

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

GETTING TO KNOW YOUR LAWMAKERS

Building relationships with lawmakers at the local, state and federal levels of government is an easy and effective chapter government affairs activity. It is also one of the most important ways your chapter can influence government actions that affect your job as a golf course superintendent.

By having frequent contact with lawmakers and establishing golf course superintendents as a good source of information, your chapter will already have an open line of communication should an issue arise that affects golf course maintenance.

The following are two ways your chapter can start building good relationships with lawmakers.

GOLF COURSE TOURS

An organized golf course tour is a great way to get to know your lawmakers and teach them about your work. It is an opportunity for chapter members to showcase environmental practices on the course while getting to know lawmakers personally. Encourage lawmakers to bring along their staff members who work on environmental issues. Invite others from the golf course who might add to the experience, such as members of the golf course maintenance staff or the green chairman.

You can also invite state and local lawmakers for a round of golf following the tour. Federal lawmakers cannot accept a gift of free golf, but they may be willing to pay to play the course. Some state governments have similar restrictions so be sure to ask your lawmaker what is allowed.

“ Include copies of photos with thank you notes to the lawmakers. They may be interested in using them in their press releases and constituent newsletters. ”

Don't forget to take photos of the event. Include copies of photos with thank you notes to the lawmakers. They may be interested in using them in their press releases and constituent newsletters. You can use the photos in your chapter and golf course newsletters, and post them on course information bulletin boards to let everyone know about your activities.

GETTING TO KNOW YOUR LAWMAKERS

SPEAKER PROGRAMS

Inviting lawmakers to speak at chapter meetings is another way to build relationships. It sends the message that you care about their work and helps them accomplish their goals by providing an opportunity to address their constituents. Lawmakers are usually eager to accept invitations to speak as their schedule permits.

The invitation will be most appealing if lawmakers only have to speak 10-15 minutes. Allow for a 15-20 minute question and answer period following their speech. The nature of the questions from chapter members will educate your lawmaker about what your group is most concerned about. It also allows chapter members to get more specific information about issues.

It is a good idea for chapter members to prepare some questions in advance. It will give both the speaker and the questioner the opportunity to make a good impression—and lawmakers will appreciate the effort. Again, don't forget to take photos and send thank you notes.



CONDUCTING SITE VISITS FOR LAWMAKERS

by Michael Graham, American Dental Association

One of the best uses of time and money in a grassroots lobbying effort is to conduct a site visit with an elected official. Few occasions provide such a great opportunity for a legislator to get to know your association members and become educated on your issues.

Here are three reasons why you should make site visits a part of your grassroots lobbying action plan:

- Give the elected official an opportunity to know you and your association member(s) personally.
- Educate him or her about your profession, business or industry; and
- Put a human face on legislation that impacts your members.

GETTING TO KNOW YOU

Perhaps you feel that you have a good relationship with an elected official. Your letters get answered. You even get a face-to-face visit once or twice a year. Now ask yourself—is that enough contact? Can that elected official be counted on during “crunch time?” Maybe not. And it’s not worth the risk.

Remember that an elected official sees lots of people each day. You are competing with everyone. Therefore, you must get to know legislators on a personal level so they respond to you as well as those you represent. Spending two hours discussing your issues—both business and personal—is usually an unforgettable experience. Be sure to take advantage of it.

EDUCATING THE LEGISLATORS

Do the legislators really know your profession? Some professions enjoy high profiles that allow, or even force, legislators to recognize them on a daily basis. Other professions don’t have the same profiles. A site visit allows legislators to get to know your issues better because they see them first-hand and meet the people responsible for delivering the goods and services.

PUTTING A FACE ON LEGISLATION

Once visits have been concluded, you can be assured that every time a bill affecting your profession crosses those legislators’ desks, they will think about the visits they made to the site. At the very least, it provides legislators with a point of reference should you need to remind them when you are discussing your legislation.

CONDUCTING SITE VISITS FOR LAWMAKERS

HELPFUL HINTS

SCHEDULING. Extend invitations to legislators to visit during a personal meeting or by sending a letter. The invitation may include a “meet and greet” reception following the visit to introduce legislators to other individuals in your profession. If you send a letter, be brief but specific about what you hope the legislator will learn from the visit. Follow up with the office scheduler to confirm the date and time.

VISIT LOGISTICS. Educate your participants about the legislators, key issues and what you wish to accomplish. Assign each participant a specific duty. What key issues, technologies, practices and techniques do you wish to highlight? What refreshments will you serve? Map out the tour, and perform a walk-through. Prepare an information sheet, and schedule a photographer. Under some circumstances, a legislator may want the press on hand.

CONDUCTING THE VISIT. Stay on time. Remember your goals for the tour. Tie the technologies, practices, and so on, to the legislative issues you care about. Give the legislators time to visit with all participants, and provide a question and answer period. Remember to thank the legislators and respective guests. Don’t forget to tell the legislators what you want. (“Please support/oppose H.R. ____.”).

FOLLOWING UP YOUR VISIT. Write thank-you notes to your legislators, reemphasizing the key points you made during the tour. Include additional update information, if appropriate, as well as photos taken during the visit. Stay in contact with the legislators. You should look at successful site visits as just another important step in the long process of getting to know and educate your legislators.

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Michael Graham, senior congressional lobbyist, American Dental Association, Washington, D.C., is a member of the American Society of Association Executives (ASAE) government relations section. Michael E. Dunn, president, Michael E. Dunn and Associates, Arlington, Virginia, contributed to this article. Reprinted with permission, ASAE, 1575 I St., N.W., Washington, D.C., 20005-1168, ©1998, ASAE, (202) 626-2723; www.asaenet.org.