



## Advocacy Education Series: Working with Legislative Staff

Legislative staff members are incredibly important and are relied upon heavily by legislators for policy research, constituent outreach and relations, keeping the legislative process moving forward, administrative support, and keeping the legislator informed of important issues and district sentiment. Whether advocating on either the federal or state levels, you will have to work with staff. Legislative staff are the gatekeepers to the elected official. They can also be trustworthy, reliable sources of information, and are held in high esteem by the legislator.

**Be polite and patient.** No matter if you are speaking with a summer intern or a Chief of Staff, be polite at all times. Legislative staff play a key part in the ultimate success or failure of your legislative efforts. The legislator will ultimately find out if you were rude to their staff. They won't appreciate it and it *will* affect your message getting through. If you are angry regarding a particular policy, do not take it out on the staffer who answers the phones. Direct your concerns into a thoughtful phone message or letter and make sure your sentiments get to the *policymaker*. Understand that staffers are often put in difficult positions between the legislator (their boss) and constituents. If you show them appreciation for their efforts and are patient, you will find that the office is more responsive to your outreach.

**Get legislative staff on board with your issue.** Some view meeting with legislative staffers as ineffectual or a waste of time. This notion couldn't be more incorrect. Meeting with legislative staff is, in most cases, as effective or *more* effective than meeting with the actual legislator. Legislators aren't experts on every issue, and there's a good chance that the staffer is better versed on your issue than the legislator is. Your legislator looks to office staff for guidance on important issues and values their opinions and viewpoints with higher regard than those held and heard by lobbyists, trade/industry insiders, academic/scientific reports, and fellow legislators. Convince legislative staff of your argument and you'll have an issue champion *inside* your legislator's office.

**Thank them.** This will go a long way in creating a productive dynamic between you and your elected official's office.

*For additional guidance or questions, please contact Monica L. Reid, Senior Director of Advocacy, at [mreid@nacdl.org](mailto:mreid@nacdl.org).*