

**ABATE OF ARIZONA GUIDE: EFFECTIVELY
REACHING YOUR ELECTED OFFICIALS**

ABATE OF ARIZONA, INC.



www.abateofaz.org

FORWARD

In the Gettysburg Address, President Lincoln described our democracy as a “government of the people, by the people,” but what does that mean? In a day and age when people are growing ever more cynical and distrustful of our elected officials, it is imperative that we get back to understanding what government is, what it is not and how we, as everyday citizens can make government work.

A 2014 study by the Annenberg Public Policy Center found that an alarmingly number of Americans knew very little about government. Many Americans could not name the branches of government nor did they even know who their representative in Congress was. I am sure that number is even worse when it comes to knowing your local elected officials. As an advocate for motorcycle rights and freedoms, I am still shocked at the lack of engagement of citizens on issues that directly affect their everyday lives. We still have lots of family, friends, and neighbors who do not exercise their right to vote but even when people vote, they fail to engage their elected officials once they get in office.

Education is the key to keeping citizens engaged and getting us back to that democracy Abraham Lincoln was talking about, and this guide is designed to help you with that. The ABATE of Arizona Guide to Effectively Reaching Your Elected Official is a one of a kind guide to help you understand how to engage with your elected officials. This Guide will teach you practical ways to advocate for what you want and to build meaningful ways to stay engaged.

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INTRODUCTION

ABATE of Arizona is passionate about making it easier for you to get involved in local government. By being a member of ABATE of Arizona, we hope it's now easier for you to find out when your city or county is talking about something important so that you can take action.

We wanted to see if we could answer the question:

“How can an average voter be most effective working with their elected officials around an issue?”

We then put together this guide, so that you can be as efficient as possible. As you refer to these guidelines, we'd love to hear your experiences, so we can continue to improve our guidebook for future citizens.

Thank you again.

WHAT DO ELECTED OFFICIALS WANT?

If you're politically active, you've often probably tried to contact your Senator and other representatives at the national or state level. The initial flush of excitement at your first letter or email response quickly fades as your letters and efforts don't seem to have any effect. It can be frustrating and often cause enthusiastic citizens to give up.

Of course, the problem for these elected officials isn't necessarily that they don't care to hear from you, it's just there are so many of us to hear from. The average member of the House of Representatives has over 600,000 constituents. If an upcoming vote mobilizes one-half of one percent of us, that's 3,000 positions to read through and evaluate. The chance is remote that "my" call or letter, no matter how persuasive and well-reasoned, will get a solid reading and consideration.

If you take the total population of Arizona and divide it between the nine U.S. Representatives, it averages 728,000 per Representative. Unless you reside in the largest of cities, that's refreshingly not the case for most of us locally. Even Phoenix has a relatively reasonable ratio of 72,000:1 and most municipalities have a ratio between 5,000 to 20,000 residents per representative. In the same scenario as above, your councilperson is only hearing from 25-100 residents; you're not just part of a wall of noise, you're a singular voice, and one more likely to be heard and considered.

Recently, City and County council members from across the United States were surveyed and on average they stated that they take notice of an issue when just over 500 people sign a petition or if as few as 22 people set up a meeting with them at their office!

So great, you can be effective at this level, but what do they want to know? In here, we outline just what an elected official wants to hear when you communicate with them and how it differs based on how you're communicating. We hope you can make use of this as a workbook, leveraging the various sheets to be your most effective.

CALLING YOUR LOCAL ELECTED OFFICIALS

Preparation

- ✓ Research your topic if you wish to discuss it during the phone call.
- ✓ Are your comments short and to the point?
- ✓ Do you have a relevant personal story to share during the call?
- ✓ Do you have a specific action you want your elected official to take?
- ✓ Did you leave your contact information and ask for a response to your comments?
- ✓ Respect your elected official's time. Unless it's a scheduled call, can you keep what you want to say down to five minutes?

Don't Be Rude, or Threatening

You've probably heard one of your neighbors say things about elected officials like "I pay your salary," or "you work for me," or even "I'll remember this at election time." While these may resonate with citizens, and on the tips of tongues of many, this is just going to rub the elected official the wrong way, and not put you in a position to move forward. This holds true for all lines of communication, not just phone calls.

TIP: Call your elected official – but not just that you are against it but “why” you are against it. Is there anything that can be done to change/modify the “something” that would make it more acceptable.

CALLING YOUR LOCAL ELECTED OFFICIALS TEMPLATE

Hello, my name is: _____

You're my representative for: _____

I'm calling about the upcoming _____ on:

This topic is very important to more than just me because: _____

That's why I'm calling. Will you please: (choose either 1, 2, or 3 below)

1. Vote _____ at the meeting on _____

2. Will you _____ that: _____

3. Meet with me to discuss the matter further?

SPEAKING AT A PUBLIC MEETING

Similar to pre-arranged meetings, voicing your opinion directly to your city/county/school board members can be a very effective way to get your message out. Unlike a meeting, these are typically very limited opportunities and may take several hours to get to YOUR turn. Practice aloud prior. If you're not comfortable speaking in front of crowds, record yourself. Watch your body language, and the tempo of your voice while playing your recording back. Once you find a style you like, practice it over and over until it's second nature. When you're comfortable, you appear confident. When you are confident people listen. When people listen, you have your opportunity to influence.

Checklist

- ✓ Are your comments focused on a specific issue or topic that will be covered during the public meeting?
- ✓ Did you practice your comments a few times in front of other people?
- ✓ Do your comments fit within 1-3 minutes, or the set time-period provided by your local government?
- ✓ Did you research your issue and collect information from reliable sources?
- ✓ Did you plan to thank the officials for listening to you at the end of your comment period?

TIP: There are unlimited opportunities for citizens to speak in public forums. Unfortunately, very few individuals take advantage of such a powerful way to share their views. Let's change that!

LETTER OR E-MAIL

The effectiveness of your letter or email will depend on how well you can communicate your issues or concerns.

Before you submit your written communication, be sure to have someone else proof read it, along with asking questions once they're done, such as "Does this make sense?" and "Are you able to fully understand what my letter is requesting of my representative?"

Checklist

- ✓ Is your letter focused upon one specific subject or issue area?
- ✓ Did you include any personal stories you may have regarding the issue at hand?
- ✓ Is your letter no more than 2 pages?
- ✓ Did you provide your elected official with a direct course of action or suggested solution to your problem?
- ✓ Is your letter respectful in tone?
- ✓ Did you provide your contact information and request that the elected official send you a response?

TIP: The real questions are, "What do you understand about the issue?" and "Why do you have the opinion you have?" These two questions allow your elected official to understand that the person giving input actually understands the meaning of the issue. It allows for interactive questions and answers to see if the elected official actually understood them correctly

IN-PERSON MEETING

While writing a letter or calling on your representative may be less intrusive for you and them, there is no greater power than sitting eye-to-eye with someone and allowing your body language to accentuate your auditory message. Seeing someone passionate about their cause, or position is far more likely to become memorable.

Checklist

- ✓ Decide who will attend the meeting.
 - ✓ Will it be just you or will you be with a group
 - ✓ Decide who will be speaking
 - ✓ Determine when that person will speak
 - ✓ Know what will be said

- ✓ Are your talking points focused upon the topic for which you scheduled the meeting?

- ✓ Do you have a relevant personal story prepared?

- ✓ Are your talking points short and to the point?

- ✓ Do you have a specific course of action you wish your elected official to take?

- ✓ Did you leave time for your elected official to ask questions?

TIP: As many facts as possible... how many people share your views... sense of urgency or emergency

PETITION

A way to show support for your cause, and similar sentiment among your neighbors, friends, and other supporters, is to show your local elected officials just how many individuals feel the same way you do. To do so, a petition gives names to numbers. This is a substantial opportunity to let your representatives see, without ambiguity, numbers of individuals that feel a certain way, and lend power to your passion – showing you and the signers of that petition mean business, and want their voices heard.

Checklist

- ✓ First line of petition should be the Goal of your petition in one sentence
- ✓ Keep the signing statement concise (Think Tweet length, if possible)
- ✓ Provide 1-2 supporting paragraphs as supporting material to include:
 - ✓ Description(s) of relevant circumstances
 - ✓ What you want to achieve or your desired action to be taken by your elected officials
 - ✓ Evidence and support for your goal(s)
- ✓ If this is a legally binding petition Make sure the signing sheet contains all information needed, such as address
- ✓ Know how many signatures are needed ahead of time
 - ✓ If additional information, such as phone numbers or voter registration information is required, add these columns into your table.
- ✓ Create a ‘Signing sheet’ with the signing statement and place for signatures

TIP: Don’t sign a form petition. Do your own.

This workbook is provided free of charge to all by the generous contributions of those who support ABATE of Arizona and the Arizona Motorcycle Voters Project.

To learn more about you can be involved, go to www.abateofaz.org or www.azmvp.org.