



Delivering the APWA Public Works Message

As an APWA Advocate, you are delivering an important message about the public works community and its recommendations for public policy action. APWA has tools that enable you to send a carefully crafted letter or prepare for a meeting. You are not alone!

Elected officials are very busy and their offices communicate with hundreds of people each week. That is why it is important you know exactly what you are going to say to an elected official to make the most of your letter, phone call or meeting. As an Advocate, always know the message, get comfortable with the specifics, and be ready to make the ask.

Making the Ask

When you tell an elected official exactly what you want him or her to do, it is called making the ask. The ask is the most important part of your meeting.

- ***What do you want?***

Do you want your elected official to sponsor, cosponsor or vote for or against legislation? Do you want a specific exemption? Should he or she introduce an amendment?

An ask can be as simple as “support increased funding for surface transportation,” or as technical-sounding as “support Congressman Smith’s amendment to H.R. 123 exempting water facilities from regulation.”

*The most important thing is that you MAKE THE ASK!
If you do not ask the answer is usually no.*

It is also important to have talking points, persuasive reasons why your representative should take action. APWA positions may provide broader, policy-oriented talking points, but it is extremely convincing if you have an example from your own experience—in your elected official’s district—that relates to the issue.

Remember, talking points are quick and punchy, not story-length. Think about your situation and try to condense it into the most relevant, applicable details. It should be your unique story, packaged into a sentence or two.

Once you are comfortable with the message, choose the best way to get it across: generally, the type of “ask” you are making can help you decide how you will deliver it.



Meetings

Meetings are effective for requesting broad support for an array of public works priorities. Meeting requests should be made in writing, and faxing the request is recommended. About a week after you send your written request, call your elected official's office and ask to speak with the scheduler to set up a meeting with the staff person who covers your issue.

Once you are able to arrange a meeting, be sure you adequately prepare ahead of time to maximize your impact. Here are tips to make the most out of your meeting:

- **Be On Time:** Elected officials have very tight schedules. If you arrive late, you may miss your chance to meet—but do not be discouraged if you are kept waiting. Remember, your voice as a constituent matters to your elected officials, even if they are temporarily delayed by other affairs. Be sure to review the key congressional staff roles in the event that you meet with the elected official's staff.
- **Know Your Audience:** Take the time to research your elected official's position on the subject you are discussing. If she has already introduced supportive bills, be sure to thank her. If he is opposed to the position you are advocating, be sure you have a strong argument with which to persuade him, but always be polite. Doing your homework on a legislator before you arrive will pay off in the meeting.
- **Leave Something Behind:** Always offer to be a resource for future questions. Be sure the person you meet with has one of your business cards, along with any supporting materials you think might help make your case (e.g., APWA's advocacy priorities). When a staff member does her research to determine how your Congressman will vote on a bill, your leaflet or handout might be what she grabs for background.
- **Follow Through:** After your meeting, send a thank you letter re-stating your main point and be sure to keep any promises you made during the meeting (for example, if you told a staff member you would e-mail him a report you referenced, make sure you do so). If you asked for something specific, check back after a few months to see if your elected official was able to do it. If so, send another thank you. If not, consider following up with a call or a letter reminding him or her of your discussion—and be sure to ask for a response.



Phone Calls

Phone calls work best when you have a short or urgent message you want to convey, such as support for a specific bill coming to the floor. The staff assistant who answers the phone can log your comment, or you can ask to speak to the staff member who works in an appropriate policy area (usually, a staff member will have responsibility for broad issues like transportation, environment or emergency management, so think about what area your concern might fall under). Prepare for a phone call by writing down two or three talking points, the main messages you want to convey. These should only be a sentence or two, so be sure your message is clear, concise and makes a good argument.

Key Congressional Staff Titles

If you are meeting with a staff member, know his or her role in the office.

- **Chief of Staff:** The key administrative official in each congressional office. He or she runs the office on a day-to-day basis.
- **Legislative Director:** Responsible for determining the senator or congressman's official position on legislation. This person may be responsible for specific areas, particularly issues in the jurisdiction of a member's committees.
- **Scheduler:** Manages the member's schedule. This person will often determine whether or not the member is able to meet with a constituent and may determine which staff member takes the meeting if the member is unavailable.
- **Legislative Assistant:** Staff members who concentrate on one or more issue area. Public works issues such as transportation, water, rights-of-way and emergency management may be covered by a single legislative assistant, or an office may have a different staff person for each issue.
- **Legislative Aide:** Staff members (primarily in the Senate) who assist Legislative assistants or take responsibility for some smaller issue areas.
- **Legislative Correspondent:** Staffers responsible for responding to constituent inquiries, primarily via mail. In the Senate, legislative correspondents may also have some issue areas and work closely with legislative assistants by attending meetings and briefings on their behalf.
- **Staff Assistant:** The receptionist, who will route your calls to the appropriate person.



What to Expect – The Policy Process

It is important to be realistic when making demands of your elected officials. If your representative was just elected, she probably is not ready to introduce a major bill. And if he is in the minority, he might be fighting as hard as he can for an issue that will never be considered by a committee. Know these basic concepts:

- **The Legislative Agenda:** *The agenda is set by the majority in Congress. If the majority does not like a bill or an idea, it's unlikely to be voted on. In committees, the agenda will be set by the chairman and will include specific items over which the committee has jurisdiction.*
- **Committees:** *Know the committees and subcommittees on which your elected official serves. If she is on the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works, she is likely to have a lot more expertise in stormwater regulations than someone who sits on the Budget Committee. Remember the Appropriations Committee members as well! They hold the key to providing funding for legislative priorities and often need the most education about the importance of projects and technical issues. On the following page, find a select list of committees and their jurisdictions that deal with public works issues.*
- **How a Bill Becomes a Law:** *You already know that bills get introduced, voted on and signed by the president in order to become law. But it is important to know also about a bill's momentum. When a bill is first introduced, it is sent to a committee that will hold hearings, discuss it, mark it up (i.e., amend) and send it to the floor for a vote. Many more bills are introduced in a session of Congress than the committees have time to consider and many bills are said to die in committee.*

While a bill is in committee or waiting for a floor vote, elected officials can add their names to the bill as a cosponsor, showing support for the bill. Adding cosponsors gives the bill momentum, especially if the cosponsors are from both parties. If a bill is moving, it will start gaining amendments and cosponsors.

When a bill passes both the House and Senate, it is sent to a conference committee to be finalized. This is often the time when the final details are decided and represents the last and most urgent opportunity to make sure public works needs are met in the bill.

- **Bills, Provisions & Amendments:** *If a bill is likely to become a law, policymakers will add provisions and amendments that otherwise might not pass. For example, a single bill might provide funding for a federal agency and a million dollar provision for an unrelated program. It is important to know if you support a bill but not a provision, or vice versa. Your congressman may be able to introduce an amendment that strikes or adds an individual provision without affecting the viability of the bill.*



Relevant Committees and Jurisdictions

Senate Committees

Environment and Public Works

- *The Committee on Environment and Public Works has jurisdiction over matters related to the environment and infrastructure, including environmental policy, research and development, flood control and improvements of rivers and harbors, public buildings, water and air pollution, water resources, solid waste, construction and maintenance of highways, regional economic development, public works, bridges and dams. The committee is also the lead on anticipated Climate Change legislation.*

Homeland Security & Governmental Affairs

- *The Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs has jurisdiction over matters related to the Department of Homeland Security and other homeland security concerns, as well as the functioning of the government itself, including the National Archives, budget and accounting measures other than appropriations.*

Banking Housing & Urban Affairs

- *The Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs has jurisdiction over matters related to banks and banking, urban mass transit and urban development, and federal monetary policy.*

Energy & Natural Resources

- *The Committee on Energy and Natural Resources has jurisdiction over matters related to national energy policy, including international energy affairs and emergency preparedness, nuclear waste policy and territorial policy.*

Commerce, Science & Transportation

- *The Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation has jurisdiction over matters related to the regulation of interstate common carriers, including railroads, buses, trucks, vessels, pipelines, and civil aviation, as well as highway safety, inland waterways and coastal zone management.*

Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry

- *The Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry has jurisdiction over matters related to federal agriculture policy, extension of farm credit and farm security, rural development (water, wastewater and solid waste) and water conservation.*



House Committees

Transportation & Infrastructure

- *The Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure has jurisdiction over matters related to transportation including civil aviation, railroads, water transportation and transportation infrastructure, construction and maintenance of roads, bridges and dams, road safety, flood control and improvements of rivers and harbors, oil and other pollution of navigable waters, public buildings, inland waterways, wastewater infrastructure and policy and federal management of emergencies and natural disasters.*

Natural Resources

- *The Committee on Natural Resources has jurisdiction over matters related to fisheries and wildlife, forest reserves and national parks, mining interests generally and irrigation and reclamation.*

Homeland Security

- *The Committee on Homeland Security has jurisdiction over matters related to U.S. security legislation and oversight of the Department of Homeland Security. The committee conducts oversight and handles legislation and resolutions related to the security of the United States.*

Energy & Commerce

- *The Committee on Energy and Commerce has jurisdiction over matters related to air quality and environmental health and drinking water, the supply and delivery of energy, telecommunications, general management of the Department of Energy and management and all functions of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission and exploration, production, storage, supply, marketing, pricing, and regulation of energy resources, including all fossil fuels, solar energy, and other unconventional or renewable energy resources. The committee is also the lead on anticipated Climate Change legislation.*

Agriculture

- *The Committee on Agriculture has jurisdiction over matters related to federal agriculture policy, extension of farm credit and farm security, rural development (water, wastewater and solid waste) and water conservation.*



Contact Us

The APWA Washington Office is available to assist you and answer any questions you may have about public works legislation, regulations and advocacy. Please do not hesitate to contact the Government Affairs department at 202-408-9541. Visit the APWA Advocacy webpage at <http://www2.apwa.net/advocacy/>.