

Establishing a Relationship with your Legislator

It is essential for hospital advocates to build and maintain relationships with legislators who can support hospitals and the patients they serve. Though some of them may seem unapproachable or intimidating, developing a relationship with legislators is no different than getting to know a new friend or contact.

Here are ways to build a valuable relationship with a legislator:

ACCESS: Attend events that you know your legislator will attend like Town Hall meetings or community events. Step up and introduce yourself, say where you are from and what you do. **If true, say you are a constituent.** Invite them to come to your hospital.

SUPPORT YOUR OFFICIAL: Seek areas of common ground and **always** be respectful when you speak with a legislator. **Never** speak about them poorly, in private conversations or in public. Recognize new legislators with a letter of congratulations sent to them or in a Letter to the Editor to your local newspaper and express your desire to work together in the future.

ASK QUESTIONS: Learn about your legislator. Get to know your legislator's point of view by researching and asking them about their life before they took office. Do they sit on community boards or volunteer in the community? What are their interests?

RESPECT OPPOSING VIEWS: Always know your legislator's views on the issues and if you're not sure, ask them what they think. Understanding the views and stances of your legislator will help you tailor your conversation and enable a smooth working relationship.

BE APPROACHABLE: It's all about developing trust —building a relationship with legislator is no different than building relationships with friends or associates.

BE A RESOURCE: First and foremost, legislators want to represent constituents in their district, so show how your issue connects with them. Educate your legislator —don't assume they know who you are or what you are talking about. Show your legislator how you can help inform his constituents through your network.

BE DIRECT: Ask your legislator for support; when appropriate, tell them exactly what action you would like to see from them.

Top 10 Ways to Establish a Relationship with your Legislator

1. Invite your legislator to visit your hospital. Make sure they know what your hospital does for the community and its challenges. Suggest what they can do to improve or help hospitals.
2. Follow up with your legislator. Update them on the results of their support and news about activity at the hospital.
3. Put legislators on your hospital's newsletter mailing list. Follow them on social media.
4. When they have been supportive, thank them quickly and publicly. Publicize their support for hospitals by submitting a Letter to the Editor to your local paper.
5. Provide regular communication via email and phone calls as a concrete reminder of your interest, your identity and your issues.
6. Share your annual report, news about new board members, and special events.
7. Invite legislators to your hospital at least once a year and for special events.
8. Make a lasting impression by being reliable and sincere.
9. Get to know their legislative assistants.
10. Remember that maintaining a relationship is a two-way street. Just as you ask your legislator to support you and hospital, provide data and information in a timely manner as requested from your legislator and their staff.