

American Association of Museums

ADVOCACY FOR MUSEUMS

Ten Rules for Engagement Getting Involved in the Political Process

1. ALL POLITICS IS LOCAL

All elected officials are all interested in satisfying the people that vote for them back home. They champion the interests of their constituents in all the work that they do. They need to know (and you and others need to tell them) that support for museums is important to the voters and people back home.

2. REMEMBER YOUR MANNERS

Don't forget to say please and thank you. After you meet with an elected official write a thank you note and remind them of the issues you discussed and any actions they promised to take. If you receive local, state, or federal support in the form of grants or direct funding – send thank you notes just as you would with donors. Invite elected officials to your museum and so they can see how you are using those resources.

3. THE SQUEAKY WHEEL GETS THE GREASE

Those that speak up for their issues get attention. If you do not ask, people will not know the issue is important to constituents. Silence can be a powerful message. If you do not speak up, your member of Congress might not know that an issue is important to you.

4. TO CHANGE PUBLIC POLICY TAKE THE LONG VIEW

By its very nature, Congress and the Federal government work through incremental change and dramatic policy shifts take time. It took nearly ten years for The Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids to get a law passed through Congress to prohibit the advertising of tobacco products to kids.

5. POLITICIANS ARE PEOPLE TOO.

They have hobbies and families. They have feelings. They have causes that they champion. Even amongst your political opponents, you might find common ground upon which you can build a relationship. And someday, you might even be able to change their mind.

6. TELL THE TRUTH

Do not make things up. Give them the facts, even if they might hurt your case. You need to maintain your credibility as a trusted source for information.

7. TREAT THE STAFF WITH RESPECT.

The staff for elected officials are a valuable part of the team that keeps them informed. They advise their members and work hard for little pay. They can be a great internal champion for your cause. Someday, they, too, may also run for political office.

8. MAKE ADVOCACY A HABIT

Don't rely on one visit a year to make your case for your institution. Keep in touch with your elected officials and their staff. Invite them to visit your museum. Make sure they are on your mailing list and/or your media list. Find creative ways to send the message that your museum is an important part of your community. Share your successes with them.

9. REWARD GOOD WORK

If your elected officials do good things for your museum, tell everyone. Put it in your newsletter, share it with your supporters, give them an award, and don't forget to let the media know.

10. YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE AND ASK OTHERS TO HELP

Enlist others to help you make your case. Be creative.

- At your next docent meeting, have the volunteers write their elected officials to let them know how important the museum is to the community
- Teachers that participate in your professional development workshops can help you let school officials, local school boards, and elected officials how valuable working with the museum is to their teaching and students success
- Share visitor comments with elected officials
- Approach vendors who are members of your local business community to write letters of support for your institution