

ENHANCING YOUR INFLUENCE: CANDIDATE OUTREACH STRATEGIES

Campaigns offer a valuable opportunity to educate candidates—both incumbent legislators and their challengers—about your hospital’s role in the community and the issues that affect your facility and patients. This campaign season presents an ideal opportunity to meet with candidates and members of Congress and invite them to visit your hospital. By engaging elected officials and candidates during the coming months, you can influence key decision-makers who will ultimately determine the future of health care policy in our country.

The Basics

If you do nothing else, send material to every candidate and incumbent, offering to serve as a resource on health care policy. Here are a few simple and important steps to take. And remember, what you do for one candidate you must do for all candidates in the same race.

1. Send an information packet to all candidates (incumbents and challengers)

- Send an introductory letter from the CEO and board president (see page 32 for a sample).
- Provide a brief packet of information on your hospital; don’t assume the candidates are familiar with your facility.
- More is not better. Campaigns are inundated with material. Send basic facts and statistics about the hospital, making connections to the state and district (e.g., the number of patients served or constituents employed).
- Consider sending everything electronically, with links to key information.
- Use the letter to invite the candidates to visit your facility and to meet with hospital leadership.
- Copy the letter to VIP stakeholders who have a relationship with the candidate.

2. Follow up with a phone call

- Call the candidate’s or legislator’s office to follow up on the letter and to request a meeting.
- Present yourself as a resource on health care policy.
- Invite the candidate or legislator to visit your facility and meet with the hospital leadership and employees. This will be very appealing at this time of year.
- Without a follow-up phone call, the material might not get noticed.

3. Finding the right staff contact

- For the mailing or email, send to the candidate or incumbent and copy the campaign manager.
- When you call to follow up by phone, ask to speak with the campaign manager, issues director, or scheduler (in that order).
- To find contact information for candidates running in a House or Senate race in your state, follow these steps:
 - Visit Project Vote Smart’s website.
 - Select your state from the pull-down menu to see a list of all the candidates running in Senate and House races.
 - Click a candidate for a brief bio and campaign contact information.

Advanced Strategies: Building a Relationship

Developing and sustaining relationships with candidates and their staff members is essential to advancing your hospital's public policy agenda. In fact, investing in relationship-building—even before members are elected—can yield significant dividends down the road. Taking the time to reach candidates from neighboring districts is also critical, as your facility likely provides care to their constituents.

These strategies are a bit more time-consuming than simply sending material. But if you have the bandwidth, they are well worth it.

1. Get to know district staff (incumbents)

- For incumbents, the district staff is often responsible for constituent services. During an election year, they may have more interest in meeting with you.
- This is an ideal time to meet with the district director so that your hospital has a relationship with local staff, as well as the legislative staff in DC.
- Call the district director and ask if he or she could meet with the hospital staff. For the meeting, bring a hospital board member or other stakeholder—particularly one with ties to the member or candidate. This will add to your clout and influence.

2. Get to know campaign staff (challengers/open seat candidates)

- For a challenger or an open seat candidate, the campaign manager often becomes the chief of staff in DC. Getting to know the campaign manager early can position you well for later work toward reaching your goals.
- Request a meeting at the campaign headquarters and bring a few community leaders or other VIPs to showcase your community support. Explain the role your hospital plays in your community—both as a health care provider and as an employer.
- Review the key public policy issues that impact your hospital and offer to be a resource.
- Invite the staff and candidate to visit your facility.

3. Cultivating the relationship

- Keep up the relationship through email exchanges and social media.
- Send candidates articles relevant to and supportive of your goals. Remember, whatever you send to one candidate, you must send to all candidates.

4. Engage your stakeholders

- With increased competition for candidates' attention, take advantage of key hospital stakeholders who have existing relationships with members of Congress and candidates.
- These individuals can be effective in helping to educate incumbents and their challengers about your hospital and your broader policy agenda.
- Bring them with you to your meetings with candidates; ask them to sign a letter of invitation to tour your hospital; and ask them to join you when the candidates visit your facility.

Who are “grasstop” stakeholders?

- Typically they are politically well-connected and have personal relationships with candidates or legislators (e.g., financial or political supporters).
- They may be influential due to the strength of their professional or community reputation (e.g., business leaders, union leaders, university presidents).
- They may serve on your board of trustees or foundation board, or they may be physicians or senior hospital management.

How do you find the most influential stakeholders?

- Survey your boards, senior physicians, senior management, and other supporters to find out if they or anyone they know has a personal relationship with a legislator or candidates running in 2014.
- Review candidates’ contributor lists (Federal Election Commission reports are available online through www.opensecrets.org; see page 29) to identify campaign donors who might be affiliated with your hospital.
- Provide stakeholders with educational materials and talking points and encourage them to reach out to candidates on the hospital’s behalf.

5. Arrange a hospital visit and tour

- Urge campaign staff, incumbents, and challengers to visit your facility.
- When pitching a hospital tour, provide a highlight or focus for the visit (e.g., innovations, a new clinic, areas of specific interest to the legislator or candidate). Make it relevant to their needs.
- Visits can include a tour; meeting with your board, employees, and constituents; a candidate forum; town hall meetings; and other forums for learning and discussions.

More Helpful Tips

Hosting a Hospital Visit

1. Establish goals for the tour:

- educating the legislator or candidate
- highlighting innovations and achievements
- identifying needs
- strengthening relationships
- enhancing public relations

2. Develop a clear agenda, including these points:

- whom the legislator or candidate will meet
- special interests of the legislator or candidate
- departments you will visit and the purpose of each tour stop
- option of the legislator or candidate to hold an informal “town hall” meeting with hospital employees
- overall message to be delivered
- media availability

3. Use the visit to strengthen relationships:

- Identify specific stakeholders (e.g., trustees, physicians, community leaders) to join the tour.
- Coordinate with the legislator or candidate's press secretary to generate media coverage of the visit, if desired, and to determine the parts of the tour that would be open to the media.
- Encourage the legislator or candidate to make a public statement in support of your policy agenda.
- Use social media to amplify the visit, including posting on your website, Twitter, Facebook, and other channels.

Hosting a Town Hall Meeting

- A town hall meeting hosted by the hospital offers a unique forum to engage candidates and legislators on issues of concern to your facility.
- As a public facility, you will need to provide the same opportunity for all candidates running for the same office (i.e., you cannot offer to host a town hall for one candidate, but not for the others); see the legal guidelines, page 22.
- The moderator of the town hall plays a particularly important role by helping to keep the questions and discussion focused on issues of concern to your hospital.
- If you plan to organize such a forum, the advocacy staff at America's Essential Hospital is available to help you.

Hosting a Candidates Forum

- Hosting a forum for candidates is a highly effective way to engage candidates on your issues, but can also be very time-intensive; this is a particularly good model when a congressional seat is open.
- Extend an invitation to all candidates running for the same office—or, at a minimum, to all candidates that meet certain threshold requirements (e.g., polling above a certain level); provide the same briefing material to all candidates. See the legal guidelines, page 22.
- Secure a knowledgeable, neutral, and effective moderator and prepare suggested questions.
- After the event, you may publicize or post on your website candidates' statements and positions on key issues, provided you do not characterize the comments or rank the candidates.

2014 ELECTION ADVOCACY TOOLKIT

*Making Your Voice Heard for
Essential Hospitals and Patients*



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