

The Executive Board asked me to put something together for the newsletter regarding “Getting to know Your Legislator”. Once I started I realized it was going to be a very large article so it is going to be posted on our website. I have also expanded it into another document “Getting Your Legislator to Listen”.

*These guidelines will help guide us in these very important areas. In the near future there will be issues that we all need to be Advocates for the MAAO. A lot of time has gone into the preparation of these documents that will not only help you but the MAAO. If we all contact our state representatives and senators they are apt to take us more seriously as a group. We need “**EVERYONE’S**” help so that they will listen to us.*

Please visit our website for these very important tools.

Ron Keohan MAA,

Co-Chairman of the Legislative Committee

Ron Keohan, MAA Legislative Committee co-chair

Getting to Know Your Legislators

Building a strong, personal relationship with your Massachusetts [Senators](#) and [Representatives](#) and their staff is one of the most important aspects of advocacy. While it is important to get to know their positions on issues and legislation, it is just as important to nurture and strengthen the relationships that you have with them. Positive communication and effective follow-up are keys to enriching these relationships.



You can more effectively communicate with your legislators by learning about their backgrounds, interests, and records of support. Do some research and find out significant data, such as: the positions they hold in legislature, the chair of the committee that will consider your proposal, and the opposition’s chief spokesperson. Having this background knowledge will allow you to discuss your position more efficiently and will let your legislator know that you are well-informed on the subject.

Another method of keeping the lines of communication open with your legislators is to keep your name and the Massachusetts Association of Assessing Officers in front of them. Send articles, clippings, and other information about issues of interest to your legislator and his or her staff. Keep them up to date on our organization by informing them of our achievements and inviting them to MAAO events.

Becoming a Successful Advocate

General Tips:

The more you know about being an advocate, the more effective you will be. Below are a few tips on how you can prepare yourself to be a successful advocate.

1. Know your basic facts

The subject at hand is the single-most important aspect that an advocate must know. Before you begin advocating, ask yourself the following questions:

- What is the substance of the legislation or the nature of the project that I am supporting or opposing?
- Why is it so important to the MAAO?
- What happens if the legislation passes or the program is funded?
- What happens if the legislation does NOT pass or the program is NOT funded?
- How does it pass?
- How much does it cost?

We will provide you with the information that you need to know about an issue or a program. You can contact a member of the MAAO Legislative Committee whenever you have any questions about legislation and how it will affect the MAAO. We are here to help!

2. Be organized.



Organization is an important part of being an effective advocate. You want to be able to present your legislator with the all of the necessary information in the short amount of time that he or she may have available. This is why being organized is so crucial. Whether you are advocating by telephone, letter, e-mail or in person, we believe that you can be a terrific advocate if you follow these simple rules:

- Be brief. Your legislator may not have much time on their hands, so present her with only the necessary points of the legislation for which you are advocating.
- Be clear and accurate. When communicating with your legislator, be sure that you speak clearly about your points, and of course, be sure that you are accurate on the information that you are presenting. If you are not sure about a question that your legislator may ask, do not pretend to know the answer. Tell your legislator that you are unsure of this answer, but that you will go home and research to provide him or her with the sought after answers. Then, be sure to actually do the follow-up research that you promised.
- Be timely. This is usually the most difficult concept for the beginning advocate to understand. The MAAO Legislative Committee is here to help you work this out.
- Be persistent and persuasive. It is important that you get your point across, so have confidence in yourself and our institution and refuse to give up. There is no need to be argumentative or demanding; this type of approach will likely not encourage your

legislator's support. Of course, please never make promises or threats. Be grateful. Thank your legislator for any votes or support on issues that you have advocated for, and congratulate your legislator on his or her personal and professional achievements.

Communicating with Your Legislators

Personal Visits

Meeting face-to-face is the best means of communicating with our legislators. The first step that you will need to take is to make an appointment through the legislator's staff. When doing this, let them know what it is that you would like to discuss. The MAAO Legislative Committee will provide you with the needed information and materials to assist both you and the legislator in understanding your position.

On the day of the actual meeting, be sure to be a few minutes early. Feel free to bring someone along with you, but make sure that this person is also well-informed on the issue that is to be addressed. While it is encouraged to bring one person along, keep your group to only a few.

During the meeting, remember that it is extremely important to briefly state your case and leave after expressing thanks for your legislator's time. The ideal amount of time to cover your topic is between five to ten minutes per subject. Try not to exceed ten minutes if possible, and do not hang around unless your legislator chooses to lengthen the meeting. This meeting should be a time when you can exchange thoughts and information. Present your reasoning and then listen as your legislator expresses his or her standpoint on the topic at hand.

Always remember that if your legislator poses questions that you cannot explain, be sure to answer honestly. Admit that you do not have the answer, and say that you will provide the requested information later and then be sure to do so! At the closing of your meeting, leave any written information that you may have about your position, and don't forget to thank the legislators for his or her time.

Putting Pen to Paper

Another effective way to communicate to your legislators is through a letter. Here are some guidelines to follow when communicating via a written letter:

- Use MAAO or your municipal stationery. This will make your letter look professional, and it also leaves your contact information on the letter. It is important for your legislator to have a place to contact you with questions or concerns that he or she may have. Plus, the legislator may want to set up a personal meeting with you to further discuss your position.



- Be specific on your position. State the necessary information and be sure to include exact information such as the bill number (if appropriate), title and subject matter.
- Use a personal touch. Put the letter into your own words. **Do not use a form letter**, as it is not as effective as a personal letter. You can use a sample letter to guide you, but be sure that the letter is in your own words. You can also mention something unique about your legislator, such as a recent event he or she participated in to add more of a personal touch.
- Be concise. It is recommended that your letter be only one page long. Begin your letter by explaining your reason for writing (i.e., “Please support House Bill ...”). Remember to briefly state your main points. You want to provide your legislator with the necessary information without taking up too much of his or her time.
- Obtain any necessary information to support your case. Contact our Legislative Committee to acquire any supporting documents or information about the issue to be addressed.
- Request a response. Ask that your legislator send you a reply that confirms his support and states his position on the issue.
- Proofread your letter multiple times prior to sending it. Have a few others look over it as well for spelling and grammatical errors. Be absolutely sure to spell your legislator’s name correctly and confirm the address as well. A mistake in your correspondence will make you; the cause and our institution appear less credible.

Legislative assistants can carry your message

Many times you will not actually be able to see a legislator. Even at times when you have an appointment, you may be referred to an assistant or intern. Please be understanding of this situation. There will be times, due to quickly called committee meetings or requests by the governor’s office, that your appointment will have to be cancelled or changed and that the legislator could not avoid such last-minute scheduling changes.

What do I do if my legislator has an opposing viewpoint?

It is important to remember that your legislator will not always share your nor the MAAO’s viewpoint on a particular issue. Actually, he or she may completely oppose your position and that of MAAO. Your reaction to this situation may greatly affect your legislator’s willingness to meet with you or any MAAO delegate in the future.

Here are a few tips that you can follow to help you deal with opposing views:

- Agree to disagree. Do not be afraid to contest your legislator’s arguments and provide him or her with a few supported points of your own.
- Do not insult the opposition. They likely believe in their position as strongly as you believe in yours.
- Leave your legislator with some stimulating thoughts. Ask questions that will encourage the legislator to contemplate your position and also will help you better understand that of your legislator’s.

- Express your gratitude. Always show appreciation to your legislator or staff member for taking the time to listen to what you have to say and letting you express your opinion.

Follow Up

Always show appreciation

It is important to always remember to thank your legislator after meeting in person or talking on the phone. Send out a thank you note that politely restates your position and also expresses gratitude for his or her time and consideration. It is also appropriate to send a thank you letter after he or she has voted for or supported an issue for which you advocated.

A thank you letter can really make an impact. The vast majority of all mail that a legislator receives is asking favors, complaining about what the government has done wrong, or criticizing something that he or she has done. Your letter can leave a positive, lasting impression and confirm your dedication to the cause.

Inform the MAAO Legislative Committee

After contacting your legislator in any manner, please let one of our committee members know! Keep us informed. Who did you meet with or talk to? What issues did you discuss? What was your legislator's position? Your report will help our team shape our future plan for advocating on behalf of the MAAO. A simple way to do this is to send an e-mail to execdir@maao.org

Tips for Contacting Your Legislator

Don't underestimate your influence: Legislators pay attention to the issues raised by voters in their communities, especially during an election year. The hometown connection is essential to getting a legislator's attention. Be sure you are registered to vote.

Know your legislators: Before contacting your legislator do a little homework. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts website, www.mass.gov/legis, is user-friendly and comprehensive. Look up your legislator's name, background, voting record and committee assignments. You can also check the status of bills, send an email to legislators and follow the legislative calendar.

Don't forget the legislator's staff: Get to know the staff in your legislator's office. They often have more time to devote to your concerns and have considerable influence with the legislator.

Know your local officials: Legislators respond to the needs and desires of local officials. Ask local officials for their help in your advocacy efforts with your legislators.

Identify yourself as a constituent: Being a constituent is important, so always identify where you live and how you are connected to the community. Include your name, address, phone

number and email address in all correspondence.

Remember human nature: Like everyone else, legislators respond better to courtesy and appreciation. Legislators get many more complaints than compliments. Threats and ultimatums do little to convince a legislator to support your position. Be polite, positive and non-partisan.

Write a letter: Here are some suggestions:

- **Don't assume you need to be an expert in legislative advocacy:** You are the expert in knowing your profession and what support you and your community need. Make contact with your legislator as a concerned local official and voter about an issue important to you. You set the stage with your legislator for MAAO staff to follow up on the issue(s) you raise.
- **Say "thank you" before you say "please":** Open your letter by thanking legislators for their past support. Let them know that you appreciate their efforts on your behalf. Even if you disagree with their positions, they are more likely to listen to you if you recognize them for their work to represent you.
- **Tell your story:** Your own story is your most persuasive message. When contacting your legislator, share your experience about what has and has not worked in your community. Share your experience - struggles along with your suggestions for solutions. Ask for the action you want your legislator to take. Be positive and courteous. Again, always identify yourself as a constituent by including your name, address, phone number and email address in your correspondence. Thank them for their support.
- **Use your own words:** The most effective letter is a personal one, not a form letter. If you are using a form letter as a guide, modify it to express your message in your own words.
- **Send an email:** Write the email as if it were a personal letter. Identify yourself as a constituent.

Invite your legislator to visit: When legislators feel connected to your issues, they will be more likely to offer their support. Invite your legislators and their staffs when you are holding an awareness event, program or celebration of any kind. Legislators appreciate opportunities to interact with their constituents, especially during an election year. Let them know when local press might cover the event. Send a thank you note to each legislator who attends.

Make a visit to the legislator's office at home or in Boston: When the legislature is not in session, a visit to the home office will be less hectic. Here are some suggestions for your visit:

- Call the office and identify yourself as a constituent.
- Go with a friend or a group to make the visit less stressful .
- Prepare for the visit by defining what you want to accomplish. Know your issue(s) and your suggestions for solutions. Prepare to be brief and to the point.
- Don't overload a visit with too many issues. Focus on one or two.

- Thank your legislator for past support.
- Explain why your issues are important and make some suggestions for solutions.
- Be specific about what you are asking your legislator to do.
- Ask for their advice on what else you can do to make your advocacy efforts effective.
- Close on a positive note. Thank them for their time. Restate the issue and your suggestions. Be specific about what you want them to do.
- Regardless of the outcome, always send a thank you letter.

Attend candidate forums, especially during this election year: Listen for your legislators' responses to questions and how you can connect your issues with theirs. Ask questions from the audience -- be respectful, appreciative, share your experience and your recommendations. Talk with your legislator after the forum and personalize your contact.

Remember you are not alone: Expand your reach by asking other assessors to contact their legislators. Share the user-friendly Commonwealth of Massachusetts website www.mass.gov/legis so they can identify the legislators from their home districts.

Stay informed: Once the legislative session starts, things happen quickly. Often there is little notice before an issue comes up for a vote. There will be times when a legislator needs immediate feedback from you on an issue. Check the MAAO Legislative Committee web page at www.maa.org/legcomm.htm. The committee members' names and their communities, of the MAAO Legislative Committee is also on that page.

Establishing and Maintaining Relationships with Legislators

As a Key Person for the assessing profession, you are specifically charged with the responsibility to develop a close, constituent relationship with your lawmakers. It is vital that you take the time to communicate with these individuals about the issues that affect you and your profession. However, these contacts will have much more impact if a personal relationship exists between you and your elected officials and their staffs.

Most legislators and their staff want to make the acquaintance of as many of their constituents as possible. You should have little or no trouble getting to know your legislator if you take advantage of available or created opportunities to meet. Both patience and persistence are valuable in the development of the relationship.

Party affiliation should not be an obstacle; your legislator represents the entire district – Republicans, Democrats and Independents alike. You need not be a member of his or her political party to establish a relationship.

To make contacts with your legislator meaningful, you should do your homework. First, find out as much as you can about your legislator, including his or her voting record, personal political background, issue priorities, and what committees he or she serves on. Knowledge of the demographics as well as the political concerns of the district is also helpful. For information of this nature, local business organizations in your community, such as the chamber of commerce,

may also be helpful.

Once you have become familiar with your legislator's background, it is important to stay abreast of his or her activities and positions on the issues. Information gathered through public statements, voting patterns, and print and broadcast media reports will be invaluable in your personal contact with your legislator. Also, be certain that you are on the mailing list for your legislator's newsletter.

Importance of Key Person Relationships with Legislators

Key Persons have many different kinds of relationships with their legislators. For example, you may have a personal relationship that is a source of enjoyment and benefit to both you and your legislator. You may have a formal relationship consisting of prompt and polite correspondence. The relationship may be staff-oriented, allowing for good flow of information between you and the legislative staff. The legislator may be cordial and responsive, but nonetheless indifferent to your concerns, and may consistently vote opposite to the profession's positions. Or, the relationship could possibly be unfriendly, especially if the legislator is an opponent of the profession. Keep in mind, however, that a legislator, who opposes the profession on an issue today, may nevertheless become a valuable ally on an unrelated issue tomorrow.

Regardless of the kind of relationship you have with your legislator, remember that every relationship is worth developing even though some will be more productive and more enjoyable than others will. The key is to establish and maintain regular contact and keep the channels of communication open.

Getting Acquainted with Your Legislator

Don't wait for problems to arise before you approach your legislator. On the contrary, if you do not know or have never met your legislator, you should attempt to make your first meeting a friendly, get-acquainted occasion. You can accomplish this easily by attending a town meeting that your legislator might hold, introducing yourself as a constituent and Assessor who wants to be more politically active. Better yet, you should contact the legislator's district office and schedule a personal meeting when he or she is meeting with constituents.

Take advantage of other opportunities to meet and become better acquainted with your legislator. Any public or official function in which you are involved – a building or public project dedication, a ground-breaking for a new project, an open house, or a civic or charitable award ceremony – is a legitimate opportunity to invite your legislator.

Opportunities also may develop through meetings of your local or state business and professional associations, charitable organizations, or political parties. You also might create opportunities to meet your legislator by inviting him or her and selected staff to visit our office and meet with your colleagues. The contact initiated at such meetings can evolve quickly into relationships that lend themselves to discussion of interests concerning accounting and the profession.

Ideas for Maintaining a Constituent Relationship

Keep in mind that your goal is to develop ongoing personal relationships with your legislators in order to facilitate communications on legislation concerning assessing, taxes and professional issues. Once you have become acquainted with your legislators, you will find the following activities helpful for maintaining good relationships.

- Stay informed about the legislator's activities and the votes he or she casts on issues of concern to the profession.
- Let the legislator know when you are pleased or displeased with a vote or expressed opinions on an issue of special concern to you and the profession.
- Visit the legislator's office and get to know the staff both in Boston and the district, specifically the administrative assistant, legislative assistant, and the personal appointments secretary. Talk to them succinctly about key issues, the political scene, or subjects of common interest.
- Invite your legislator to speak at a meeting of a local business or civic group in your community.
- Ask to have your name added to the mailing list of the legislator's newsletter.
- Send your legislator literature highlighting references to the profession.
- Invite your legislator and selected staff to visit our office and meet with your colleagues.
- Respond to the Action Alerts occasionally issued by MAAO Legislative Committee by communicating with your legislator on a specific topic.
- Attend and participate in your legislator's "town meetings" in the district.
- Respond to your legislator's questionnaires about issues.
- Meet with the key staff aides from your legislator's Boston or district office who handle assessing and tax issues.
- Get involved in local projects undertaken by your legislator.
- Attend political functions and fundraisers in the district. At each function, introduce your legislator to your friends and colleagues.
- Get involved personally in your legislator's election campaign, if he or she is the candidate of your choice.
- Make a personal contribution to the candidate's campaign.
- Host a fundraiser in your home for the candidate and invite your friends and colleagues to attend.
- Host a "meet and greet" or reception in your home for the candidate and invite your friends and colleagues to attend.

When your legislator or his or her staff begins to ask advice from you on legislative matters relating to the interest of the profession, you'll know you have built a productive constituent relationship.