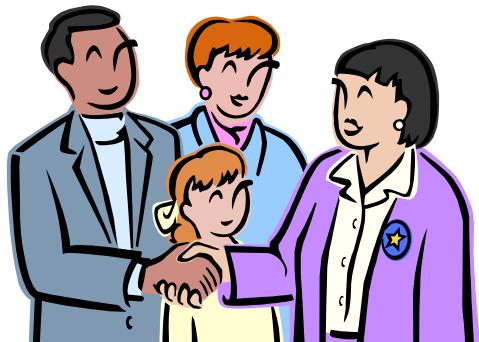


# POLK EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

## Grassroots Advocacy Toolbox

- Introduction to Grassroots Advocacy/Lobbying
- Ten Tips for Calling Your Elected Official
- Eight Tips for E-mailing Your Elected Official
- Eleven Tips for Writing Your Elected Official
- Ten Tips for “Printable” Letters to the Editor





# **The Basics: Introduction to Grassroots Advocacy/Lobbying**

*A grassroots advocate is someone who cares enough about an issue to speak up about it by contacting their elected officials – state legislators, members of congress or their local officials.*

## **What is Grassroots Advocacy or Lobbying?**

- The point of grassroots advocacy is to demonstrate to key policymakers that particular issues have deep support in their home districts – support with voters, employees, community members.
- The focus of grassroots advocacy is not on how well you know a particular policymaker, or how much access you have, but rather on the quantity and quality of contact with the policy maker.

## **Who is a Grassroots Advocate?**

- This may be obvious, but the answer is you and anyone else who has an interest in a particular policy issue. All association members, friends, families, colleagues, etc., are potential grassroots advocates.

## **What do you Need Before You Begin Grassroots Advocacy?**

- **Message:** You need an effective message to advocate for – what do you want to tell policy makers. Additionally, before you can persuade a policymaker, you must know the story you want to tell and why you want to tell it.

## **How do you Engage in Grassroots Advocacy?**

- There is no exact right or wrong way to practice grassroots advocacy. Remember, the key is to let the policymaker know what you, their constituent, think about an issue. You can use personal letters, phone calls, e-mails, letters to the editor, events or direct action to persuade your elected official.

## Ten Tips for Calling Your Elected Official

*Making a phone call to your elected official is quick, easy, and can be done at a moment's notice, making it an attractive method for legislative contact. For these same reasons, it is critical that the phone call be effective. You don't need to be an expert on the issue in order to be persuasive; you just need to give your personal perspective. Follow these ten steps for an effective call to your elected official:*

1. **Plan:** Before you make the call, plan what you are going to **say**. Your phone call will be very brief, so keep your message simple and to-the-point. Take a moment to think about it – you might even want to make some notes—and you'll find that your call goes more smoothly than if you were to call “off the cuff”. Know your request (for example, vote for a specific bill) in as few words as possible.
2. **Message:** After identifying (and possibly writing down) your issue, think about a **key point** or personal story that supports your issue. If you are speaking about a specific bill, reference it in your call, House Bill or Senate Bill and the number, ex. HB 236.
3. **Call:** Make the **call**. If your elected official is in your home district on specific days or weekends, call then when they are there.
4. **Staff or Message:** You may not be able to reach your elected official if you are calling his or her office during the legislative session. Be prepared to talk to one of the elected official's **staff** or to leave a message instead. Make sure you get the staff person's full name, and treat them with respect.
5. **Constituent:** Begin by stating that you are a constituent. Elected officials are most responsive to the people who can keep them in office – their **constituents**. If you voted for the elected official, mention that as well. Give your name, city of residence, and your phone number. You may also wish to include where you work or the type of work that you do.
6. **Persuade:** Get to the point. Following your plan, state the reason for the call. Try to get the elected official to state their position on the issue, and try to **persuade** them using the points you developed.
7. **Thank Them:** If the elected official agrees to support your issue, **thank** them. Regardless of their position, thank the elected official for their time. Let them know that you will track the issue.
8. **Recruit:** **Recruit** a like-minded friend, family member, or colleague to make a call as well. Particularly with phone calls, quantity is critical. Elected officials pay attention to issues when they believe that many of their constituents care about that issue.
9. **Report your call.** Let PEA know that you made the call, and report anything of import that the elected official said.
10. **Call Back:** As you monitor the issue, **call back** to ask for specific support or action as appropriate to the process. Quantity is important in grassroots advocacy, because a high number of calls indicates to an elected official that many people in their district care about an issue.

## **Eight Tips for E-mailing Your Elected Official**

*E-mail has changed the way that we communicate and in many ways has replaced other forms of communication, such as phone calls or handwritten letters. This technological tool is fast, cheap, and efficient. However, because it is a fast and relatively informal means of communication, many elected officials view it as less credible than other methods. If you use e-mail to communicate with your elected official, you should do so in the context of an ongoing relationship in which you use other methods as the foundation of your communication.*

To craft an e-mail with impact, follow these steps:

- 1. In the subject line of the message, state that you are a constituent** (For example – Subject: Message from a constituent on xyz issue). Most elected officials have their staff sort and respond to their e-mails, and this strategy will increase the likelihood that your letter is read.
- 2. State your request concisely.** View your message as different from an electronic letter. Again, e-mail is less formal and much briefer than traditional written communication. Craft your message accordingly – keep it tight and short. Spell check works – USE IT!
- 3. Provide personal examples and local context.** Use similar principles as those in letter writing, but in a tighter format. If you are sending a generic e-mail written by a group of which you're a part, insert personal examples in the message.
- 4. Persuade a like-minded friend, family member, or colleague to send an e-mail as well.** Again, quantity is critical. Elected officials pay attention to issues when they believe that many of their constituents care about that issue. One e-mail is not convincing.
- 5. Report your e-mail.** Copy PEA on your e-mail, polk@floridaea.org. If you persuaded a friend, let them know that that friend will be reporting as well. Make sure that your friend follows through.
- 6. Follow up.** Again, because the impact of e-mail varies widely from elected official to elected official, be sure that you are using other methods to communicate with your elected official. Follow your e-mail with a phone call, or a handwritten letter. Send a copy of any response you receive to PEA, polk@floridaea.org.
- 7. Communicate more than once.** As with all other forms of communication with your elected official, view your e-mail as part of an ongoing relationship. Keep in touch and tuned into your elected official and his or her position on the issue.
- 8. Monitor progress.** Follow how your elected official votes on your issue. If they have voted with you; thank them. If they have voted against you; express your disappointment and make a request for future consideration.

## **Eleven Tips for Writing Your Elected Official**

*Writing a letter to your elected official offers you the opportunity to give more information than you could in a phone call. It can also be an effective strategy for following up on a phone call, visit, or e-mail. The disadvantage to writing letters is you are not directly interacting with the elected official, and therefore, they do not have the opportunity to ask questions, state their position, or respond to a specific request. For these reasons, you might consider following your letter with a phone call for more interaction.*

- 1. Begin by stating that you are a constituent.** If you voted for the elected official, let them know that as well. Make sure that you write your return address on the envelope, so that the elected official's office staff knows immediately that you are a constituent.
- 2. Personalize your letter.** Research consistently shows that handwritten letters have the most impact. If you are basing your letter on a form letter, rewrite it, or at least retype it. Photocopies of generic letters are the least effective. In making your case on the issue, use personal examples.
- 3. Use the news.** Watch news stories in your local community that you can use to illustrate your point. Use a local news item as a springboard for your issue.
- 4. Local, local, local.** Make a strong connection between the issue and your local community that the elected official represents. Again, use local examples that illustrate why your issue is important and why your position is a strong one.
- 5.** If the elected official has supported your issues in the past, **acknowledge** this – but don't take it for granted that the support will continue. Give reasons why the elected official should continue or intensify his or her support.
- 6. Show restraint.** Keep your letter brief – one to one and a half pages at the most. Make sure that supporting information that you leave behind is brief as well.
- 7. Persuade** a like-minded friend, family member, or colleague to write a letter as well. Again, quantity is critical. Elected Officials pay attention to issues when they believe that many of their constituents care about that issue.
- 8. Report** your letter. Send a copy of your letter by courier or fax to PEA. Let PEA know that you wrote the letter, and what you intend to do to follow up.
- 9. Follow up.** In the letter, ask your elected official for a response. If you get a response, send a copy to PEA. To get a better picture of your elected official's position, consider following your letter with a phone call or e-mail.
- 10. Communicate** more than once. Again, quantity is as important, if not more important, than quality in grassroots advocacy. One letter will not gain influence. As you monitor the issue, communicate with the elected official through phone calls, additional letters, e-mail, or visits to ask for specific support or action as appropriate to the process.
- 11. Manners Matter.** To build the relationship, send a thank you note.

## Ten Tips for “Printable” Letters to the Editor

An underused resource in grassroots advocacy is the local media. Letters to the editor can be powerful vehicles for influencing or inspiring public debate, making the case for your issue, or responding to related events. In addition, elected officials always read the opinion pages of their local paper, because it gives them an idea of what their constituents think. The trick is to write a letter that the editors find compelling enough to print. Use these tips to write a letter that is more likely to get printed:

- 1. Capitalize on the hot stories.** Find ways to tie stories in the news with your issue. For example, if there is a bank robbery in your town, can it be tied in some way to your issue? What about controversy regarding ATM fees? Open your letter to a reference to the recent event, and then quickly build a logical bridge to your issue.
- 2. Keep it brief.** Most “Letters to the Editor” should be under 250 words. Edit your letter aggressively. Use a word processing program to write and edit your letter, then cut and paste it into your e-mail.
- 3. Be clear.** This may sound obvious, but a surprising number of letters that don’t get published just plain don’t make sense. Avoid jargon, use common vocabulary, eliminate all acronyms, and let a few friends or colleagues review the letter for you before you send it.
- 4. Use word cues to underscore your point.** For instance, preface your major conclusion with “The important thing is...” If you have research that makes your case, preface the facts with “Research proves that....
- 5. Don’t overlook neighborhood weeklies and smaller papers.** Often, these publications have more room for letters, and community papers have very large readerships.
- 6. Include a call to action or solution.** If you are illustrating a need or making a case for a specific action, include a line about what people can do to help.
- 7. Don’t be afraid to toot your own horn.** If PEA is involved in work that addresses the issue, include that in your letter. Refer them to our website for more information.
- 8. Be passionate, but not poisonous.** There is a difference between “fire in the belly” and righteous indignation. Avoid sarcasm, and if you’re angry, cool off a bit before sending a final version.
- 9. Use local or personal angles.** All grassroots strategies rely on the local and the personal in an issue. Include this perspective in the letter to illustrate why readers should care about the issue.
- 10. Identify yourself.** Letters written by someone willing to identify themselves are more likely to be printed. Include your name, city of residence, and a descriptor. Example: Mary Smith, Winter Haven, Elementary School Teacher.

# Build Your RAFT

## Role – Identify your role as you prepare your letter.

- Constituent
- Taxpayer
- Parent
- Educator
- Public School Employee
- Student

## Audience – Address your audience clearly.

- School Board Member
- State Senate
- State House
- U.S. Congressional Representative
- U.S. Senator
- Governor
- President
- The Public

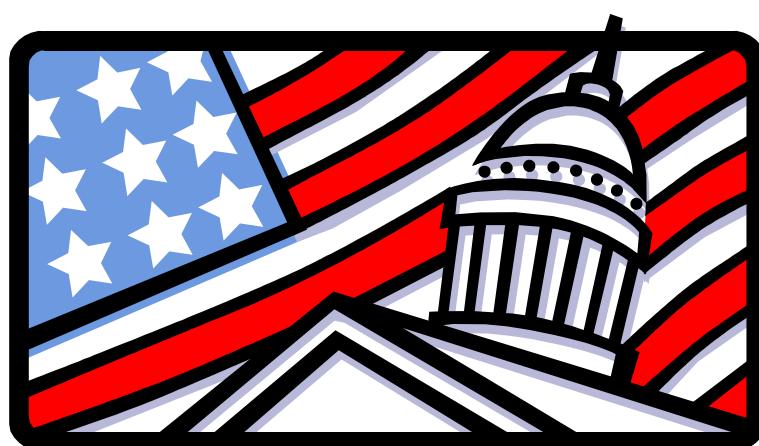


## Format – Choose Your Format

- Letter
- Phone Call
- E-mail
- Letter to the Editor

## Topic – Select your Topic from your Talking Points

- Education Revenue
- Education Cuts
- Polk School Board Budget
- Polk Salaries
- NBCT
- Employee Free Choice Act
- Other



## **Local Newspapers**

### **Lakeland Ledger**

Website: <http://www.theledger.com/section?template=submit&subtype=letter>

Phone: (863) 802-7000

Address: The Ledger, 300 W. Lime St., Lakeland, FL 33802

E-mail: voice@theledger.com

### **Orlando Sentinel**

Website: <http://www.orlandosentinel.com/opinion/os-opinion-submission-guidelines-htmlstory.html>

Address: 633 N. Orange Ave. MP-218, Orlando, FL 32801

### **Polk County Democrat**

Website: <http://ads.polkcountydemocrat.com/editorial/LetterToEditor.aspx>

Fax: (863) 533-0402

Address: 99 Third Street NW, Winter Haven, FL 33881

E-mail: letters@polkcountydemocrat.com

### **Tampa Bay Times**

Website: <https://www.tampabay.com/letters/>

### **Winter Haven News Chief**

Website: <http://www.newschief.com/section?template=submit&subtype=letter>

Phone: (863) 401-6900

Address: 455 6th St NW, Winter Haven, FL 33881

## **Polk School Board Emails & Phone**

### **District 1**

**Billy.Townsend@polk-fl.net**

**Phone: (863) 209-4037**

### **District 2**

**Lori.Cunningham@polk-fl.net**

**Phone: (863) 678-0552**

### **District 3**

**Hazel.Sellers@polk-fl.net**

**Phone: (863) 533-7714**

### **District 4**

**Sarabeth.Reynolds@polk-fl.net**

**Phone: (863) 604-2023**

### **District 5**

**Kay.Fields@polk-fl.net**

**Phone: (863) 802-5483**

### **District 6**

**Lynn.Wilson@polk-fl.net**

**Phone: (863) 534-0529 ext. 51348**

### **District 7**

**Tim.Harris@polk-fl.net**

**Phone: (863) 808-0005**

## **Legislative Contacts**

### **Polk County State Senate Districts**

**[www.flsenate.gov](http://www.flsenate.gov) to locate offices, phone numbers and addresses of State Senators.**

#### **DISTRICT 20 – Tom Lee**

**e-mail: [lee.tom.web@flsenate.gov](mailto:lee.tom.web@flsenate.gov)**

District Office:  
915 Oakfield Drive  
Suite D  
Brandon, FL 33511  
(813) 653-7061

Tallahassee Office:  
418 Senate Office Building  
404 South Monroe Street  
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1100  
(850) 487-5020

#### **DISTRICT 22 – Kelli Stargel**

**e-mail: [stargel.kelli.web@flsenate.gov](mailto:stargel.kelli.web@flsenate.gov)**

District Office:  
2033 East Edgewood Drive  
Suite 1  
Lakeland, FL 33803  
(863) 668-3028

Tallahassee Office:  
324 Senate Office Building  
404 South Monroe Street  
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1100  
(850) 487-5015

#### **DISTRICT 26 – Denise Grimsley**

**e-mail: [grimsley.denise.web@flsenate.gov](mailto:grimsley.denise.web@flsenate.gov)**

District Offices:  
205 South Commerce  
Avenue, Suite A  
Sebring, FL 33870  
(863) 386-6016

212 East Stuart Avenue  
Lake Wales, FL 33853  
(863) 679-4847

Tallahassee Office:  
306 Senate Office Building  
404 South Monroe Street  
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1100  
(850) 487-5021

## **Polk County State Legislative Districts**

**E-mail is through the website: [www.myfloridahouse.gov](http://www.myfloridahouse.gov) and click on Representatives**

District 39 – Neil Combee

E-mail: [neil.combee@myfloridahouse.gov](mailto:neil.combee@myfloridahouse.gov)

218 House Office Building  
402 South Monroe Street  
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1300  
Phone: (850) 717-5039

District Office:  
108 West Polk Street  
Auburndale, FL 33823-3428  
Phone: (863) 968-5666

District 40—Colleen Burton

E-mail: [colleen.burton@myfloridahouse.gov](mailto:colleen.burton@myfloridahouse.gov)

1301 The Capitol  
402 South Monroe Street  
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1300  
Phone: (850) 717-5040

District Office:  
Suite 260  
100 South Kentucky Avenue  
Lakeland, FL 33801-5093  
Phone: (863) 413-2640

District 41—Sam Killebrew

E-mail: [sam.killebrew@myfloridahouse.gov](mailto:sam.killebrew@myfloridahouse.gov)

1101 The Capitol  
402 South Monroe Street  
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1300  
Phone: (850) 717-5041

Winter Haven, FL 33880  
Phone: (863) 291-5254

District Office:

337 Avenue C Southwest  
405 House Office Building  
402 South Monroe Street  
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1300  
Phone: (850) 717-5042

District 42 – Mike LaRosa  
E-mail:  
[mike.larosa@myfloridahouse.gov](mailto:mike.larosa@myfloridahouse.gov)

District Office:  
1224 10<sup>th</sup> St.  
St. Cloud, FL 34769-3343  
Phone: (407) 891-2555

District 56—Ben Albritton

E-mail: [ben.albritton@myfloridahouse.gov](mailto:ben.albritton@myfloridahouse.gov)

222 The Capitol  
402 South Monroe St  
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1300  
Phone: (850) 717-5056

District Office:  
150 North Central Ave  
Bartow, FL 33830-4732  
Phone: (863) 534-0073  
Fax: (863) 534-0075

## **Polk County U.S. Congressional Districts**

### **District 9—Darren Soto**

Web: <https://soto.house.gov/contact>

Address to: The Honorable Darren Soto

### **District 15—Dennis Ross**

Web: <http://dennisross.house.gov>

Address to: The Honorable Dennis Ross

### **District 17—Tom Rooney**

Web: <http://rooney.house.gov>

Address to: The Honorable Tom Rooney

## **Florida Senators**

### **U. S. Senator Marco Rubio**

Website: [rubio.senate.gov](http://rubio.senate.gov)

The Honorable Marco Rubio

### **U. S. Senator Bill Nelson**

Website: [billnelson.senate.gov](http://billnelson.senate.gov)

The Honorable Bill Nelson,

## **Executive Contacts**

### **President Donald Trump**

Office of the President  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Phone Numbers  
Comments: (202) 456-1111  
Switchboard: (202) 456-1414  
Website: [www.whitehouse.gov/contact/](http://www.whitehouse.gov/contact/)

### **U.S. Secretary of Education – Betsy DeVos**

Office of the Secretary  
U.S. Department of Education  
400 Maryland Avenue, SW  
Washington, D.C. 20202

Phone: (202) 401-3000  
[www.ed.gov](http://www.ed.gov)

### **Governor Rick Scott**

Office of the Governor  
State of Florida  
The Capitol  
400 S. Monroe St.  
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0001

Home page: [www.flgov.com](http://www.flgov.com)  
E-mail: [rick.scott@eog.myflorida.com](mailto:rick.scott@eog.myflorida.com)  
Phone Numbers  
Switchboard: (850) 488-7146  
FAX: (850) 922-4292