

# Partnering for Impact: Engaging Elected Officials to Advance Your Nonprofit's Mission

Government support plays a critical role in nonprofit sustainability, affecting funding, policies, and community impact. Yet, many organizations struggle to establish relationships with elected officials. To navigate funding uncertainties and advocate effectively, nonprofits must proactively engage government representatives at all levels.

This white paper explores best practices for building strategic, long-term relationships with public officials. Drawing from real-world experiences of veteran political operatives, it provides actionable insights on securing meetings, communicating effectively, and leveraging these connections for sustained nonprofit success.

## Why Government Engagement Matters for Nonprofits

### The Role of Public Funding

Government grants and funding streams are integral to nonprofit operations:

1. 30% of U.S. nonprofits rely on government grants, totaling \$303 billion annually.
2. Over 100,000 nonprofits receive government support.
3. 35,000 nonprofits depend on government grants for more than half of their revenue.
4. Larger organizations are more successful in securing grants: 55% of nonprofits with budgets over \$5M receive funding, compared to only 23% of those under \$500K.
5. Key sectors benefiting from government funding: human services, public societal benefit, and international aid organizations.



# Why Elected Officials Want to Hear from You

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Public officials value nonprofit input for several reasons:

- 1. Visibility:** They want to be seen as effective public servants.
- 2. Connection:** They seek direct insights into the needs of their constituents.
- 3. Impact:** Nonprofits play a vital role in supporting their communities.
- 4. Collaboration:** They can connect nonprofits with other organizations and resources.

## Building Strong Relationships with Elected Officials

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### 1. Get the Meeting: Securing Face-to-Face Time

To effectively advocate for your nonprofit, start by establishing contact with officials and their staff:

- 1. Call their office:** Ask, “Who schedules this official for my area?”
- 2. Personalize your request:** Explain how your nonprofit serves their constituents.
- 3. Leverage networking opportunities:** Engage at community events, town halls, and public meetings.
- 4. Understand the role of gatekeepers:** Staffers control access to officials—build rapport with them.

### 2. Making the Most of the Meeting

Once you’ve secured a meeting, preparation is key:

- 1. Send an agenda** ahead of time to ensure clarity and focus.
- 2. Introduce your mission:** Explain how government policies impact your organization.
- 3. Provide real-world examples** of your nonprofit’s community impact.
- 4. Offer solutions:** Suggest ways the official can support your mission.
- 5. Ask for advice:** Engage them as partners in problem-solving.



### 3. What if They Are on the Other Side of the Aisle?

Engaging officials with differing political views requires diplomacy:

1. **Be respectful:** Focus on shared values and mutual interests.
2. **Make it about the mission:** Highlight how your work benefits their constituents.
3. **Find common ground:** Emphasize nonpartisan issues that resonate across political lines.

### 4. The Power of Follow-Up

After a meeting, solidify the relationship by:

1. **Sending a follow-up** email summarizing key points and next steps.
2. **Recognizing staffers** who facilitated the meeting—praise their efforts to their bosses.
3. **Scheduling periodic check-ins** to keep your nonprofit on their radar.
4. **Inviting officials to events** for continued engagement.

## Navigating Challenges: When Funding Is at Risk

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Government funding can be unpredictable. If your nonprofit faces funding cuts:

1. **Engage local and state officials:** Explore alternative funding options.
2. **Ask officials for guidance:** “If you were in my shoes, how would you approach this?”
3. **Mobilize community support:** Encourage constituents to advocate on your behalf.
4. **Hold officials accountable:** Remind them of their duty to represent all constituents.



# Increasing Your Nonprofit's Visibility with Officials

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Visibility strengthens advocacy. Strategies include:

- 1. Hosting events:** Invite officials to speak or tour your organization.
- 2. Recognizing officials publicly:** Highlight their support in newsletters and social media.
- 3. Engaging in ongoing outreach:** Regular communication builds lasting relationships.
- 4. Attending their events:** Show support for their initiatives to foster goodwill.

## The Long Game: Cultivating Future Leaders

Today's city council member could be tomorrow's senator. Build relationships early to establish a strong foundation for future advocacy efforts.

## Conclusion

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Advocating for your nonprofit requires more than one-time interactions; it demands sustained relationship-building. Public officials want to hear from you—make your voice heard.

### Next Steps:

- 1. Identify key officials relevant to your mission.**
- 2. Schedule meetings and engage consistently.**
- 3. Leverage relationships for long-term policy impact.**
- 4. Stay visible and proactive in government engagement.**

By implementing these strategies, your nonprofit can secure funding, influence policy, and strengthen its community impact for years to come.

