

How to Engage Elected Officials

Leveraging Policymakers to Strengthen Your Projects

Many elected officials are well-known and well-respected members of the community. They will likely have contacts with other community leaders, businesses, nonprofits, and potential funders who may be beneficial to your project. Depending on your cause, and their position, they may also be able to support your work through government legislation.

An elected official may want to become involved in your project for publicity or to show his/her support for your cause. You have a lot to offer as a youth-run organization working for change. Candidates for elected office might also want to lend a hand in exchange for a photo opportunity and the chance to know more community members.

Even if the elected officials in your area are unable to physically attend events that you're hosting or meet with you personally, they still may be able to show their support in other ways. For example, he/she may be able to provide sponsorship, public service announcements, personal support letters, or staff attendance at an event.

Most importantly, always remember to send thank you notes to all of the elected officials who support your project in any way. You'll be glad you did next time you ask him/her to get involved.

How to Include Elected Officials

Generally elected officials are willing to make time for constituents. Engaging elected officials in your project can be a great way to bring your cause into policy debates and to get additional publicity for your work. Below are some steps to take if you want to engage elected officials in your work.

Do your homework:

Research the initiatives your representatives have championed so you have a better idea of where their focus areas lie. This way, you will be more well-informed when you contact them.

If you're not sure who your state and local elected officials are, visit www.congress.org. To find your congressman or congresswoman visit www.house.gov or www.senate.gov.

Make a specific request:

- Send a personal invitation to an event you are holding.
- Write a letter expressing your interest in his/her participation and support of your Venture. In the letter, ask for a meeting to discuss your Venture further.
- If legislation regarding your issue is coming up, write or call to ask your elected official's support for your

cause. Request a reply to your letter.

Follow up:

- If you did not receive an answer to your requests, write or call again to get an answer.
- If you do get a response, or if your elected official attends an event, acknowledge his/her participation and support with a thank you letter.

Adapted from Youth Venture

