



# BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH LEADERS & DECISION-MAKERS

#WCAProjectEngage – Empowering the Leaders of Tomorrow

## Outreach

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Building relationships with decision-makers at the local, state, and federal level is essential to move change forward. **Decision-makers** are people who directly impact your cause through their decision-making abilities. They exist at various levels of government.

<u>Local Decision-makers</u> made decisions closest to your community	School Board; Town Mayor, County Executive
<u>State Decision-makers</u> represent your cause at the state level	Lieutenant Governor; State Senators; State Legislators
<u>Federal Decision-makers</u> make decisions on a national scale	The President; Vice President; Speaker of the House; House Representative; Congressional Senator

Once you decide who you wish to build a relationship with, make a **first connection** in one of the following three ways:

- 1) Reach out via phone, online or email
- 2) Have a friend or colleague who knows the decision-maker introduce you
- 3) Go to an event the leader will attend to speak with them

Sometimes members of the decision-maker's staff will be available on their behalf. Reaching out to them can be just as important and productive as connecting with the influencer themselves, as they are usually the person's most trusted allies.

## Strategy

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- Figure out what value and perspective you can bring to the relationship.
- Explore how exactly the leader can help in their role or scope of influence.
  - Be as specific and measurable as possible and use data, personal experience, and reliable research to back up your efforts.
  - E.g. We are hoping that you would be able to help our group submit our written proposal and help us increase the funding for and number of family-focused events in our community by the end of the year.
- Recruit friends, family, or other community members to get involved and decide roles they can play—more people shows strength to decision-makers.
- Know the issues, bills, and policies that they support and which they oppose.
  - Try to maintain objectivity and thoroughly understand the topic.

## Messaging Fundamentals

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Research how communities with similar problems approach advocating for change. After this, draft your own message to share with decision-makers and other advocates.

Next, outline three clear, catchy, and consistent messages that you aim to spread. To be more persuasive:

- Be Compelling: Share your background and experience to connect people to your own thoughts and feelings
- Be Specific: Include data and evidence to support your stances and recommendations
- Be Actionable: Give people activities, such as personal reflections or group conversations

## Promote Your Messages

Prepare to explain your message and approach both in person and digitally.

In Person:

- Attend in-person events relevant to your cause, such as coalition meetings, rallies, or information sessions.
- Create printed materials, such as fact sheets, which summarize your approach and reasoning.

Online:

- Show a public presence on platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. Make your own posts, but also foster community by sharing other organization's posts.
- Create hashtags to group your cause.
- Join Facebook groups or Discord chat rooms which foster engagement on the issue.

## Connecting with Decision-Makers: Key Rules to Follow

Building a relationship always starts with a conversation. The **best way to make a lasting impression is to meet in person**, share what you are interested in or concerned about, and assure the decision maker that you will follow up. You do not have to have all of the answers when you meet— leave opportunity for more discussions in the future. Remember this guide before, during, and after meeting in person.

Before	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Make a first connection via email, phone, or in person. Following this, schedule an in-person meeting.</li><li>• Create a meeting agenda with your main talking point. Make sure these points include both personal experience and facts.</li><li>• Establish a goal this meeting will achieve.</li></ul>
During	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Make eye contact, shake their hands, and politely greet them with their appropriate title.</li><li>• Introduce yourself and the community you are representing.</li><li>• Be enthusiastic! Learn by asking questions, and keep talking short and concise. Aim for 30% talking and 70% active listening.</li><li>• By the end of the meeting, come to an agreement with the decision maker about the topic and clear next steps</li></ul>
After	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Say thank you after the meeting by sending an email or card. Express your intention to meet again if necessary.</li><li>• Keep the conversation going, either by attending events where the Decision-maker will be, or sharing more information with them when necessary.</li></ul>