

Grass-Roots Lobbying

Empowering ATIA's Roots & Blades

"Grass Roots: The ultimate source of power, usually patronized, occasionally feared..."
– Safire's Political Dictionary

General Tips on Achieving Success in Juneau:

- **Communications from constituents** receive the highest visibility from legislators and candidates for office.
- The purpose of **grass-roots lobbying is to educate and influence** the public official; informing them of the consequence of their vote on an issue.
- Most members of the Legislature are **responsive to grass roots lobbying** – they are aware of the need to be in step with their constituency and pay close attention to constituent communications.
- Some legislators may be opposed to an issue and a grass roots effort may not change their view; however, it may cause them to **become less active in their opposition**.
- **Campaigns are expensive** and depend on voluntary financial contributions. Those who support candidates with their time and money are appreciated and not forgotten.
- **Become a campaign volunteer.** Those who show up in a candidate's campaign office and provide assistance with even the most mundane tasks **will ALWAYS BE REMEMBERED**. Distributing yard signs, mailings, data entry, door knocking; it can be fun and a great learning experience.
- Learn all you can about the candidates. Who are they? What have they done? What experiences do they draw from as they ask you for your vote and to be your voice in government? **How will their experiences shape their decisions** before casting their vote?
- **Develop a rapport** with public officials. Educate and prepare them well in advance of an upcoming issue. If a legislator has already cast a public vote against your position, you have placed them in a very difficult situation by not communicating in advance. It is very difficult for a public official to change their position on a public vote.
- **Time is a precious commodity** for members and staff. The information conveyed must be concise, easy to read, easy to digest, and based in fact, not emotion.
- Always **be courteous and show respect**. The job they were elected to is challenging, rewarding, and extremely taxing and trying at times.

Tips on writing an effective letter/email to members of the Legislature:

Legislators generally do read their mail/email, and every office dedicates considerable staff time to processing and answering constituent mail. Individually composed letters from constituents are one of the most effective ways of communicating with decision makers. These letters receive more attention than any other form of written communication. One clear letter from a thoughtful constituent will receive considerably more attention than dozens of form letters bearing the same message.

- Write the letter when the issue is current, not after it's too late to change the outcome of a vote, i.e. when a bill is passed out of committee or is already on the floor of the House or Senate.
- Send the letter on your personal or business stationery, if possible.
- Identify the bill number and/or legislative issue in a subject line of your letter. Approximately 1,000 bills are introduced in every Legislature (2-year term), and a member cannot be expected to know a bill unless specifically described.
- Identify yourself and mention your legislative district and town in which you are a voter.

- Explain your position. State very simply in your own words the impact of the legislation and how the bill or amendment will affect you and/or your business personally.
- Be brief. A letter stands a better chance of being read if the issue is stated concisely. A letter should not be longer than one page – quality, not quantity, will get a legislator’s attention.
- Ask for a response. Urge your legislator to support your position and give them the reasons for doing so.
- Ask them for their vote – don’t be afraid to be direct. Always request a written reply and/or a return phone call.

Tips on meeting with legislators:

Personal visits to legislative offices are effective if the visitor is professional in his/her approach. Visits by uninformed individuals, using emotion in lieu of solid information, can be counterproductive.

- **BE APPRECIATIVE & COURTEOUS.** Thank them for serving in public office. Compliment them on a recent action they have taken. It lets them know you are paying attention and following their legislative record.
- **BE BRIEF.** Be knowledgeable about the issue, status of the bill, and committee action. Make your pitch in five minutes or less. Give the reasons why they should support your position. Let them know specifically how and why it affects you and/or your business.
- **BE PREPARED.** Know a legislator’s background and voting record on the topic, and be prepared to discuss the position of those in opposition, point by point.
- **DON’T TALK TOO MUCH.** Be a good listener. Let your legislator ask questions, and answer them with hard facts that show an understanding of the issue. You don’t have to agree with a member’s point of view. Don’t be concerned if you can’t answer every question but promise to provide the information – and follow through.
- **STICK TO THE POINT.** Don’t let the member evade the issue. If the subject is changed, tactfully bring it up again and ask about his position.
- **ASK FOR THEIR SUPPORT.** Don’t be shy. Ask them if they support your position – will they vote yes in committee and on the Floor of the House or Senate.
- **OPPOSING POSITIONS.** Determine why a member may oppose your position. If opposition is based on political philosophies, be prepared to professionally and politely agree to disagree. If opposition is based on facts and concerns, follow-up with answers immediately. Engage other constituents and hone message to garner votes of other Legislators.
- **SUPPORTING POSITIONS.** Thank them. Offer to assist with other legislators that may not be supportive. Provide broader constituent support. If the member is on your side, emphasize how much the issue means to his constituents, get as much support as you can.
- **LEAVE BEHIND.** Provide a brief fact sheet or policy statement.
- **BE POLITE – USE YOUR HOSPITALITY SKILLS.** Don’t threaten or argue, and thank them for a vote or other action taken.

BECOME AN ATIA ROOT OR BLADE: Homework between October 9 and November 4

- Meet the candidates in your election district
- Educate them on the Travel Industry and Tourism
- Ask them for their support of Tourism & the Travel Industry
- Become a campaign volunteer
- Contribute to your ATIA Political Action Committee and your favorite candidate