



Guide to Effective Volunteer Advocacy

VOLUNTEER ADVOCACY

A partnership between the Grain & Feed Association of Illinois (GFAI) and our membership is essential for successful advocacy efforts. GFAI can advocate long and hard for legislation in our members' best interests, but legislators also want to hear from you – their constituents – as evidence of support from the people back home in their districts. A successful partnership requires good communication and coordination. Here is how you can be a good advocate:

Keep informed of the latest legislative developments by reading your Association e-mail, including our weekly Washington Update newsletter, and social media.

Keep in touch with your legislators and their aides through letters, emails, personal visits, phone calls, and following their social media.

Keep GFAI updated on the legislative contacts you make and the responses you receive from legislators and their staff members on the issues.

LEGISLATORS WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

You are acting as one of many competing firms in the grain and feed business working together to solve industry problems, promote progress and enhance services. You have current information about issues concerning the grain and feed industry and keeping up-to-date on these issues is one of a legislator's responsibilities. You are a voter in your legislator's district and state. You represent other business people in the district who have similar concerns about the grain and feed industry.

STAYING CONNECTED WITH YOUR LEGISLATORS

Every legislator maintains a district or state office. Take an opportunity to meet and introduce yourself to legislators when they are home in their districts. Most legislators tour their areas on pre-arranged schedules to meet and visit with voters.

- Contact your legislators at least twice a year to give a brief status report on your activities and the needs of the industry. You can look up your state and U.S. Representatives and Senators online and find their email and mailing addresses.
- For Illinois, the Illinois General Assembly website (www.ilga.gov) has contact information for your local Senator and Representative including their background and the committees to which they have been assigned. In addition, you can review current laws and legislation which have been introduced
- Congressional Websites: United States House of Representatives (www.house.gov) and United States Senate (www.senate.gov)
- Many legislators have mail and email distribution lists for newsletters or other reports to their constituents, as well as social media platforms. Contact them and request to be put on their mailing lists and follow their social media accounts.
- 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.

TIPS & SUGGESTIONS WHEN VISITING WITH LEGISLATORS

Call ahead for a meeting.

Request a meeting time when your legislator will have about 30 minutes to discuss legislative issues with you. Remember to talk in specific terms about the request and its justification.

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.

Be prompt and be prepared to wait.

Things change quickly and a legislator's schedule can shift, resulting in phone calls and visitors being "stacked up" awaiting a minute of the legislator's time.

Keep trying!

Don't give up if your best efforts to see your legislator fall through 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.

Come prepared!

Have the points you want to make firmly in mind or have notes, so you can tell your story clearly and briefly. 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 follow up with an email or phone message. Legislators are always interested in the number of people who are active in a business or industry and who that industry serves.

Ask questions.

You should find out if your legislator has any family members or close friends who are involved in the grain and feed industry. Be sensitive to concerns raised by the legislator's staff.

Don't overlook opportunities for lobbying on the move.

If your legislator is dashing out of the office, offer to walk along and discuss your business en route. Much legislative business is conducted in the halls and foyers used by the legislators.

Don't waste time with small talk.

You have limited time so use it on the issues you want to discuss, not the weather or any other subjects that do not directly relate to the purpose of your visit.

Don't argue, threaten, or leave angry.

Keep in mind that legislators have responsibilities in many legislative areas. In deciding on what they can or cannot support, they must take into account 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 give up.

A "no" right now can become a "yes" later. Continue to educate them about your issue and let them know that GFAI is active in their districts and the State.

GET TO KNOW LEGISLATIVE STAFF MEMBERS

Legislative staff members research and track the progress of legislation of interest to their constituents and prepare summaries and recommendations on these measures, so it is common for legislative assistants to talk with you for more detailed discussion of the advocacy issues at hand.

Make the most of this opportunity. Get to know key members of your legislator's team. 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.

Legislative assistants will appreciate your specific and detailed information on current grain and feed industry issues and the special problems and needs of the industry. 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. Let GFAI know about your visit and the response you received.

INVITE LEGISLATORS TO EVENTS

Legislators must know the key people in their community. Ask your legislators to speak at your company's annual meeting, customer appreciation dinner or tour your facility to inform both staff and legislators about our issues. Arrange for media coverage and photographs of the visit.

Follow up on each visit with legislators or staff members by sending a letter thanking them for their time and interest. Consider an award to honor their support of the industry or thanking them in the local newspaper or your company's newsletter.

LETTER AND EMAIL CORRESPONDENCE

President/Congress

The President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave
Washington, D.C. 20500
Dear Mr. President:

The Honorable
Jane Doe
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510
Dear Senator Doe:

The Honorable
John Doe
U.S. House of
Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515
Dear Representative
Doe:

State of Illinois

The Honorable
Janet Doe
207 Statehouse
Springfield, IL 62706
Dear Governor Doe:

The Honorable
Janice Doe
Illinois Senate
Springfield, IL 62706
Dear Senator Doe:

The Honorable
James Doe
Illinois House of
Representatives
Springfield, IL 62706
Dear Representative
Doe:

Visit these websites to find your U.S. Representative and Senator's email and mailing addresses:

White House: www.whitehouse.gov
United States House of Representatives:
www.house.gov
United States Senate: www.senate.gov

Visit these websites to find your Illinois Representative and Senator's email and mailing addresses:

Governor's Office: www2.illinois.gov
Illinois House of Representatives: www.ilga.gov
Illinois Senate: www.ilga.gov



**GRAIN & FEED
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of Illinois

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