



Connecting with New Legislators

Each election brings new elected officials who need to be educated on the importance of tourism to the vitality of communities and the opportunity engage legislators who have not yet connected on tourism issues. Proactively engaging legislators at the start of a new legislative term allows tourism leaders to build a framework for engaging on specific issues and developing tourism champions.

As Congress, state legislatures, and city and county councils are starting the hard work of developing a budget and setting policy goals for the year ahead, now is the time to educate these new legislators on the economic impact of tourism and its critical role in developing resilience and building community.

The pandemic and protests continue to present challenges to connecting with legislators in-person, but these are not insurmountable. Nearly all elected officials have established Zoom.gov accounts or other virtual meeting platforms. Call the office to see if they are conducting in-person meetings and, if so, schedule one for the earliest availability in the local/district office. You don't have to go to the Capitol to have a successful meeting. In fact, informational meetings are often more effective away from the hustle and bustle of a legislative session. If in-person meetings are not an option, then ask to set up a virtual meeting.

You don't want this meeting to be a discussion of specific issues, but rather a tourism 101 seminar. A good conversation starting point, however, would be rebounding from the pandemic. Addressing the hit to tourism is a good way to demonstrate the economic impact and how tourism is driving recovery in your community or state. Also, ask about their priorities for the community and how tourism can support those goals.

In addition to providing some basic education on tourism, you also want to use this opportunity to put a name to the face so they will recognize you at future meeting and community events and to start to establish yourself as an information resource. You also want to connect with the key staff for tourism legislation, as they play an important role in keeping the legislator up to date on issues.

Prepare a packet of materials that can be left behind after the meeting or sent in advance for a virtual meeting. The packet should provide a basic overview of the tourism program and its economic impact. As new numbers are developed this creates follow up opportunities to ensure they have the most up to date numbers.

This toolkit provides resources to help you connect with new legislators:

- Virtual Meeting Tips
- Getting to Know Your Elected Officials
- Identifying Advocacy Targets
- Tips for Meeting with Legislators

In addition, the state tourism fact sheets are available for download in the [Advocacy Resource Center](#) on www.southeastourism.org



Virtual Meeting Tips

Scheduling the Meeting

- Request a meeting one to two weeks in advance.
- By phone: Call the office and ask to speak to the scheduler. Some offices will ask that you fill out a form, but most of the time a phone call will suffice.
- By email: Send a request to the scheduler. As many legislative offices are currently working remotely, email contact may be preferable to a call.
- When requesting the meeting, let the office know:
 - the issue you would like to address
 - the number of people that will be attending the meeting
 - the organizations and communities represented
 - your available times.
- Once the meeting is scheduled, confirm which virtual platform will be used for the call -- i.e. Zoom, Google Meeting, WebEx, etc. Be sure all participants download the platform software in advance to ensure the virtual meeting will run smoothly.
- The day before your call, confirm the meeting with the scheduler or aide. In the confirmation email, include:
 - The virtual meeting login information or phone number if you are using your own meeting room or conference line.
 - Attach or provide links to the materials you want to share and an agenda (optional).
 - The meeting organizer's phone number.
 - Copy everyone planning to attend the meeting.

For the Meeting

- Dress professionally and avoid background clutter (if meeting on video) and background noise (for both phone and video meetings).
- Be punctual – login or call 5 minutes before the start time.
- Open your meeting with introductions.
- If you drafted an agenda, stick to it and your speaking times.
- When switching speakers, pause to allow the next speaker to unmute.
- Have one person on the call take detailed notes, especially of any feedback you receive or follow up action that you promise.

- If follow up is required, confirm who you should follow up with.
- Ask the elected official and/or staff member if you can get a snapshot of the session to share later.
- Thank the elected official and staff for their time and consideration.

After the Meeting

- Remember: No meeting is the final conversation with an elected official. The strongest advocacy focuses on building a sustained relationship, rather than a single conversation.
- Post to social media a thank you for your elected officials for meeting and include a photo if you have one. This helps to build the relationship by publicly expressing appreciation for their availability. To do so publicly also reminds them that they are accountable to follow up on the commitments they made and to get more information on the questions they wanted answers to.
- Share you learn with your network, including your members, board, advocacy partners, State Summit Chair, and STS. This can help you to build your own community coalition.



Getting to Know Your Elected Officials

Building a relationship with elected officials is beneficial to being recognized as an influential voice and advancing your organization's mission. By undertaking some basic research, you can compile information on their backgrounds and interests that can spark a conversation and help to establish a personal relationship. Or at the very least, ensure you are remembered when they run into you in the produce aisle at the local grocery store. The biography on an elected official's website is a good place to start, a campaign website can offer additional details, and Google search will often turn up interesting facts, like an interest in the American Revolutionary War or their favorite sports team.

Here are few things to know about your elected officials:

The Basics:

- Name
- Current and Former Positions
- Office addresses
- Education
- Occupation(s)
- Age

Political:

- Party Affiliation
- Leadership Positions
- Committees, Caucuses, and Task Forces
- Issue Expertise
- Accomplishments & Recognitions
- Key Staff Names and Titles

Family Information:

- Spouse/Partner
- Children
- Siblings
- Hometown

Personal:

- Favorite sports/teams
- Charitable Causes
- Leisure Activities
- Special interests



Identifying Advocacy Targets

The most important advocacy targets are the elected officials that represent a district, community, or state. Their job is to give voice to the concerns of their constituents and to act in their best interest. However, there are some legislators that are particularly influential or hold a deep understanding of an issue that should also be engaged as a supporter.

Relationships need to be developed with legislators that sit on authorizing committees, where the work of a program is approved, as well as those that sit on funding committees, also known as appropriations.

Other potential allies include the heads of caucuses. These are often informal organizations that allow elected officials to be engaged on issues of particular concern to their constituents.

For example, the Congressional Travel and Tourism Caucus is chaired by Rep. Gus Bilirakis (R-FL) and Rep. Dina Titus (D-NV). The Caucus has proven to be an excellent base of support for informing Members of Congress on issues important to the tourism sector. In the wake of the Deep Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, the then co-chairs, neither of whom represented an impacted state, set up a meeting between the Secretary of the Navy, who had been charged with developing a long-term response to the crisis, and the congressional delegations from the Gulf states to ensure that tourism communities would be specifically included in the recovery plan. It is one thing for Members of Congress from a Gulf state to request a meeting, but when the meeting is convened by two Representatives outside the region with an interest in tourism, it elevates the issue and ensures that tourism is adequately addressed in the final response.

Determining who sits in key positions can be difficult, but legislative websites and directories are one resource, advocacy partners can also help with making those identifications. CEOs tourism leaders need to track who in their congressional delegation, state capitol and city councils sit in influential positions and ensure they develop relations with those legislators, as well as their direct representatives.



Tips for Meeting with Legislators

Meeting with elected officials is one of the most effective ways to educate them on the economic importance of tourism, and to convey a message about specific issue or legislative measure. Here are some tips to make ensure the success of those meetings:

- ◆ Be engaged. Keep in mind that legislators want to know what issues are of major concern to their constituents and are happy to talk that you have taken the time to meet with them. They want to hear what you have to say and they aren't going to play gotcha. Don't feel like you have to know all the right terms or political jargon to make your point. Speaking authentically is the best thing way to make your case.
- ◆ Be patient. Legislators have demanding schedules, which are often difficult to control. Votes on the floor or a committee can play havoc with their schedules. Do not be offended if they are late or you have to meet with staff – no disrespect is intended. Your flexibility will be appreciated and staff serves as key advisors so if they are well informed on tourism issues, the boss will be too.
- ◆ Be prepared. Think through in advance the key points you want to make. Bring to the meeting information and materials supporting your position. Legislators are required to take positions on many different issues. In some instances, a legislator may lack important details about the pros and cons of a particular matter. It is, therefore, helpful to share with the legislator information and examples that demonstrate clearly the impact or benefits associated with a particular issue or piece of legislation.
- ◆ Be organized. If meeting as a group, work out in advance the agenda and who will present on which issues. Others can weigh in but you want to ensure that everyone has an opportunity to speak up and engage the elected official, as well as provide a cohesive discussion.
- ◆ Be political. Legislators want to represent the best interests of their districts or state. Whenever possible, demonstrate the connection between what you are requesting and the interests of the local community. If possible, describe how you can be of assistance in advancing the issue or bill.

- ◆ Be responsive. Be prepared to answer questions or provide additional information, in the event the Member expresses interest or ask questions. Follow up the meeting with a thank you letter that outlines the different points covered during the meeting, and send along any additional information and materials requested.

- ◆ Be appreciative. Thank you is a powerful phrase that isn't often heard in politics. When a legislator votes right, champions an issue or joins the tourism caucus, highlight that and thank them. It was be a great way to start a discussion or to demonstrate that you or your group are engaged with the political process.