



TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION WITH LEGISLATORS

AAUW Iowa Public Policy 2019

Iowa Legislature website

Find information about legislators, bills, Iowa law & rules, the legislative process, legislative agencies and more at www.legis.iowa.gov

Working with legislators

1. The most effective member-lobbyists are those who have developed a personal relationship with their legislators, so keep in touch throughout the session via letters, phone calls, or personal visits when legislators are home for the weekend.
2. In-person conversations with legislators or contacts made as a representative of members or an organization often carry impact.
3. If you plan to meet with your legislator at the Capitol during the legislative session, be sure to schedule an appointment in advance.
4. If you plan on meeting with a legislator for lunch, remember that Iowa law prohibits legislators from accepting gifts valued at more than \$3.

Email

If you do not know the email address for your legislator, it can be found in the Legislators section at the Iowa Legislature website <https://www.legis.iowa.gov/legislators>.

Letters

1. Personal letters are always appreciated by legislators, but letters are best used when there is not a short time-line for action on legislation.
2. Remember to thank the elected official for her service, stick to only one or two issues at a time, be clear and concise, provide real-life personal examples if possible, and be polite.
3. Make your "ask" as a constituent—possibly offer to provide more information.
4. Carefully proofread your letter.
5. Always include your contact information (address, phone and/or email address).
6. Address letters to: "Rep." (fill in the name) or "Sen." (fill in the name) Iowa Senate or Iowa House of Representatives, State Capitol Building Des Moines, IA 50319 on the envelope and the letter.

Phone calls (during session only)

When time for action is short, you can leave a message for your legislator asking for her vote for or against a specific bill (give the bill number if you know it) by calling the switchboard number.

515-281-3371 for the Iowa Senate, T.D.D. number 515-281-3789

515-281-3221 for the Iowa House, T.D.D. number 515-281-8455

Preparation before meeting with a legislator

1. If possible, know the bill number or the amendment number.
2. Try to find the legislator's voting record or position on the issue.
3. Know your issue(s)-don't assume the legislator knows the issue, so first think through the basic information you want to share. Gather your facts.
4. Think of personal or local examples, if applicable, regarding the need for or the impact of the legislation.
5. Prepare to make a clear, specific request about a bill or an appropriation, directly asking if they support your position, e.g. "Can I count on you to . . .?" or "Will you vote to . . .?" Try to get a yes or no answer.
6. Be prepared to answer questions. It's OK to say you don't know and that you will get back with information.

Meeting/talking with the legislator

1. Introduce yourself and tell where you live-legislators like to have the contact information of those they talk with and like to know if you are a constituent.
2. Tell the legislator that you are a member of AAUW Iowa, a **nonpartisan, non-profit** organization that works on behalf of women and girls through advocacy, education, and research (or whatever description you choose).
3. If in a small group for a face-to-face meeting, select one or two as spokespersons for the group and perhaps a note-taker.
4. Be concise, fair, respectful, and assertive in making your points about support or opposition to a bill without being argumentative or rude.
5. Listen carefully to understand the view of the legislator-avoid interrupting.
6. When asking a legislator to explain the rationale for her/his position, it's often effective to say something like "Help me understand" or "Tell me more about your thinking/reasoning" rather than asking "why" which sometimes puts a person on the defensive.

7. Avoid personal attacks or insults.
8. If tempers flare, try to calmly refocus on the topic at hand or end the conversation on a civil tone.
9. Confirm any follow-up plans such as emailing information regarding the issue.
10. Thank the legislator for his or her time in speaking with you.