

## Five Ways Nonprofits Can Engage With State Legislators

By: Brian King, Utah House Minority Leader

- 1. Communicate with your legislator.** Legislators need to hear from people. They are not mind readers. They don't know how you feel about any particular issue or bill unless you communicate with them. The most effective communication comes from the legislators' own constituents, people in the district the legislator represents and who are in a position to vote for them.<sup>1</sup> In-person meetings are best in terms of the impact on the legislator, but emails, letters or notes can also be effective. Contact information for all the legislators may be found at the legislative website, <http://www.le.utah.gov>
- 2. Get to know your legislator and become a friend.** We all are more likely to trust and be positively influenced by people we know and like. To the extent you get to know your legislator and they get to know you, the legislator will be more likely to be open to considering the information you want to provide about your cause.
- 3. Educate your legislator about your area of expertise; become their trusted guide.** Legislators are generalists. We know a lot about the things we've been trained in or do for a living. But, in all likelihood, you know a great deal more about the nonprofit work you do than your legislator knows. Provide your legislator information that allows them to rely on you as a credible resource, a specialist, in the area of law in which your nonprofit works.
- 4. Personalize the issues for which you are advocating.** Good public policy is most quickly and effectively put into place when legislators understand the degree to which their actions affect real people. Bring your legislator information that makes clear that what you want the legislator to do will have a significant beneficial impact on people's lives. Introduce them to people who are struggling with the issues for which you advocate. Make sure the legislator knows the human stories behind the struggles.
- 5. Don't get discouraged and don't give up.** Many times very worthy legislative action takes years to implement. It's slow, painful, time and energy consuming, frustrating, and difficult. There will often be many obstacles and detours. But remember the family motto of the great polar explorer Ernest Shackleton: "by endurance we conquer." So it is. Persistence is indispensable. If your legislative goal constitutes good public policy, it is worth your sustained effort to bring it to pass.

---

<sup>1</sup> Pet peeve: people who write or call and tell me they are my constituents when they don't live in my House district.