

Insider Tips for Communicating with Elected Officials

With Gail Perry & Cassie Rice | AFP ICON Seattle

Why This Matters

Right now, government funding is shifting rapidly. Nonprofits are feeling the crunch - layoffs, budget cuts, and rising needs in the community.

You need your elected officials to understand how these changes are impacting your mission and your people. And you need to know how to communicate with them effectively.

Take These Steps Before Reaching Out

1. Know your officials at all levels:

Local. County. State. Federal. Build relationships before you need something urgent.

2. Start with staff:

Staff control access. Ask: Who manages scheduling for your elected official? Treat them with respect - they remember.

3. Ask for the meeting like you expect it:

Not if, but when. Say, "I'm a constituent. When is Representative ___ available in our district?"

4. Frame your purpose clearly:

- This is how the government affects our work.
- This is how our organization helps your constituents.
- This is what we need from you.

What to Say When You Get the Meeting

- Be concise.
- Share a real story that makes an impact.
- Tie it back to their constituents and their district.
- Ask for help clearly (connections, advice, support).

Example quotes:

"There are 2,000 children in your district who will go hungry if this funding is cut."

"This is how your office can help us continue serving your voters."

"Can you help us connect with [Agency/Partner/Leader]?"

Relationship-Building Tips

- Treat staff like donors - compliments and kindness go a long way.
- Follow up after meetings with a thank you note.

- Invite elected officials to visit your programs in action.
- Show up at their town halls and be visible (and kind).

Common Questions

****What if they're from the "other party"?****

They still represent you. Cassie's experience shows most elected officials are willing - and even eager - to help their constituents regardless of party lines.

****What if they supported funding cuts?***

Be honest. Say, "I'm disappointed in your vote. Can you help me understand where else we might find support?" Ask for advice and invite dialogue.

Final Word from Cassie

"We are not in normal times.

Take care of yourself.

Take care of your mission.

And then - be as loud as you can."

Bonus: 3 Things Elected Officials Want to Hear

1. How government decisions are affecting you
2. How your work helps their voters
3. How they (or their office) can help