

5 Good Advocacy Habits

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Good Habit #1

Say thank you. Say it as often as possible and mean it. Say thank you not only when you get something you want, but just because . . . because your legislator or a staff member has taken the time to talk, listen, etc. Don't take legislators or staff members for granted. Say thank you!

Good Habit #2

Develop relationships. People do things for people. Get to know your legislators – at the local, state, and federal levels – as well as their staff members. It's important to develop good working relationships at all levels, because you don't know if an alderman has sights on the state legislature or if the state senator quests for the governor's mansion, and so on. And, it's not improbable that a key aide or chief-of-staff might someday seek an elected office. [**Note:** Accuracy counts! Spell and pronounce names correctly and if you don't know, ask. Keep tabs on changes and update your records regularly. This is especially important following elections. And don't forget to offer congratulations following elections.]

Good Habit #3

Ask what you can do. How can you – or your institution – be helpful or be of service. Asking how you can be helpful is a natural outgrowth of developing relationships with your legislators and with staff members. For example, consider opportunities that will put your legislators in the spotlight, especially in your institutional spotlight, which is a win-win, especially when you can finesse media coverage, too.

Good Habit #4

Keep legislators and all elected officials and their staff members informed, up to date, and in the know. This includes sharing press releases, invitations, general mailings, etc. Be especially conscious of sharing time-sensitive or breaking news, whenever possible and as appropriate. For example, legislators shouldn't read important news about your institution in the newspaper; you want to be the one to provide a heads-up.

Good Habit #5

Say thank you again! Remember to say please, too. Hand-written notes are still meaningful, perhaps even more so today with our reliance on electronic communication. Courtesies do count. Always be sincere.

Adapted from a Museums Advocacy Day panel presentation, "Advocacy In-Depth – Working with Congressional Staff," March 22, 2010, Washington, D.C.