



Guide to
**Effective
Volunteer
Advocacy**

Grain and Feed Association of Illinois
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INTRODUCTION

Like any other activity, advocacy (or lobbying) has basic rules, which every lobbyist, professional or volunteer, should know. All people in our country have at least one U.S. Representative, two U.S. Senators, one state representative and one state senator who are elected to represent them. How well we are represented depends upon our individual persistence and effectiveness in making our views known to these legislators.

This pamphlet provides you with practical pointers on how to advocate effectively. For those of you who have already had some on-the-job training in advocacy, much of this material will be familiar. However, we hope you will find a few new ideas or different approaches. The material in this booklet is applicable to every level of government, from Congress to state legislatures to city councils.

For those of you who are newcomers to advocacy, this how-to-do-it booklet should provide you with basics for becoming an *effective* spokesperson for the grain and feed industry.

THE IMPORTANCE OF VOLUNTEER ADVOCACY

The Grain and Feed Association of Illinois can advocate long and hard for legislation that is in our members' best interests, but unless the legislators are also hearing from you – their constituents – they aren't going to pay that much attention to lobbyists who do not have tangible evidence of support from the people back home. What is essential to successful advocacy is a partnership between the Grain and Feed Association of Illinois and our membership.

A successful partnership or team effort depends on good communication and good coordination. Both are two-way streets, and here are some guideposts to help you travel in the right direction.

- Keep informed of the latest legislative developments by reading your Association mail and/or email, including our quarterly *Grain News* newsletter.
- Keep in touch with your legislators and their aides through letters, emails, personal visits, and phone calls.
- Keep the Grain and Feed Association of Illinois updated on the legislative contacts you make, and the responses you receive from legislators and their staff members on the issues.

GETTING TO KNOW YOUR LEGISLATORS

It's always easier to ask a friend for something than to ask a stranger. If possible, get acquainted with your legislators before the time you appear in their offices to request assistance with an advocacy proposal.

WHY YOUR LEGISLATORS SHOULD LISTEN TO YOU

There are at least four reasons. First, you are acting as one of many competing firms in the grain and feed business who are working together to solve industry problems, promote its progress and enhance its service.

Second, you are unique because you have current information about issues concerning the grain and feed industry. Keeping up-to-date on these issues is one of a legislator's responsibilities.

Third, you are a voter in your legislator's district and state. Finally, you represent other business people in the district who have similar concerns about the grain and feed industry.

LET THEM KNOW ABOUT YOU

There are many ways you can introduce yourself to your legislators. Some of these are:

- Take an opportunity to see your legislators when they are home. They maintain district or state offices. Most legislators tour their areas

on pre-arranged schedules to meet and visit with voters. This is a good time for getting acquainted.

- Write your legislators at least twice a year to give a brief status report on your activities and the needs of the industry as you view them.
- Many legislators mail newsletters or other reports to their constituents. Write and request to be put on their mailing lists.
- Make sure all legislators are receiving any newsletters or press releases you write. Call their attention to articles of particular interest to them or to the industry.

VISITING YOUR LEGISLATORS

Here are some suggestions to help you make the most of your limited time with your legislator (and staff) – and to ensure that the welcome mat will be out the next time you come to the office.

- DO phone ahead for an appointment. Request a meeting time when your legislator will have about half-an-hour to discuss legislative issues with you. Remember to talk in specific terms about the request and its justification.
- DO be flexible. A legislator's day begins early and ends late. Many legislators see visitors before hearings, during the noon lunch hour, or late in the afternoon after any official business has been completed.

- DO be prompt and be prepared to wait. A legislator's office, whether at home or in Washington, D.C., frequently resembles a busy airport because a change in legislative climate can result in phone calls and visitors being "stacked up" in a holding pattern, awaiting a minute of the legislator's time.
- DON'T overlook opportunities for lobbying on the run. If your legislator is dashing out of the office to the airport, to a close-by appointment, or to answer a quorum call in the Capitol, offer to walk along and discuss your business en route. Much legislative business is conducted in the halls and foyers used by the legislators.
- DO keep trying and don't give up if your best efforts to see your legislator come to naught because of a sudden emergency. Tell the staff you would like to reschedule your appointment. Consider going to the Capitol for an appointment if you can. Keep trying to see the legislator until you succeed.
- DO have the points you want to make firmly in mind, so you can tell your story clearly and briefly to the legislator. If the legislator asks you a question about your business or the industry for which you do not have accurate information on hand, offer to send the information in a follow-up letter. Legislators are always interested in the number of people who are active in a business or industry and who that industry serves. By the same token, you should be curious about your legislator. Find out if anyone among the legislator's family or close friends is involved in the grain and feed industry. Be sensitive to concerns raised by the legislator's staff.
- DON'T let your limited time with the legislator be used up on discussions of the weather, or any other subjects which do not

directly relate to the purpose of your visit. Steer the discussion tactfully, but firmly, to the issues you want to discuss.

- DO have the facts and figures to back up the case you are making, preferably in brief written form, such as a fact sheet you can leave with the legislator. Attach your card or write your name, company name, address, and “Grain and Feed Association of Illinois” on the fact sheet.
- DO try to get a favorable commitment on the specific issue or issues about which you came to see your legislator. Listen to and carefully evaluate what is said. For example, a general statement, “I know your industry is having a tough time,” does not necessarily mean the legislator will take a leadership role in writing or passing legislation to the benefit of the industry. It may not even mean they will support the type of legislation that would be beneficial.
- DON'T argue, threaten, or go away angry. Keep in mind that legislators have responsibilities in many legislative areas. In making a decision on what they can or cannot support, they must take into account a variety of factors, including how their position on the matter will affect their working relationship with their Committee Chair, their party leadership, and their constituent groups. If they can't help this time, they may be able to help in the future when you call on them again. Always leave the door – and the line of communication – open.
- DON'T cross legislators off your advocacy list even after you have met resistance. Continue to call on them. Let them know that the Grain & Feed Association of Illinois is active in their districts and the State. You never know when a commitment will emerge.

REMEMBER THE LEGISLATOR'S STAFF

Behind every effective legislator you will find a dedicated, loyal and hard working staff. Because of the sheer volume and ever increasing complexity of legislative proposals, legislators must rely heavily on their staff specialists. The staff members research and keep tabs on the progress of legislation of interest to their constituents, and prepare summaries and recommendations on these measures.

For this reason, don't feel you are getting the brush-off if, after a brief conversation, the legislator turns you over to the legislative assistants for more detailed discussion of the advocacy issues at hand. Make the most of this good opportunity. Become acquainted with key members of your legislator's team. You can help them, and they can help you develop a relationship with your legislator. Get to know them by their first names.

On one hand, you have the specific and detailed information on current grain and feed industry issues. You know the special problems and needs of the industry, and the other industry professionals in the legislator's district. Legislative assistants cannot get much of this information from the legislative library, or most likely, from anyone else but you.

On the other hand, the better the legislative assistants understand the problems and needs of the grain and feed industry, the more informed they will be about the specific legislative actions you are promoting. In many cases, if you successfully sell the grain and feed industry's story to the legislative assistant, you have gone a long way toward selling it to the legislator.

Therefore, you have many good reasons for wanting to get acquainted with various members of

your legislator's staff, whether or not the legislator even refers you to any of them for additional discussion or help. In addition, if your legislator's staff know and respect you, they will respond to your phone calls, letters, and requests for appointments. Also, the goodwill you generate among the staff will benefit the entire Grain and Feed Association of Illinois advocacy program.

Little things mean a lot, especially in a hectic and harried legislative office. A pleasant smile, a cheerful greeting, polite requests, and patience with the legislator's crowded schedule will go a long way to ensure your welcome in a legislative office. Addressing the receptionist, appointment secretary and legislative assistants by name always leaves a good impression. Write down the names of the key staff people you meet, and review them before your next visit.

Also, don't forget that an excellent way to inform both staff and legislators about our issues is to ask them to speak at your company's annual meeting, a customer appreciation dinner or a Grain and Feed Association of Illinois meeting.

Be sure you follow up on each visit with legislators or staff members. Send a letter thanking them for their time and interest. If a legislator gives exceptional support to the Association's programs, you might consider presenting that individual with an award to honor such work or thanking them in the local newspaper or your company's newsletter.

Legislators must know the key people in their community. You are a key person by virtue of your organization and your work. Recognition from an organization such as the Grain & Feed Association of Illinois helps to build an excellent community reputation for the legislator.

Be sure to let the Grain and Feed Association of Illinois know about your visit and the response you received.

A WORD ABOUT ISSUES AND VOTES . . .

When the legislative issues you discussed with your legislators begin moving or arrive at a critical stage in the legislative process, you are likely to get a legislative action alert from the Grain and Feed Association of Illinois requesting that you call or email your legislator to reaffirm your interest in these issues. Please send that email or make that phone call promptly and report the results to the Association. *(See Appendix for hints on writing your legislators.)*

HELPING SUPPORTIVE LEGISLATORS

As a grain and feed industry advocate, it is in your best interest to build a strong relationship with legislators and their staff. Here are some of the things that you can do:

- Invite your legislator to speak at your annual business meeting and arrange for adequate coverage of the appearance by local media.
- When you visit your legislator, you might arrange for a photograph to be taken of the two of you for use in your hometown newspapers. Offer to hand-deliver the picture to your local editor. Make a copy available for your company newsletter and the Grain and Feed Association of Illinois newsletter.
- When your legislator introduces a bill, votes, or makes a speech in support of the Grain and Feed Association of Illinois advocacy goals, spread the good word to your fellow organization members.
- Host an honorary dinner for a legislator committed to grain and feed industry issues.

- Invite your legislator to visit a grain and feed industry program or event in your hometown. Arrange for media coverage and photographs of the visit.

APPENDIX

Writing an Effective Letter

Whether as a follow-up to an office visit or as a first contact, a letter to your legislator can be an effective advocacy tool to help people in the grain and feed industry. Many of the same DOs and DON'Ts listed for office visits also apply to letters.

- Do write on your personal or business stationary (use preprinted form letters as a guide and add personal story).
- Do include your address on the letter and on the envelope.
- Do be brief and to the point. Clearly identify the grain and feed industry issue about which you are concerned.
- Do state your reason for writing. To add support to your information and request, personalize your letter by including your own and your state's involvement in the grain and feed industry. Do mention the number of companies and the economic impact grain and feed companies have in the district and the state.
- Do ask for a specific favorable commitment from your legislator.
- Do stay in touch with the Grain and Feed Association of Illinois and report on your contacts with legislators. Legislative alerts and the *Grain News* newsletter will contain information about when to contact your legislator regarding the issues that affect our industry.

SUGGESTED ADDRESSES AND SALUTATIONS

The President
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

The Honorable Jane J. Doe
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Doe:

The Honorable John J. Doe
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representative Doe:

The Honorable Janet J. Doe
207 Statehouse
Springfield, IL 62706

Dear Governor Doe:

The Honorable Janice J. Doe
Illinois Senate
Springfield, IL 62706

Dear Senator Doe:

The Honorable James J. Doe
Illinois House of Representatives
Springfield, IL 62706

Dear Representative Doe:

**The mission
of the
Grain and Feed Association
of Illinois
is to represent,
promote and advance
the common interests
of a viable
grain and feed industry
through an involved
and informed membership.**

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

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