

# The Most Effective Do's and Don'ts of Successful Grassroots Advocacy



Township supervisors represent 5.5 million Pennsylvanians and that means when you speak, legislators listen.

Through the PSATS Grassroots Advocacy Network and your help, our voice in Harrisburg and in Washington will be stronger than ever. By developing or furthering relationships with your legislators and letting them know how their decisions affect township residents — their constituents — you will be speaking on behalf of every township in Pennsylvania. That's almost half of the state's population, and that's power.

When township officials from across the state connect with their individual legislators, they create a web of communication that far exceeds what would otherwise be possible.

We encourage you to get to know your their legislators. Developing a relationship with your legislators will serve you well in your grassroots advocacy efforts.

When it comes to grassroots advocacy, knowledge is the first of several keys to success. Knowing your legislator, the legislative process, PSATS' position on an issue, and the basics of a key legislative or policy proposal increases your credibility — and therefore, your power of persuasion and chance of success. And PSATS is here to help you every step of the way!

Your communication with legislators can take various forms: phone calls, personal visits, email, text messages, letters and even interactions on social media. No matter what the medium, however, you will be most effective as a grassroots advocate by following some simple Do's and Don'ts.

# Do's and Don'ts of Success

## DO...

- 1) Remember that time is precious. All letters, phone calls, e-mails, and office visits to your lawmaker should be "short and sweet." Get to the point soon and focus on your issue.
- 2) Include the bill number and/or name of the legislation or regulation in all communication.
- 3) Explain in simple and straightforward terms the logic supporting your position. The most effective logic often involves costs, services, and how many people the legislation will affect.
- 4) Remember that the lawmaker's staff is as important to you as the lawmaker. Staff often are the ones who prepare the issue summary, including a vote recommendation, for the lawmaker.
- 5) Take advantage of "strength in numbers." This is true for all communication: e-mails, phone calls, text and social messages, and office visits. Many issues are decided on the volume of communications received.
- 6) Remember that the more responsibility and involvement you assume, the more vigorous the commitment and support you can expect from your lawmaker. **Know your issue.**
- 7) Include your name, email address, address, and phone number (home/office/township/cell) on all communication. This allows your lawmaker and staff to contact you for appropriate follow-up and reminds your legislator that you are the constituent.
- 8) Follow up; send letters, emails, calls, etc. Make a commitment to your cause.
- 9) Remind your lawmaker how many people (read votes) in your association share your position.
- 10) If possible, have a "position paper" that clearly states your position and include local township examples. Take extras to leave behind when you visit.
- 11) Include your lawmaker on your township's mailing list for your township newsletter if you have one.
- 12) Be patient. Sometimes neither you nor the lawmaker will know the outcome for months.
- 13) Be a good winner and a good loser. Your adversary on one issue might be your ally on the next issue.
- 14) Invite your lawmaker and staff to your township office or other appropriate location(s) that will put a human face on the issue you're discussing.
- 15) Understand that you and your lawmaker sometimes will have to compromise. Assess what you can **realistically achieve** in this session and work on the rest later.
- 16) Ask lawmakers to state their position. If it agrees with yours, ask what you can do to strengthen that support. If it differs with yours, ask what information or show of public support is necessary to change that position. If they have not decided, ask what information and public support you can supply to help with the decision making.
- 17) Use the media (letter to editor, press release, op-ed, etc.) to help create public support for your positions. Lawmakers are constantly looking to see what "the people want" on issues.
- 18) Write a thank-you note to your legislator no matter what the outcome of your issue. (*remember item #13*)
- 19) Invest 30 minutes to contact (by letter, phone, e-mail, or office visit) your legislators six times a year. This will make you more active than 99.9% of all citizens and therefore 99.9% more legislatively successful.
- 20) **Remember, you and your lawmaker need each other.**



# Successful Grassroots Advocacy

## DON'T...

- 1) Confuse the issues. Two or three issues are about as much as you should cover in one letter, e-mail, call, or visit.
- 2) Use form letters. Form letters are not taken seriously and are interpreted as the action of a single person, rather than as broad support.
- 3) Underestimate the weight given to letters, emails, and phone calls. Many legislative offices multiply each letter or email received by 50 (i.e., 200 are counted as 10,000 letters). Fifty letters on any issue are considered an avalanche of public support.
- 4) Use jargon. You're not speaking to your colleagues in the township office. Your lawmaker may have little or no knowledge of your issue or its jargon.
- 5) Contact a lawmaker and then drop the issue. Persistence pays off.
- 6) Say you're contacting your lawmaker because your association told you to do so. Lawmakers respond to people (voters).
- 7) Ignore opportunities to visit with your lawmaker at home.
- 8) Ever lie. Anything less than full honesty will erode your lawmakers' ability to commit to you and your issue. If there are some rough spots, acknowledge them early and work on avoidance strategy together with your lawmaker.
- 9) **Ever forget that you and your lawmaker need each other.**

To learn more about the PSATS Grassroots Advocacy Network, log onto [connect.psats.org](http://connect.psats.org) and click on the grassroots tab or call (717) 763-0930 and ask to speak to someone on the legislative staff. Also, make sure you are receiving the network's *Week in Review* newsletter for the status of legislation that could impact townships and a recap on the weekly happenings in Harrisburg and in Washington. To sign up for the newsletter, email [grassroots@psats.org](mailto:grassroots@psats.org).



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Inform. Persuade. Influence.  
Make a Difference.



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