

## HOW TO BUILD A RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR LEGISLATOR

### Why Build a Relationship?

When it comes to the programs they fund, legislators need to know how a program is working and what impact it is having. That story is best told by local people because no paid lobbyist in Madison can make as compelling case about what impact the program is having locally. That's why it's so important in the tobacco control movement for coalition coordinators and funded partners to have a relationship with legislators.

If legislators are not made aware of what tobacco control is accomplishing in their communities, in their minds, nothing is happening. There are hundreds of programs in Wisconsin competing for limited state funding. If those coordinating the programs don't inform their funders, i.e. their legislators, about impact and successes, it's difficult for the funder to justify continued funding. Having an ongoing relationship with your legislator allows you to remind them all year long, not just during the budget season (every two years), that the money they've invested in the tobacco control program is having a positive impact on the people in the district and the state.

Communication is the basis for a good relationship with your legislator. There are many different ways and avenues to communicate with your legislator. Here are some specific actionable items to consider. While the ideas listed below are always good tools, once you have established a rapport and relationship, communication between you and the legislator can become more regular and casual.

### Who Is My Legislator?

Find out who your legislators are at <http://waml.legis.state.wi.us/>

### Getting to Know Your Legislator

Before running into your legislator or setting up a time to meet, it is helpful to know what their work background is as well as hobbies and interests they may have. You may have some things in common with them and that can be helpful conversation starters. If you have a newly elected legislator, or don't know him or her well, here are some tips to starting the communication.

- Do some background reading about your legislator:
  - Check out the Blue Book for pictures and background information:  
<http://www.legis.state.wi.us/lrb/bb/05bb/index.htm>
  - Economic interest statements: Government Accountability Board - Ethics Division  
<http://www.ethics.state.wi.us/>
  - Contact information and listing of committees they sit on:  
<http://www.legis.state.wi.us/>
  - The Wheeler Report is also a good resource:  
<http://www.thewheelerreport.com/>
- Call SmokeFree Wisconsin, American Heart Association, American Lung Association and American Cancer Society. All these organizations have regular contact with lawmakers and their lobbyists can share what they have gleaned from the legislator about their feelings on the tobacco control and prevention program.
- Attend events in the district. Lawmakers love to be seen at a variety of events. Often times you can keep track of where they're going to be in the community by keeping an eye on the local paper.

- Ask a legislator to come and speak to your service club, union, or coalition. Drop by during office hours that they may hold in the district to introduce yourself, nothing more. But you may want to be prepared if they ask questions.

### **Keeping the Dialogue Going**

- Invite legislators to meetings and events
- Send monthly/quarterly newspaper clippings about your work
- Add them to your newsletter mailing list