

Effectively Communicating with Your Legislative Officials

August 13, 2018

Presented by

Robert S. Beck

PinPoint Results, LLC



Goals for Today's Session

- Do's and Don't's for communicating with your legislators – what works and what doesn't;
- Advice for crafting your message;
- The Impact of civic disengagement – a.k.a. indifference or sitting on the sidelines;
- Links to useful resources;
- Questions and Answers;
- Secure your commitment to ADVOCATE for Aging Programs & Services!

The Florida Legislature

- 120 members in the Florida House of Representatives
- 40 Florida Senators
- 8 year term limit
 - House members run every 2 years for election/reelection
 - Senate term are 4 years in length
- The job of a Florida Legislator is Part-Time
 - Senators are paid \$29,697
 - Representatives are paid \$29,697
- The Annual Legislative Session is held annually every March (sometimes January – even years) for 60 days. Their only constitutionally-mandated duty is to pass an annual budget.

The Florida Legislature

- Every legislative session, thousands of bills are filed by the House and Senate; but often, fewer than 200 will pass and become law.
- There are 1,872 lobbyists registered to lobby the Florida Legislature – that's 11.7 lobbyists per legislator.
- These 1,872 lobbyists represent 3,882 Principals (businesses, not-for-profits, and other entities seeking an appropriation or legislative issue – a bill, for example).

The Florida Legislature

- There are 480 total working hours during a 60-day legislative session.
- That's 28,800 total minutes.
- At least 50% of that time, or 14,400 minutes will be spent in legislative committees, debating bills, putting together budgets and accepting public testimony.
- That leaves 14,400 minutes for 1,872 lobbyists to meet with legislators in Tallahassee.
- That's just 7.69 minutes per member, per lobbyists.

The Florida Legislature

- So What's the Point of this information?

Your BEST approach to effectively communicating with your legislative officials is to approach them in their district office BEFORE the legislative session ever begins.

That's not to say that visiting your legislator during the 60-day legislative session is not worthwhile – it is – in order to reinforce the message and priority you met with them about in their district office.

Your communication & advocacy MUST BEGIN months before session starts.

Effectively Communicating with your legislative officials

“Do’s and Don’ts”

- Do:

- ✓ Have your issue/problem well-defined in a 1-Minute Elevator Speech

- Legislators deal with dozens of issues each and every day – they are bombarded by constituent and special interest issues. You will have a very limited window to grab your legislator’s attention!

- ✓ Make your issue Compelling. Ask yourself this simple question: Why should my legislator care about this issue?

- If your issue relates to funding, what compelling information can you provide that makes your issue ‘worthy’ of the expenditure of tax payer dollars?

- If your issue is a policy issue – meaning legislation may be required, again, what makes your issue unique and why should it be addressed? House members only get to file 6 bills each legislative session – 6! Why should your legislator use one of their very limited 6 slots to address your issue?

Effectively Communicating with your legislative officials

“Do’s and Don’ts”

- Do:

- ✓ Have a ‘Leave Behind’ – a short, concise written document that summarizes your issue and your recommendations and/or requested ACTION. Be sure to include your contact information in the document.
- ✓ Meet with Legislative Staff if the State Representative or Senator is not available or if you’re having difficulty getting on your legislator’s calendar.
 - ❑ A relationship with your legislator’s staff is critical! They are the chief advisors to the elected officials and hold a position of great trust. Never ignore or be rude to legislative staff – to do so will put your issue in peril!
 - ❑ Often times following a productive meeting with legislative staff will result in securing a meeting with your legislator

Effectively Communicating with your legislative officials “Do’s and Don’ts”

- Do:

- ✓ Be sensitive to TIMING! The first time to meet with your legislator is NOT in Tallahassee when they are in session. If you wait to have your first meeting during the legislative session, it’s almost always – “Game Over”.
- ✓ Meet in the local district office, months or weeks before legislative session, and indeed, before interim committee meetings begin in January.
- ✓ Be persistent in securing a meeting – remember, in Florida, the job of a legislator is a part time job – many legislators have full-time day jobs. It may take three to four phone calls and several emails to get on your legislator’s calendar – don’t give up!

Effectively Communicating with your legislative officials “Do’s and Don’ts”

- Don’t:

- ✓ Be afraid or nervous – you are a constituent; your legislator represents YOU;
- ✓ Don’t rush your meeting; typically, when meeting in the district office, you will be given 15-30 minutes to discuss your issue. If you can present your ‘ask’ in 15 minutes, then do it. It’s always good when you can give back time to a busy legislative official. They appreciate that!
- ✓ End your meeting without clearly having made your ‘Ask’. Legislators typically meet with dozens of people each week – don’t be that person, that when you leave, your legislator has no idea of what you were asking for!

- Crafting your message:

- ✓ Clear, concise, - keep it short and simple – 1-2 pages MAX; charts and graphs are always good.
- ✓ Data: Your issue **MUST BE SUPPORTED** by DATA. Legislation and Appropriations are never based on antidotes. Be prepared to discuss your supporting documentation and the source of your data.
- ✓ If your issue relates to an appropriations priority – identify the need, why it exists, who will be served, cost of service, return on investment, local match, impact if not funded, and any other pertinent information that makes your budget issue compelling.

- Crafting your message:

- ✓ Don't assume that your legislator knows about your issue or what you do or the programs you administer or the people you serve.
- ✓ Your goal is to educate, educate, educate, educate AND Explain to them

'WHY'

they should care about the issue you are presenting to them today.

The Impact of Civic Disengagement – a.k.a. Indifference or Sitting on the Sidelines;

- If your legislator doesn't know you, they likely won't help you
- The level of competition among advocates is fierce – Aging Programs are one of thousands of special interests
- Look at your local legislators election campaign website – does he or she have a position or priority concerning Florida's 4.7 million seniors? Sadly, many do NOT.
- If you don't lay the ground work at the local level on the importance of what you do, about Community Care for the Elderly, Alzheimer's Respite Care, Home Care for the Elderly, and the needs of the seniors you serve – NOTHING WILL HAPPEN.

The Impact of Civic Disengagement

– a.k.a. Indifference or Sitting on the Sidelines;

- Did you know that Before FCOA and the Aging Network – our CCE Lead Agencies, Local Service Programs, and Area Agencies on Aging, began their Advocacy Initiative 7 years ago that only once in the prior 12 years was funding increased to serve those on the waiting list?
- Once in 12 years!
- In the past 7 years of Aging Network Advocacy, CCE has been increased by over **\$17 million dollars** – and a lot of the credit goes to you for your local advocacy efforts and for not sitting on the sidelines.

Links to Useful Resources

<http://dos.elections.myflorida.com/candidates/CanList.asp>

<https://www.flsenate.gov/>

<https://www.myfloridahouse.gov/>

<http://elderaffairs.state.fl.us/>

http://edr.state.fl.us/Content/long-range-financial-outlook/3-Year-Plan_Fall-2017_1819-2021.pdf

Robert@pinpointresults.com

Questions?