

Basic Principles for Effective Communication

1. **Be brief.** Respect that a legislator's time is limited, as is yours.
2. **Be appreciative.** Acknowledge past support, and convey gratitude for current action.
3. **Be specific.** Know your issues and refer explicitly to proposed legislation (S. ___/ H. ___).
Ask directly for a certain action.
4. **Be informative.** Explain how proposed legislation will personally affect you, using specific examples and putting the issue in human terms as much as possible.
5. **Be courteous.** Be polite at all costs, even if you disagree with your legislator's position. Remember that you are building a relationship with him/her and want the communication lines to remain open.

Personal Visits

- ✦ **Face-to-Face discussion is the most effective means of communication.**
This type of visit will underscore the importance of the issue you wish to bring to his/her attention, and will allow you to have his/her full attention.
- ✦ **Constituents are always welcome in Montpelier and Washington D.C.**
Make sure to set a firm appointment prior to your visit. Get to know district staff members if your legislator is unavailable. Close working relationships with staff will benefit you in many ways.
- ✦ **Invite your legislators to your business.**
Conducting a tour of your business is a perfect way to get your local officials to better understand how your business operates. It also allows them to introduce themselves to your employees - likely voters within their districts. This type of visit enables you to convey your message in real and human terms.
- ✦ **Don't stay too long.**
Keep your visits short. Try not to take up more than 20 minutes meeting with him/her. Aim for closure within the first 10 minutes of your visit. Leave any informational materials in support of your issue. If you reach an impasse, thank him/her despite your disappointment. If nothing else, you have educated him/her on an important issue to you.
- ✦ **Follow-up is important.**
Be sure to send a thank you note after your visit. If commitments were made, repeat your understanding of them.

Telephone Calls

- ✦ **Once you have made the acquaintance of your legislator, telephone calls are appropriate and easy.**
Make them sparingly to your representative, whose time is heavily occupied. Regular contact with staff is often effective.
- ✦ **Telephone calls are especially appropriate when there is not enough time before a key vote.**
- ✦ **Visit Vermont's [online legislative directory](#) for local representatives' telephone numbers or call the State House (800) 322-5616.**

Letters

- ✦ **Letters are the chief fuel which power any legislative vehicle, and they are read.**
They elicit responses. They represent votes. Each letter-writer is deemed to represent several like-minded if less highly-motivated constituents.
- ✦ **Letters may be formal or informal, typed or handwritten, but use company letterhead.**
- ✦ **Include basic information.**
Write from the assumption that the legislator is not immediately familiar with the issue. Refer to the specific bill number. Briefly summarize the legislation and your position.
- ✦ **Keep it short and to the point.**
Address only one issue in each letter. Use just enough facts, figures or examples to further enhance your statement. Only make statements that you can back up with evidence. When possible, keep it to one page.
- ✦ **Tout your experience.**
If you are writing about a bill that could have an impact on your profession, let your legislator know you have experience in the field. This will lend tremendous credibility to your letter.
- ✦ **Ask for a response.**
Be specific with respect to what you are asking him/her to do. If the bill attempts to address a problem that you recognize, acknowledge the problem and offer what you think is a better solution. Ask if the legislator has taken a position, and what it is. Let him/her know that you will be following up with a phone call to discuss.
- ✦ **Offer further assistance.**
Thank your representative for considering your concerns and express your willingness to answer further questions. As a taxpayer and business executive, you can serve as a long-term resource for him/her on business-related issues.
- ✦ **Addressing Correspondence for state or federal legislators:**
To a Senator: The Honorable (full name) To a Representative: The Honorable (full name)
Dear Senator: Dear Representative:
- ✦ **Consult Legislative Directory for local legislator addresses or call State House at (800) 322-5616.**
- ✦ **Visit Senator Leahy's, Sanders' and Representative Welch's websites for their contact information.**

Email & Fax

- ✦ **Email, fax and telegrams are fast and easy ways to communicate when timing is critical.**
Regular letter correspondence guidelines apply.
- ✦ **Include your return mailing address.**
Some congressional offices will only reply via the postal service.