



BECOMING A RESOURCE FOR YOUR LEGISLATORS

A Legislative Guidebook for the Tourism Industry



Your Partner in Tourism



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“You must be the change you wish to see in the world.”

Mahatma Gandhi

Many of us find it hard to believe that our voice can create change. Nothing can be further from the truth. Your voice matters. Your voice is needed. Your voice counts.

At no time in U.S. history have Americans had greater access to government. Technology improvements and greater acceptance of various communication methods have made contacting your legislators easier than ever. Campaign finance and lobbying reform have altered the balance of power and changed the decision-making process in Washington and at state capital buildings. This means there are greater opportunities for individual voices to be heard. However, these tools and opportunities are only available for those who use them.

One person can make a difference, but that voice is magnified when joined by similar voices such as those provided by the Ohio Travel Association. At the same time, the legislative efforts of the Ohio Travel Association and other organizations are not as effective without grassroots actions. How can we best use our ability to create change? Communicate with our legislators regularly so each of us can be identified as a resource when it comes to the tourism industry. We also must communicate accurately and swiftly, sharing the same message.

The Ohio Travel Association has developed this guidebook to give you ideas, information and resources to make sure your messages are being heard at the State Capital. Additional resources are available on the association’s legislative web site at <http://www.tourismcreatesjobs.com> and will be listed in Appendix C of this guidebook for easy reference.

WHY GET INVOLVED?

Budget proposals, bills, taxes and other legislative decisions can seriously harm Ohio's tourism industry and its economic future if the tourism industry is silent. Legislators have a lot of decisions to make, and they are influenced by a number of special interest groups. You need to make sure tourism-related impacts of their decisions are known before votes are taken.

Despite what you may believe, legislators are very eager to get to know you, a constituent. If you work at an attraction, retail shop, visitor's bureau, hotel, restaurant, rental car company, etc., you are a tourism expert in your community – and you have information legislators need to make informed decisions. You know what's happening in the trenches. You know whether the profit margin is expanding or decreasing. You know the employment issues facing your business.

Your goal is to become a resource for your legislators – someone they can call or email when they need accurate information, feedback from the business community, or information on potential economic impacts of pending legislation.

HOW DO INDIVIDUALS MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

Grass roots

1. The common people.
2. The basic source or support.

Webster's New World Dictionary

Grass roots: The ultimate source of power, usually patronized, occasionally feared.

Safire's Political Dictionary

Throughout history, individuals have changed the course of the future. Without individuals working through their local representatives, Mothers Against Drunk Driving wouldn't have convinced dozens of states to toughen up drunk driving laws, women wouldn't have the ability to vote, and child support laws would be inadequate.

The tourism industry has the same opportunity to influence legislation. Tourism generates \$2.6 billion in state and local tax revenue annually. Our industry is an employer of 454,000 Ohio residents. And an industry that generates more than \$38 billion in annual visitor spending, you have a role – no, a responsibility – for making sure your local legislators know the issues and concerns facing tourism businesses in their districts.

The Independent Sector of Washington, D.C., says, “Many of us think lobbying is some mysterious rite that takes years to master. It isn’t. You can learn how to lobby – whom to call, when, what to say – in minutes. While there are a few simple reporting rules your organization needs to follow, it isn’t complicated. Countless numbers of people have learned how. Lobbying is easier and more effective when many committed people work together. One person does not have to do everything or know everything.”

WHAT IS LOBBYING?

Often perceived as being associated with power lunches and fancy suits, “lobbying” is derived from “lobby”, a noun referring to a passageway. “Lobbying”, as a verb, can therefore be defined as the way of passing information to a legislative body, which can assist them in making well-informed decisions. It’s kind of like gathering in the lobby of an apartment or office building to discuss the events of the day.

The Ohio Travel Association employs a registered lobbyist to keep a finger on the pulse of legislative issues, make recommendations for our involvement, and to keep us informed of issues that might affect tourism in Ohio. Our need is to make sure our members, and other individuals in the tourism industry, make essential contact with their local legislators. That’s where the power of the people can be felt. Grassroots efforts are often behind most positive legislative changes. But the tourism industry must respond in order for us to be effective.

Where do legislators come from?

They're not hatched or graduates from the "Private Boarding School of Future Politicians." Legislators are folks like you and me, who perhaps owned businesses in your community, served as township trustees or county commissioners, or who were housewives. They are mothers, fathers, grandparents, neighbors, cousins or siblings. They were; however, inspired to serve your community. And, even more importantly, were able to share their visions and promises with local constituents effectively enough to be elected to serve. So, as you communicate with local trustees, commissioners and business folks, remember that they too could one day represent your region in Columbus or Washington. Start educating them now about the importance of tourism in your community and to the State of Ohio.

LEGISLATIVE PROCESS IN OHIO

The legislative process in the State of Ohio provides many different opportunities for making contact with your local representative and senator. The Ohio Travel Association can, and does, provide information about the status of certain issues and bills and which committee members should be contacted.

The goal of this handbook is help you become a resource for your legislators 24/7. Don't wait to contact him or her when you need something or want to complain. Your opinion will matter the most when your legislators know they can depend on you in a timely fashion to provide honest, substantiated and sincere information any day of the year. By making these contacts a part of your "to do" list throughout the year, your voice will be heard when an issue sparks a need to contact legislators later.

WHO DOES WHAT?

Various entities support travel and tourism in the State of Ohio. Some of them are government agencies, while others are industry-driven representing those of us in the day-to-day trenches of hospitality. All have a role to play. All are necessary to make sure the state's tourism potential is most effective and economically powerful.

Role of the Ohio Department of Development

As a cabinet-level department, the Ohio Department of Development strives to enhance the economic stability and growth of the State of Ohio. Incentive programs, education, sales missions, and other programs encourage business growth, retention and new businesses in the state. The department prioritizes those jobs that contribute the most jobs and those regions which are considered targeted areas.

Role of the Ohio Tourism Division

The Ohio Tourism Division is a division of the Ohio Department of Development. Its mission includes marketing the State of Ohio as a tourism destination, educating members of the tourism industry, and representing tourism as the state pursues economic development objectives.

Role of the Ohio Travel Association

As the largest tourism industry association in the State of Ohio, the Ohio Travel Association represents all sectors of the industry – hotels, attractions, visitor bureaus, retailers, motorcoach operators, etc. This wide range of expertise makes the OTA the ideal voice for tackling statewide issues of concern to all. Working with its partners (such as the OH&LA, OACVB, ORA, and others) the OTA is prepared to provide testimony, case studies, policy recommendations and other items of interest to legislators.

Role of the Ohio Hotel & Lodging Association

Following recent mergers with many different citywide lodging associations, the Ohio Hotel & Lodging Association is now a powerful partner in making sure lodging interests are protected in city and county governmental decisions. The OH&LA concentrates its legislative efforts at the local region where decisions impact hoteliers the most, but is a vital partner in discussing statewide issues as well.

Role of the Ohio Association of Convention & Visitor Bureaus

Representing the visitors & convention bureaus throughout the state, the OACVB concentrates on policies and decisions that impact destination marketing organizations and the bed taxes that fund them. The OACVB is a strong force in representing statewide tourism issues as well.

Role of Other Industry Associations

Nearly every type of business in the state has a coalition of like industry members that converge for education, research, legislative issues, and networking. Many also have legislative affairs committees that monitor legislative activities that may impact their specific industries.

Role of the Ohio Tourism PAC

Ohio Tourism PAC is a political action committee focusing on tourism issues in the state. Personal contributions to this PAC are used to support candidates. Fundraising and educational opportunities are coordinated by this committee each year.

Role of the Ohio Tourism Roundtable

The Ohio Tourism Roundtable was established to facilitate the communication and cooperation among tourism and hospitality organizations in Ohio. The founding member organizations include the Ohio Travel Association, the Ohio Restaurant Association, the Ohio Hotel & Lodging Association and the Ohio Association of Convention & Visitor Bureaus.

Your Role

As a business owner, manager or employee in the tourism industry, you must keep legislators informed of business trends, effects of taxes and policies on your business, and tourism in your community. You may learn of issues needing addressed through newsletters, telephone calls, or workshops presented by one of the above organizations. Your role will be to carry this information to your legislators with a “local” edge. Research shows that legislators place the most significance on comments brought to them by their constituents.

**“Diamonds are nothing more than chunks of coal
that stuck to their jobs.”**

Malcolm Stevenson Forbes

COMMUNICATING WITH YOUR LEGISLATORS

Above all else, be persistent. Persistence is key. Don't think a one-time shot is going to make a difference. Make contacting your legislators a regular part of your routine.

Guiding Principles

Do your homework. Learn as much as you can about the problem or issue. Be able to explain it, know opposing arguments, anticipate questions and have answers ready. Support your position with facts.

Start early. Be ready when the time comes, and know that many things (like getting an appointment) often take longer than expected. Most important, build relationships with your legislators before you need them.

Tell the truth. Legislators rely on you for good information. If you want to be credible, you must be truthful. If you don't know the answer, say so. If you say you will follow up, do it.

Keep it short and simple. Think about what you want and why you want it. Identify one or two main points. Legislators will appreciate your respect for their busy schedules.

Take your friends where you find them. Work with unlikely allies. Never cut off anyone from contact. Today's opponent may be tomorrow's ally.

Work at the local level. Messages that have a local slat are a priority of legislators. The local constituency is, obviously, most important to legislators, so make sure you relate issues to what's happening in your legislator's own backyard.

Thank people who help. More important, let everyone else know how helpful your legislator has been.

Staff are People Too, and Important Ones at That

Who controls your schedule? Answers the phone? Decides which salesperson will get immediate access and which one will have to wait? Legislative staff persons are important for many reasons. They are the first point of contact with your legislator. Many contribute ideas and suggestions to the legislator because they are close to constituents and colleagues. If your appointment with a legislator has been delegated to a staff member, consider yourself fortunate to have this opportunity to meet this important person. Treat them with the same principles as you would your legislator.

Don't forget the staff. They are often more accessible, and some even have advisory roles.

Don't mix personal issues with a discussion of tourism. This will dilute your message and confuse your legislator – “What is it that this person REALLY needs?”

Show respect. There's always more than one side to a story. Although you may disagree with a policymaker's position on a tourism issue, you can still communicate an understanding of their point of view (“Yes, the last budget cycle must have been extremely difficult.”). To gain it, demonstrate it by taking the time to understand the issues. Put yourself in their shoes.

WHO TO CONTACT

Before you start planning how to contact a legislator, you need to determine who that person is and where they're located! Find out who represents both the district where you work as well as the district where you live. Many times they will be the same person. If not, make sure you contact both.

A list of state legislators is available on the Ohio Travel Association's legislative web site at www.tourismcreatesjobs.com. Links are also provided to give you telephone numbers, email addresses and mailing addresses. Take note of which committees each legislator serves as a member. This is important information depending on the issue involved.

TOOLS FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATIONS

There are as many different ways to communicate as there are sides to an issue. The most effective method will be the one that, over time, works for you. Choose methods that make the most sense given your existing relationship with your legislators, the urgency of your message, and the complexity of your cause. One foolproof way to decide how to communicate is to send a written letter, followed up with a telephone call. At that time, ask the staff member or the legislator which communication method they prefer.

The Congressional Management Foundation (2005) conducted a comprehensive study of congressional staff, asking them which communications methods are most effective. Although this study was based on congressional staff, we can identify some preferences that are likely to be similar to state legislative staffs as well.

Congressional staff members said the following methods are most effective: 1.) in-person issue visits from constituents, 2.) individualized postal letters, and 3.) contact from a person that represents many constituents. The least effective means included 1.) form faxes, 2.) form e-mail messages, and 3.) form postal letters. A complete table of findings appears in Appendix B.

Overall, the following points were highlighted:

- Congressional offices pay more attention to personal communications from constituents than any other source. In fact, Congressional staff members claim that if their representative does not already have a firm stance on a particular issue, a personal contact will have some influence at least 90 percent of the time.
- The best way to gain the attention of congressional staffs is to contact them personally, either by letter or office visit.

TIPS FOR PERSONAL MEETINGS

Personal meetings, either to discuss specific issues or just to introduce yourself as an interested and involved constituent, are effective means of political communication. Although sometimes difficult to arrange – given a legislator’s busy schedule, they are vital for putting a face to an idea. Here are tips for getting the most out of a personal meeting with your legislator.

- If you’ve never met this legislator before, send a letter to request an appointment.
- Follow up with a telephone call to the legislator’s staff person to arrange an appointment.
- Don’t overlook the opportunity to meet with a staff member. In fact, tell the staff member that you are looking forward to meeting with them as well.
- Offer your legislator the option of meeting with you in the district. (Usually Monday mornings and Fridays.)
- Be concise and well organized.
- Plan on discussing only one issue per visit. Presenting multiple items will not be as effective. Do not combine discussions of personal issues with those of business.
- State your views in 10 minutes or less.
- Be firm in your remarks while being attentive to the legislator’s needs as well.
- Never forget that the meeting is an open exchange of ideas and not an opportunity to lecture your legislator.
- Prepare a one-page summary of key points about your position on the issue. Leave a copy with the legislator. Be sure to include your name and phone number.
- Be early, and prepare to wait.
- If attending in a group, keep the number of folks to no more than four representatives. Make sure your legislator knows who will be accompanying you. Designate one primary spokesperson.
- Follow-up your meeting with a thank you note, and re-emphasize the key points discussed.
- Send a thank you note to any staff member that helped arrange the meeting.

TIPS FOR LETTER WRITING

Written communications leaves a standing impression and can be forwarded to others with little chance of misinterpretation. Personal letters are the most effective form of communication. Indeed, 96 percent of offices surveyed by the Congressional Management Foundation say that individualized letters from constituents can have at least some influence on members of Congress.

The Congressional Management Foundation report also said that the volume of mail and e-mail continues to grow. This means your letters have to be effective, short and informative. Staff members and legislators have less time to review the materials, so your message has to stand out in the crowd. The following are tips for improving the effectiveness of what you pen:

- Use personal or business stationery when writing to legislators. Type-written letters are preferable, but sometimes handwritten letters can be very effective as well (particularly as thank you notes).
- Be sure to include your return address on the letter.
- Keep your comments short and to the point, and clearly state your reason for writing.
- Try to limit the letter to one page. By no means should you exceed two pages. You can, however, identify web sites that have more information, or invite the legislator to contact you for additional information about the issue.
- Address only one issue per letter.
- Mention any particular expertise. As an example, say, “As a business owner in the tourism industry for 15 years,” ...
- Always include the bill number and title about which you’re writing. Explain its impact on your business and the community.
- Avoid using industry jargon, such as NTA, OTA, OACVB, USTA, VCB, etc.
- Remember to write your legislator when he or she does something that deserves recognition and thanks. Words of appreciation will be remembered.
- State your specific position and request within the first paragraph. Don’t make them search for the information.

- Address the letter correctly. On the envelope and in the address, refer to elected officials as “The Honorable ...”

For example: The Honorable (first and last name)
Ohio House of Representatives
77 South High St.
Columbus, OH 43266-0603
Dear Representative _____

The Honorable (first and last name)
Ohio Senate
Senate Office Building
Columbus, OH 43215-4276
Dear Senator _____

The Honorable (first and last name)
United States Senator
Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510
Dear Senator _____

The Honorable (first and last name)
United States Representative
House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515
Dear Congressman _____

TIPS FOR TELEPHONE CALLS

Unless you know your legislator well, avoid trying to get him or her on the telephone. Instead, send a written letter first. Once the communications line is open, follow the recommendations below.

- You have only a few minutes. You need to be very concise and exact.
- Jot down talking points before you telephone.
- Identify yourself as a constituent first. If you can’t speak directly to the legislator, leave your name, organization, telephone number and message with the appropriate staff person.

TIPS FOR EMAIL

Email is a personal way of communication. As such, we recommend using email only if permission is granted first. Send a written letter or telephone. Then ask the legislator or staff which communication method they prefer. Many times legislators will use email for those resources they have already established a relationship needing timely updates.

Legislators receive an extraordinary amount of both written and digital mail. According to the Congressional Management Foundation, members of Congress received 200 million email messages in 2004. This is double what Congress received in 2001 and the numbers are continuing their climb.

Increases are starting to stabilize as members of Congress develop better Websites with forms that allow direct communication. In fact, most Senators and House Members are not using public email addresses and are instead directing constituents to their Websites to send messages, said Capital Advantage, an online grassroots advocacy firm. A recent study by Jack Bonner determined that 80 percent of all email was disregarded by congressional staff members because they weren't from constituents or did not include names and address.

So, should you use email at all? Email works best if the following guidelines are followed:

- Call or write first to determine your legislators' preferences for communication. You might find that once the communication lines are opened, your legislators might actually prefer email. However, don't assume until you are given permission.
- State that you are a constituent, and include your full names, address and telephone number.
- Do not send a copied form letter by email. Use your own words and relate issues directly back to the district.
- Send email only from an individual, not from another Website.
- Make sure the email is easy-to-read format and includes your issues and recommended action within first paragraph.
- Do not use email if you expect a dialogue to occur. Many times, offices return standardized responses to email.
- Include only one issue per email.

TIPS FOR FAXES

Although less effective than personal letters and visits, faxes rank slightly higher than telephone calls and considerably higher than form letters and email messages when trying to get a policymaker's attention. (Congressional Management Foundation 2005) If you still feel the need to send a fax, follow the same tips for writing personal letters. Make sure you include your name, address, and contact information at the top of the fax, and identify yourself as a constituent right away.

PROVIDING TESTIMONY

Budgets and bills have public hearings at various times during their birth. Although you may never have to testify before a committee, keep the following tips handy just in case.

- Open your remarks with “Mr./Mrs. Chairman and members of the committee, thank you for allowing me to speak on behalf of ...”
- If you are a constituent of one of the committee members, make sure to mention it.
- Tell the legislators specifically what you want. Be brief. Base your remarks on facts.
- Do not read your testimony to the committee. Maintain eye contact.
- Use real-life stories if at all possible.
- If members of the committee speak during your testimony, remember to listen as much or more than you respond.
- Provide a written summary of your testimony.
- Try to foresee questions you may be asked, some of them possibly difficult, and be prepared to answer them. Remember, if you don't know the answer to the question, it is best to say, “I don't know, but I will get that information to you.”

OTHER IDEAS

Here is a sampling of others ways you might consider reaching your legislators.

- Schedule periodic breakfasts with your legislators on Friday morning (most are back in their districts on Friday).
- Add legislators to your annual report mailing list. Send them quarterly updates if available.
- Send pertinent industry facts, such as the Longwoods study, U.S. Travel Association reports, etc. Summarize key findings. This will help anchor your position as a resource for your tourism community.
- Add legislators to your news release mailings.
- Send fact sheets on key issues. The Ohio Travel Association can be a key resource for finding these facts and often develops information sheets about major issues.
- Attend fundraisers. If you can't attend, send a contribution.
- Invite legislators and their families to your place of business. Share with them what you do. Provide information on employment, payroll, taxes, etc. Consider hosting this event on one of your busiest days. It may be more difficult for your staff, but it will demonstrate the economic importance of your business.
- Invite legislators to write a message, article or letter for your organization's newsletter.
- If you so desire, offer to put a yard sign in your home's yard during campaign time.
- Consider photograph opportunities that exist with your site. Legislators love to have their pictures taken and distributed to their constituents.
- Visit your legislator's Columbus office at least once a year, if not twice.

Appendix A

GLOSSARY OF LEGISLATIVE TERMS

Act – A bill or measure that has become law.

Action – How legislature handles or responds to measure placed before it.

Adjournment – To end a legislative day, year or biennium. Recess does not end a legislative day.

Adoption – Passage by a committee, chamber or legislature of measures, bills, amendments, resolves, memorials or resolutions.

Amendment – A proposal to change a bill, a motion, or an act.

Appropriation – Legislation that provides funds for a specific purpose.

Bill – A proposed law.

Budget – Legislation anticipating revenue and expenditures by the federal or state government for the upcoming fiscal year. In Ohio, the General Revenue Fund budget is passed in odd-numbered years and contains anticipated revenue and expenditures for a two-year period.

Calendar – List of bills or resolutions to be considered by a committee, the House or the Senate.

Capital Budget – Budget associated with acquisition or construction of major capital items, including land, buildings, and structures. Funds usually appropriated from surpluses, earmarked revenues or bond sales. Capital budget is passed in July of even number years.

Caucus – A group of legislators who form an interest bloc in the chamber because of their common interest in a specific issue or topic.

Committee – A subgroup of legislators charged with considering all bills related to a certain area of subject matter. Most legislators have numerous committees appointed by the leadership of a chamber.

Discretionary Funds – Grant funds that the secretary or director of a state agency (or federal agency) can award for purposes he or she chooses.

Earmarked Revenues – Designation of certain sources of revenue for support of specific programs or agencies by statutory or constitutional provision.

Executive – The Governor.

Executive Agency – An administrative department reporting to the Governor that assists him or her in carrying out the Governor's duties.

Executive Order – A document signed by the Governor that establishes policy for the executive agencies, but which has no statutory or administrative legal standing.

Executive Session – A meeting closed to the public.

General Assembly – The branch of government charged with creating laws. General Fund, General – Represents both the Ohio Senate and the Ohio House of Representatives. Described by which two-year session is being described, such as the "128th General Assembly."

Revenue Fund, GRF – Revenues accruing to the state from taxes, fees, interest earnings and others sources that can be used for the general operation of state government.

Grandfather – To exempt current activities from the requirements of a new law.

House – One of two bodies of legislature, the other being the Senate. The House has the greater number of members and elected by smaller districts. There are 99 representatives in the state of Ohio.

Joint Committee – A committee of senators and representatives.

Legislator – A representative elected by the people in an electoral district.

Legislature – The branch of government charged with creating laws. In the State of Ohio, the legislature indicates which two-year session is being described, as in the "128th General Assembly."

Lieutenant Governor – Second to the Governor in the executive branch.

Line-item Budgeting – Refers to objects of expenditures (e.g., personnel, supplies, contracts, capital) that are the focus of development, analysis, authorization and control of the budget.

Majority Leader – Leader of the majority part in either the House or the Senate. In the House, second in command to the Speaker.

Majority Party – The political party that has more members in a chamber than the other.

Minority Leader – Leader of the minority party in either the House or the Senate.

Minority Party – The political party that has fewer members than the other in the chamber.

Political Action Committee (PAC) – A group formed to make contributions to support issues or candidates who advance the issues the PAC promotes. The Ohio Tourism PAC serves as the PAC for the Ohio Travel Association.

President of the Senate – The presiding officer and the majority leader.

President pro tempore – The Senator who serves temporarily as the presiding officer in the absence of the President of the Senate.

Recess – A temporary delay or pause in conducting official business by a committee or chamber.

Senate – The smaller chamber, representing members who are elected by larger districts. In the State of Ohio, there are 33 Senators.

Speaker – Speaker of the House of Representatives. Presides over the House.

Speaker pro tempore – The Representative who serves temporarily as the presiding officer in the absence of the Speaker of the House.

Whip, Majority and Minority – A party leader on the floor, one for the majority and one for the minority, responsible for assuring that their members vote according to direction by the party caucus or party leadership.

Appendix B

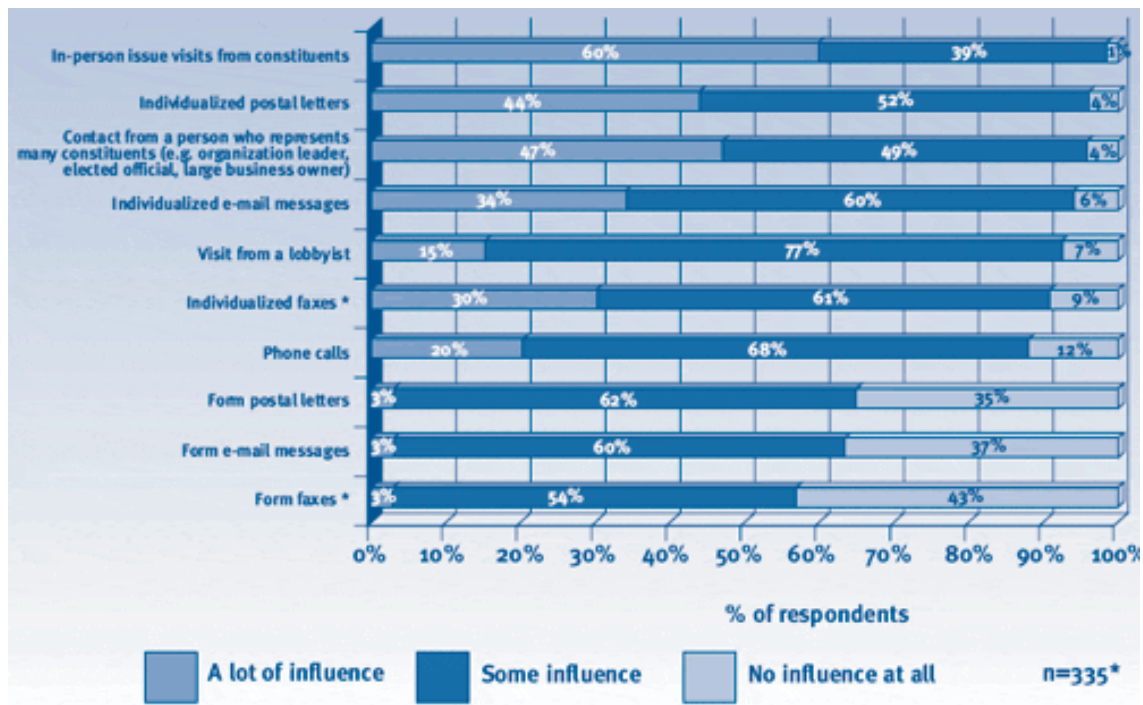
COMMUNICATING WITH CONGRESS

Source: Congressional Management Foundation, *Communicating with Congress Project*

http://www.cmfweb.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=53

Influences on member decision-making:

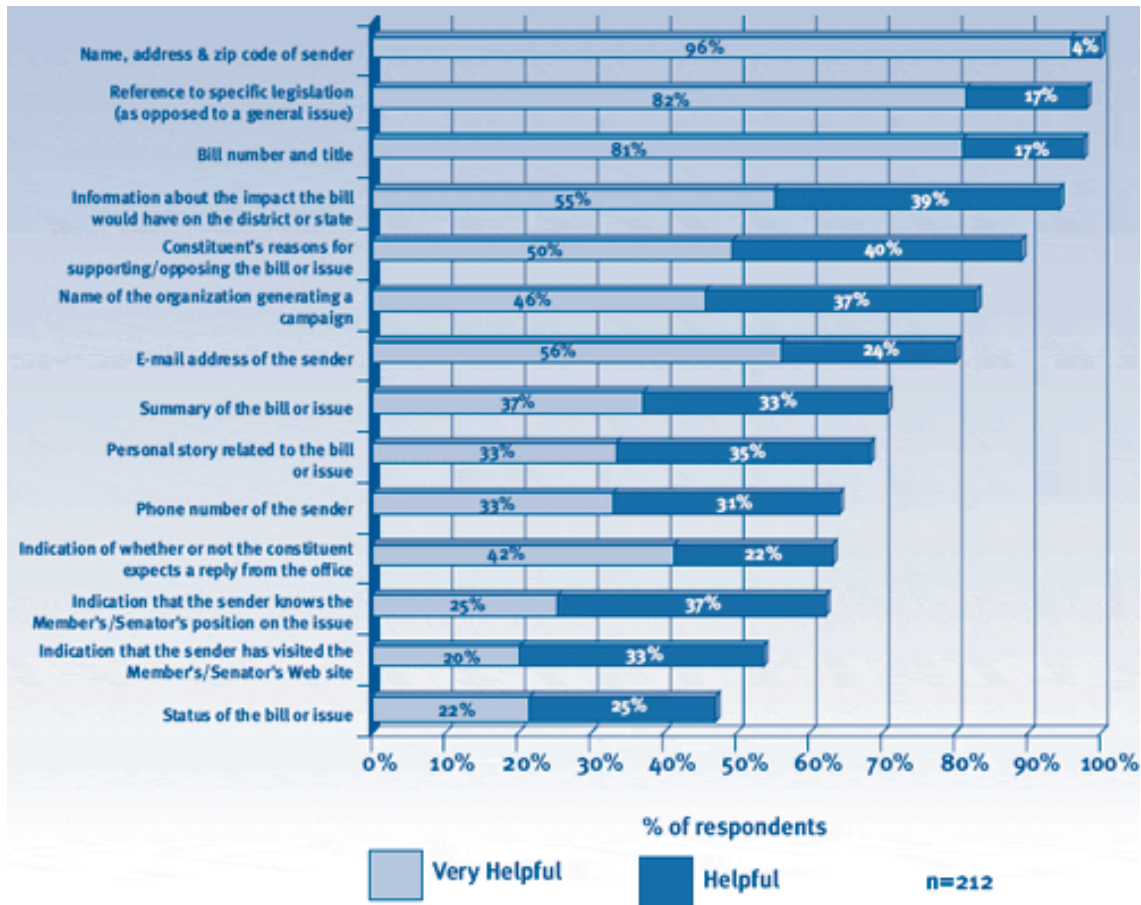
"If your Member/Senator has not already arrived at a firm decision on an issue, how much influence might the following advocacy strategies directed to the Washington office have on his/her decision?"



Staff report that personal interactions between Members and their constituents - whether through in-person visits or personalized postal or email messages - have far more impact on Members' decision-making processes than do identical form communications or visits from lobbyists.

What staff want in constituent communications

"How helpful is it for messages from constituents to include the following?"



The more information constituents provide in their communications, the easier it is for congressional offices to serve their constituents effectively. According to staff, it is “very helpful” or “helpful” for constituents to provide such details as reference to specific legislation and the bill number and title that their communication addresses. Additionally, staff would like to see more detail about how the issue affects individual constituents, including their reasons for supporting a bill or issue, the constituent’s perspective on how the bill would affect his or her district or state, and even a personal story related to the bill or issue.

Appendix C

RESOURCES ON THE WEB

Ohio Travel Association Legislative Information

<http://www.tourismcreatesjobs.com>

Ohio Tourism PAC <http://www.ohiotravel.org/ohc.html>

Ohio Legislative Services Commission <http://www.lsc.state.oh.us/>

Ohio State Government <http://www.ohio.gov/government.htm>

Ohio General Assembly <http://www.legislature.state.oh.us/>

Ohio House of Representatives <http://www.house.state.oh.us/>

The Ohio Senate <http://www.senate.state.oh.us/>