

A Guide to Engaging with Civic Leaders

As a leader in your community, it is critical for you to be involved and engaged in your community. It is important that you see yourself as a community leader.

This toolkit will teach you to position yourself as a trusted advisor, and demonstrate the value you bring to their community.

About This Guide

This toolkit will show you how to engage with civic leaders to drive real change in your community.

Contacts

If you have additional questions about civic engagement after reading this guide, our team is here to help.

Brandon Wright | brandon@bpwright.com, 443-758-5542

Share your story

Sharing a story that showcases your knowledge, professional education and experience as an architect is one of the most powerful actions you can take as an engaged citizen. According to the Congressional Management Foundation, nearly 80% of legislators agree that sharing a personal story related to a bill or issue is helpful—but only 11% of messages they receive include a constituent's personal story.

STEP 1 : EVALUATE

To communicate effectively about any issue, carefully answer the following questions:

What is your desired outcome?

Who is the target audience?

What does your audience already know about your issue?

What action would you like your audience to take?

What specific message will you use to get your audience to take action?

How will you deliver your message? Consider both the medium and the messenger.

Share your story

STEP 2 : DEVELOP YOUR MESSAGE

Keep it local

Understand how your idea will benefit the community directly. Tie a local effort to initiatives happening in cities across the country or at the state or federal level.

Keep it manageable

Provide relevant information to the appropriate individuals—not everyone wants to know every particular detail. Show examples of solutions that are working and that your target audience can implement. If you are talking about a goal that is 20 or 50 years away, be sure to include benchmarks to break up the goal into a reasonable timeframe.

Keep it relevant

Communicate, with detail, why your objective should be relevant for your audience. Describe how your efforts will impact their life and what they can do to address the issue. Never criticize or condemn your audience.

Focus on solutions

Share your personal story and connect civic action to solutions in the community.

Be reasonable

Engage your audience. Avoid rhetorical or shrill language that drives people away.

Back up your position

Use scientific data and cite credible sources

Show results and share your successes

Report your results and celebrate architects who are making a difference

Next steps

Thank elected officials for their time and ask for their feedback. Ask “How can I get involved?” and “Will you let me know if anything changes?” Follow up with a thank you email to see if they have

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STEP 3 : GET THE WORD OUT

Social media can be a powerful tool to spread your message far and wide. Here are some tips to leverage it:

Highlight unique details

We're all affected by the issues that our legislators are debating—but not always in the same way. Highlight specific ways in which you've been affected by the bill or issue. What makes your story unique? What details would be helpful for your representative to know?

Be specific

How is your story related to the bill or issue? Highlight the aspects of your story that are most relevant.

Less is more

Don't write a novel; be concise and respectful.

Tap into your network

The more constituents talk about an issue, the more your representative will pay attention. Share your story on social media and encourage others to engage their representatives as well.

Take action

Looking for ways to support a candidate or convene a conversation on a critical issue? Here are some effective actions that you can take between now and November:

Vote

Find your polling place and make a plan to vote. Bring your family and friends with you to the polls and encourage them to get involved as well.

Organize a conversation on a timely, local issue

Work with your friends and neighbors to hold a community conversation. Invite local leaders and ask for specific ways to get involved.

Become a resource for a candidate

Many candidates rely on local professionals to provide expert guidance and information on important issues. Introduce yourself to a candidate and ask how you can help shape their position on a local issue.

Support a candidate

Spend some time identifying state-level candidates who are running for office. Help them raise funds by hosting a fundraiser or making a personal contribution. With modern campaign funds, no matter where you live, you can lend your support to candidates across the country.

Build the candidate pipeline

Identify emerging leaders in your local community, school board, or firm, and encourage them to run for elected office.

Locate Your Civic Leaders

Find out who represents you at the federal, state, and local level.

FEDERAL

HOUSE

435 voting members

small staff (15 avg) and budget

“power of the purse” and powers of impeachment

serve 2-year terms

SENATE

100 voting members

large staff (40 avg) and budget

presidential appointments, treaties

serve 6-year terms

*Click “house” and “senate” to discover who represents you.

STATE

State House

State Senate

State Governorship

* All 50 states have a governor and nearly all states have both a senate and house (except Nebraska). They may call them different things—General Assembly can be both, State Assembly = State House in some cases. The number of seats varies from 49 in Nebraska to 424 in New Hampshire. Session lengths vary from 30 days to year-round. Terms can be two or four years depending on state and what chamber. Staff capacity varies widely based on funding and responsibilities vary widely by state and typically include budget (capital development projects) and licensing. The governor appoints licensing boards as well as oversees administrative rules.

Elected officials will often host community meetings in the interim. These are good opportunities to meet representatives and senators.

Connect with Elected Officials and Civic Leaders

By connecting with your elected representatives and civic leaders, you can work together to achieve your goals.

Ways to engage with elected officials:

- Call
- Write a letter
- Write an op-ed
- Engage in person

CALL

The most important part of making a phone call to an elected officials is to be clear on what issue you're calling about. Why you support or oppose certain legislation is irrelevant. The more people that call the representative's office, the less detail the assistants will write down. Getting straight to the point makes things easier for everyone — including those who are waiting for their phone calls to be picked up.

Guide to calling elected officials:

- State your name and address
- State your reason for calling
- Tell your story
- Ask your elected official to take a specific action
- Wait for their response

•SAMPLE PHONE SCRIPT

“Hello, my name is Jane Smith. I'm a constituent from _____. I am calling to oppose/support HB/SB___ and I strongly encourage the Delegate/Senator to oppose/support this legislation, too. Thank you for your hard work!”

WRITE AN OP-ED

A letter to the editor can be a powerful way to gain media exposure for key issues.

WRITE A LETTER

A letter or email to a civic leader can be an effective way to introduce yourself, request a specific action, or ask for a meeting.

ENGAGE IN PERSON

When engaging with civic leaders, it's important to be prepared with key ideas you want to express.