

# American Association of Museums

ADVOCACY FOR MUSEUMS

## ***A Few Final Thoughts About Communicating with Legislators...***

- More legislative advocacy days and visits with legislators take place from **mid-February through mid-April** than during most of the rest of the year combined and the average meeting with an elected official or staff member is only **7 minutes** long.
- Then and throughout the year advocates should be prepared to **have a coordinated message to share within 5-10 minutes**. Go with the flow if meeting locations or the staff person handling the meeting with you or your group changes at the last minute.
- No matter how a meeting goes, **never publicly (via the Internet, for example) distribute a report with personally negative comments about an elected official** or staff member or make direct contact information for a staff member widely available. These practices will not allow you to build a relationship with an office or the future opportunities to make your case and educate the member and staff.
- **You are busy and so are your elected officials**. Follow-up is always good, but once you have communicated with an office give them time (a week rather than just a business day, for example) to develop a thoughtful response.

*(Adapted from "Government by the People: How to Communicate with Congress" by Stephanie Vance)*

## **Key Lessons from the Congressional Management Foundation's 2005 Report** *Communicating with Congress: How Capitol Hill is Coping with the Surge in Citizen Advocacy*

**Quality is more persuasive than quantity.** Thoughtful, personalized constituent messages generally have more influence than a large number of identical form messages. Grassroots campaigns should consider placing greater emphasis on generating messages of higher quality and reducing form communications.

**The organization behind a grassroots campaign matters.** Grassroots organizations should consider identifying the source of each campaign.

**Grassroots organizations should develop a better understanding of Congress.** The quality and impact of constituent communications would increase if organizations generating mass mail campaigns better understood Congress and the legislative process and adapted their efforts to the way congressional offices operate.

**There is a difference between being noticed and having an impact.** Bad grassroots practices may get noticed on Capitol Hill, but they tend not to be effective in influencing the opinions of Members of Congress, and sometimes damage the relationship between congressional offices and grassroots organizations.

Sound grassroots practices are a good thing to keep in mind that when you are advocating for your museum with your elected officials. Being thoughtful and transparent with your elected officials and your community will only help you make the case for your museum in a positive and effective manner. Visit <http://www.cmfweb.org/cwcreport1.asp> for an index of report summaries and additional detailed report findings.