

WAYS TO COMMUNICATE WITH ELECTED OFFICIALS

The heart of advocacy is conveying your community's concerns and goals through **positive and active relationships** with their elected officials. Communicating with your elected officials on behalf of the land trust community is an important step towards building a long-term relationship that you can call on time and time again.

PRIOR TO THE ELECTION

- Meet with them in person: Set up a meeting in their district at your office or theirs, so you can say discuss the issues face to face. Take photos to share with your network.
- Show them the land: If you can bring your representatives out to land that showcases the benefits of their policy decision, that's one of the very best ways to show them what they are doing matters to you! They can hear directly from the landowners and other local people about why their support matters. See how to set up a site visit.
- Ask your supporters to contact them: Ask board members, key supporters, or easement donors to convey a personal message. The more people your lawmakers hear from, the more of an impression it makes.
- Give them a call: It sounds old-fashioned, but they like to hear your voice. A phone call is a great way to express appreciation in a genuine, personal way. You might talk to a staffer, but the message will get through.
- Publicize the meeting with both candidates: After you run an article in your website or newsletter about the candidates, send it to their communications director. Emphasize the strong support that (ideally) both candidates offered for your organization and its goals. It's a win-win. They get credit for helping conservation and you get the extra exposure.

AFTER THE ELECTION

- Give them an award: Hold a media event and present an award. This is good press for the lawmaker, so he or she is more likely to make time for it. (ONLY IF APPROPRIATE)
- Use your website: Express your thanks (or criticism!) in a blog post, newsletter article or press release. That shows your thoughts in a public way. And you can post the link to your lawmaker's social media, which can help lead people to your site.
- Get it in their newsletter: After you run an article in your website or newsletter thanking the lawmaker, send it to his or her press secretary with the suggestion that they run an article in their newsletter. You can offer to draft the story and provide photos. It's a win-win. They get credit for helping conservation and you get the extra exposure.
- Put it in the paper: You can send out a press release or write a letter to the editor thanking your lawmaker. Another great option is to co-write an op-ed with your lawmaker about the issue.

- **Tweet:** On Twitter, you can send a thank-you to your representative that's also visible to the public. Tag their Twitter handle (like @SenatorJones) and use hashtags to make your tweet part of a larger conversation (like #HR2807 or #conservation).
- **Post it on Facebook/Instagram:** Like Twitter, Facebook and Instagram make it easy to express your thanks in a public way. If possible, post your message on your representative's page. If their settings don't allow that, post it on your own page and tag them. Then, send a message encouraging them to share it. And be creative! Post your thank you with a photo or news clip that makes it stand out.

Quick caveat: thank them, **but don't endorse them!** It's great to praise your legislators for supporting your issues but it's against the law for a 501(c)3 nonprofit to take sides in a political campaign.

Make sure you contact Gathering Waters about your efforts. We can assist with crafting an effective message, and provide you with background on the candidate or elected official. It may be important for a representative of Gathering Waters to be along with you at a meeting, to assist and/or bring additional leverage to bear on the candidate or elected official.

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NOTE: Portions of this handout were adapted from materials developed by the Land Trust Alliance and found on the issues and action section of their website, www.landtrustalliance.org/issues-action.