



Making the Case for Greater Minnesota-How to Work with Your New (and Old) Legislators

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Preparing for success at the legislature

Strong relationships
are the foundation
for success

Get to know your
legislator before you
need to ask them for
something

Your goal: Your
Legislators know you
by name
Bonus: calls you with
questions

Why should I get to know my legislators?

- ▶ They will make decisions on important issues that affect you including funding and policies
 - ▶ Legacy funding
 - ▶ Grant funding
 - ▶ Policies on parks and trails development
- ▶ Even if your legislator is not in the majority right now, their support is still important
- ▶ We need your help on priorities that impact parks and trails throughout the state!!

Who should build the relationship?

- ▶ More than one person at your city/county can/should have a relationship with your legislator
- ▶ Some lawmakers give extra consideration to elected officials in their districts
- ▶ Other lawmakers see staff as impartial experts
- ▶ Business and non-profits can also be really helpful
- ▶ Joint interactions with other staff or elected officials may make sense
 - ▶ Bringing other cities/counties/orgs together with legislators may make sense at certain times
- ▶ Check in with others in your organization
- ▶ Keep others up-to-date on substantive conversations

What factors influence legislators?

- Constituents
 - Concerns from a loud few can have outsized influence
- Caucus (party apparatus at legislature)
- Other legislators
- Family and friends
- Contributions/independent expenditures
- Media
- Information/facts
- Policy analysis



How do you build the relationship?

Introduce	Introduce yourself and your position
Congratulate	Congratulate them on winning election/reelection
Ask	Ask for a meeting - formal or informal
Stop by	Stop by in-district “office hours”
Attend	Attend a townhall meeting

How do you build the relationship?

Invite	Invite them to a park board meeting or similar gathering
Arrange	Arrange tour or visit to one of your parks or trails. Include them at all openings
Recognize	Recognize their work and contributions publicly
Stop by	Any time you are in St. Paul, stop by your legislator's office and leave a note if they aren't there
Repeat	Schedule regular get togethers. Relationships take time and persistence

How do you make the initial outreach?

- ▶ Legislative staff for existing legislators
 - ▶ Email or call their staff
 - ▶ New legislators may not have staff until January 23
- ▶ Personal connections
 - ▶ If you have their cell phone or email, use that
 - ▶ Check with other in your city/county officials

How should you communicate?

DON'T assume the legislator knows who you are (at first)

- Introduce yourself, even if you have met once or twice before

DO be professional. Always.

- ▶ No one responds well to negativity or nastiness
- ▶ You should be passionate about important issues, but you lose effectiveness if you are threatening, rude or over-the-top

How should you communicate?

DO be (gently) persistent

- ▶ Periodic visits, calls, emails and other contacts are good
 - ▶ Let them know how projects are progressing or what you are starting up
 - ▶ Invite them to relevant events
- ▶ Regardless of political background, most lawmakers respect your input and want to serve their district well

DO be prepared with facts, examples and relevant stories

- ▶ Don't assume they know anything about the issue
- ▶ Concrete information helps lawmakers make decisions - facts and figures are extremely effective
- ▶ Share stories about how the issue at hand directly effects residents
- ▶ Tug at their heartstrings!
- ▶ Arranging park visits when it will be busy is a great way to demonstrate their importance!

Communicating with Legislators: Do's & Don'ts

DO acknowledge when your legislator does something positive

- ▶ Thank the legislator publicly in the media or city newsletter
- ▶ Send private thank-you notes and emails

DON'T give up

- ▶ “Darth Vader” strategy - it can take a long time to turn them away from the Dark Side
- ▶ There are always ways to find some common ground
- ▶ *The worst thing that can happen is a legislator saying “I never heard from any of my constituents about this issue”*

What should you communicate about?

- ▶ Importance of parks and trails to your community
 - ▶ Stories important
 - ▶ Impact on economic development, health and wellness
- ▶ Specifics in your park/trail system
 - ▶ Recent grants or other funding you have received and how the funding is being used
 - ▶ Needs in your system
 - ▶ Plans for the future
- ▶ GMPT priorities
 - ▶ Importance of legacy funds
 - ▶ Importance of DNR grant programs
 - ▶ Specific bills once those are available

What if your legislator is “non-responsive?”

Change the messenger

- Different council member or city staff person
- Enlist local business and community leaders
- Identify locals whom they trust and work with them

Educate and enlist the public

- Find relevant stakeholders and interested community members
- Community groups

Other tactics that work

Resolutions

Emails and phone calls from constituents

Letters to the editor/guest columns

Get to know the legislator's staff

Teamwork!



**SHARE WHAT YOU LEARN AND
WHAT HAPPENED WITH GMPT
STAFF**



**WORK TOGETHER WITH OTHER
CITIES OR COUNTIES IN YOUR
DISTRICT**

Next steps

- ▶ Reach out to your newly elected/reelected legislator to congratulate them
- ▶ Get on their calendar to get to know them or to reconnect
- ▶ Other ideas?



Greater Minnesota Parks & Trails

QUESTIONS?