

# Building Relationships with Elected Officials

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September 2003

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## SUMMARY

The following strategic approach can be used when dealing with elected officials. To ensure effective lobbying, it is important that active citizen architects are aware of legislative protocols.

## MOVE INTO THE FOREFRONT

Building strong relationships with elected officials is vital if the voice of the profession is to be heard at all levels of government. When legislative committee staff or a legislator wants to know something about public buildings, urban planning, or earthquake mitigation, whom do they call? Many state AIA components have discovered that their influence with legislators and administrative agencies increases when they consistently provide reliable background information about key issues. With sufficient time and resources, an AIA component can establish itself as a preeminent source of information and expertise about the built environment and the building design and construction industry.

Legislators may not always agree with your position on certain issues, but they are always interested in listening to what professionals residing or working in their districts—constituents—have to say.

Maintaining open lines of communication and a strategic legislative focus can enhance the visibility of a local AIA component in the community and propel the component and its members into the forefront of important design and business issues.

## DEVELOP YOUR VOICE

There are several ways in which AIA components and individual AIA members can make their voices heard and communicate their expertise to elected officials:

- Personal visits
- Organized group visits
- Government Affairs Days
- Fund-raisers
- Appreciation events

- Campaign support and in-kind contributions

## BE PREPARED

Design events, communications, and activities so that AIA members convey to elected officials the positive impact of architecture on the community. Here are some specific pointers:

- Always make an appointment. Don't just show up.
- Target the elected officials who represent your district.
- Brief AIA members thoroughly in advance. Be sure they know the AIA's positions and their justifications.
- Focus on specific issues.
- Prepare a one-page fact sheet that AIA members can leave with the elected official or staff member.
- Be polite, respectful, and nonthreatening.
- If a group plans to visit, determine in advance who will be the primary spokesperson.

## FOLLOW UP

Visits to elected officials should be the beginning of an on-going dialogue. Having established the relationship, take additional steps to keep a dialogue going:

- All visits should be followed by letters of appreciation
- Fulfill any promises made to provide additional information
- Call appropriate staff members to reinforce key messages
- Invite the elected official to speak before your local AIA component
- Invite legislators to public architectural events in their district, such as Architecture Day celebrations, AIA component design awards

programs, children's design contests, and ribbon-cuttings (especially for public buildings).

### **POWER IN NUMBERS**

AIA members should always be encouraged to assert their political views, but they should also be made aware of the importance of banding together to communicate their common interests as architects and professionals concerned about the quality of the built environment.

### **A CAUTIONARY NOTE**

Whenever you undertake political activities related to your business, exercise care to comply with applicable laws that govern, among other things, monetary campaign contributions, in-kind campaign contributions, lobbying, and other political activities. If in doubt, seek the advice of an attorney who is familiar with the requirements and restrictions of applicable state and federal laws.

### **ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTOR**

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### **RESOURCES**

#### **More Best Practices**

The following AIA Best Practices provide additional information related to this topic:

- 21.03.01 Successful PAC Fundraising
- 21.03.02 Regulatory Reform: Reshaping the Florida Board of Architecture
- 21.03.03 Government Affairs Day: Advancing Vital Interests Person-to-Person

#### **For More Information on This Topic**

See also "The Architect in the Political Process" by William M. Polk, *The Architect's Handbook of Professional Practice*, 13th edition, Chapter 7, page 175. *The Handbook* can be ordered from the AIA Bookstore by calling 800-242-3837 (option 4) or by sending an email to [bookstore@aia.org](mailto:bookstore@aia.org).



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### **Key Terms**

- Leadership
- Issues
- Political issues
- Legislative process
- AIA state components