where they live, reason for involvement, and any other relationship building information that may be of interest to the candidate/legislator.

02

Establish Context

Discuss the reason for your visit. Let them know you are there to share information and to ask for their support for a policy that is important to you and your community. Provide context for the problem and let them know why their support would make a difference. Share personal stories about how the issue has impacted you.

03

Ask for Commitment

You want to be clear and ask for something specific and direct. If you are unable to get a commitment during the meeting, work with the candidate/legislator to develop a plan and timeline for when you will receive an answer.

04

Catapult

Regardless of whether they commit, establish a clear plan for follow-up including action steps you want them to take, and those that you will take. Offer to be a resource moving forward. Always thank them, even if they don't support your policy.

THANK YOU NOTES

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.

Thank you notes are incredibly valuable, particularly when they are handwritten and timely.

Thank you notes have several objectives and are as strategic as your visit or phone call. They:

- Serve as a reminder of the conversation with one quick sentence.
- Tell the receiver that you are grateful for their time and talent.
- Send the message that you are watching – particularly if you are thanking them for doing something you asked them to do, such as vote on an issue.
- Give you a chance to have the last word!

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.
- During busy advocacy times, keep blank cards with you and write notes when the meeting is fresh on your mind.
- Only send electronic thank you notes to your federal delegation. Handwritten notes will often spend a lot of time being tested for Anthrax before being forwarded to the respective office.

THANK YOU NOTES

What should I say?

- Start with a respectful salutation: Dear Councilor ABC/Senator MNO/Representative XYZ
- Begin with the 2 most powerful words – Thank you! – and express your thanks
- 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, if appropriate.

Here's an example:

Dear Councilor ABC,

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me at 123Coffee about XYZ. The passage of LD 456 is very important to my community and me. I appreciated our conversation and hearing you say you support this legislation. Thank you for your time and willingness to listen. Should you have further questions, please feel free to contact me. My contact information is enclosed.

Warm regards,
Your Voting Constituent
(123) 456-7890
email@email.com

OPINION/EDITORIAL LETTERS

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. The LTE section is the most widely read part of any newspaper, and true for electronic newspapers, as well. Policy makers 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.

LTE or Op-Ed?

- 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.
 - [Portland Press Herald](#)
 - [Bangor Daily News](#)
 - Your local paper matters, too!

OPINION/EDITORIAL LETTERS

Letter to the Editor

Where do I start?

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. Use reputable sources (U.S. CDC, Maine CDC, NIH, etc.), not Wikipedia.

Think about the timing of your LTE/Op-Ed. Do you want to be published in the Sunday paper?

- Some newspapers have different guidelines about Sunday editions.
- Time your editorial with a public hearing, an election, or event that will boost your chances of publication and provide timely insight into the topic.

OPINION/EDITORIAL LETTERS

Letter to the Editor

01

What's the point of your LTE? Name this in your first sentence and make it speak to community.

Measles is coming back, and you can do something to stop it in its track.

02

Why does this matter? Tie to a current event, tell a story, make it compelling!

Measles impacts the very young and culnerable and can cause deafness.

03

How do we know it matters? Support your issue with data/evidence

All babies under the age of 15 months are unprotected.

04

What should be done? Propose a solution and state why it will work.

The measles vaccine is 97% effective.

05

Action! What do you want people/policy makers to do?

o Check your vaccination status, and make sure all children have had 2 doses of the MMR vaccine.

Before you hit submit, PROOFREAD. Ask someone else to read your LTE, proofread again.

Remember, you want to be credible, evidence-based and respectful.

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 it!

OPINION/EDITORIAL LETTERS

Opinion

Ready to give an op-ed a try?

01 You've got more words to work with, can take on a bigger issue, and bring in more resources.

02 Use a lifeline and phone/find a friend to help you.

03 Remember that Op-Eds are for expressing your opinion, so don't be shy about doing that in 750 words.

04 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. Instead, this is a great opportunity to write an LTE in response.

Before you hit submit, PROOFREAD. Ask someone else to read your LTE, proofread again. Remember, you want to be credible, evidence-based and respectful.

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 it!

SOCIAL MEDIA

Is there an advantage to using the latest social media method to connect with policy makers?

- Social media can draw others into the conversation.
- It's in the public eye.
- Other people read and see your comments.
- It might spark an interesting conversation.
- It can allow you to correct misinformation in a public way.

What's popular?

- Most policy makers have a Facebook presence.
- Some have Instagram accounts.
- Many have Twitter accounts with varying degrees of activity.
- If it's a very active account, the person has probably hired someone to manage the process for them.

So, should I do it?

- Phone calls, letters and emails still carry the day and phone calls are the best.
- If you complain about something on social media, it's there permanently, and for a large audience to see. Even if you delete the post, it can still circulate widely. Depending on the issue, it may be better to contact your legislator directly.
- Texting a policy maker is helpful if you have a relationship with them
- Policy makers generally love being mentioned and tagged in social media, especially if they took the time to meet with you, or if you're happy about their position or vote on a particular issue. It can help keep them accountable, and shows they are interacting with their constituents, out and about in the community, and learning about issues.

RESOURCES

- [Maine Public Health Association Advocacy](#) – Resources from MPHA on policy priorities, fact sheets, legislative resources, and coalition partners.
- [American Public Health Association Advocacy for Public Policy](#) – Follow national trends, find example LTEs, 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](#) – A toolkit with ideas, templates, and tools for attracting attention to your issue, including tips for working with media, writing press releases, and hosting a press conference
- [National Association of County and City Health Officials Policy Statements & Letters](#) – Resources on a variety of public health topics
- [Trust for America's Health](#) – 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.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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