

How to Work With Legislators



Making sure legislators and other policy makers are informed and educated about soil and water conservation districts (SWCDs) is extremely important for us at the local and state level. Each **SWCD supervisor** and **staff person CAN** and **SHOULD** play a role in this outreach. Here are a few helpful tips for working with your legislators.

1. Personal Contact – *Personal meetings will not be forgotten!*

The best time for personal contact with your local legislator is when he or she is home in the local district. Your opportunity for meaningful conversations diminishes during the busy legislative session. Once they come to Indianapolis, they lose control over their schedules. However, if you come to Indianapolis to meet with them, make sure you have an appointment; otherwise you may not be able to visit with them.

When meeting with them, be sure to address them appropriately and with respect. Resist attempts at humor. And do not threaten them. Name the issue; identify your concerns and suggested actions. Know what you want from the legislator and ask them! Remember to be concise and efficient with your time.

Try to keep fact sheets to one page; visuals such as maps are always good! Always send a thank you note, address any questions they had and offer future assistance.

2. Letters – *Letters are best, email is often ignored!*

Well written letters are invaluable and quick. Most legislators read mail from their constituents first, so be sure to identify yourself. To be most effective, letters should be brief and neat, one page only and typed. Keep your letter to one topic and simply your point. Outline your concerns and suggested actions. Explain to them why they should care and how it will impact their district. Offer to be of further assistance and to provide additional information if needed.

Do not send postcards or form letters.

Remember a few letters on a single subject from constituents to a legislator makes an impact. It is the most important grassroots tool if you do not have a personal relationship with a legislator.

3. Phone Calls – *You do not have to be an expert, you just have to care!*

Phone calls are effective during the height of the legislative session before an important committee or floor vote. Sometimes when you call you will simply speak to a legislative assistant who will be tallying the number of calls on an issue.

You may or may not get a return phone call, but be prepared; tell them why you want them to vote for or against an issue.

4. Indiana State Legislature Home Page - <https://iga.in.gov/>

Here you are linked to the House and Senate Home Pages and everything you need to know during a legislative session. You can find your legislator, check on legislation and bill status, get House and Senate committee and floor schedules, and even view live committee and floor action when in session.

Bookmark this site as a great way to stay tuned in during the legislative session.

Good luck and thank you for your efforts!