



# NVFC Guide to Grassroots Activism & the Emergency Services

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## **Introduction: The How-To's and Tricks of the Trade**

This short manual gives National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC) members all the basics needed to play an active and effective role in our aggressive effort to educate members of Congress on fire and emergency medical services issues. Why? Because your department needs your action, your state association needs your leadership, and the volunteer fire and emergency medical services need your involvement now more than ever.

This guide will arm you with many insider tools used by professional lobbyists and the knowledge to use them. In a nutshell, what you'll be doing is communicating – something you do every day in your professional life. Becoming a successful communicator on the legislative front is largely a matter of learning about new audiences – legislators and their staffs – and new environments – the halls of Congress and state capitals.

Like other large institutions or industries, the U.S. Congress and state legislators have their own rules and ways of working. You will have to learn a little about those accepted methods and approaches to develop and maintain the kind of relationships you need to establish with lawmakers and their key staff members. That's what this manual is all about. It will get you started on the way to mastering some of the necessary how-to's and trick of the trade of grassroots lobbying.

So, read the manual one chapter at a time or straight through, whatever suits your style of learning a new subject. If you think something has been left out or not made clear, we welcome your comments and suggestions for improvement. These can be addressed to [nvfc@nvfcoffice.org](mailto:nvfc@nvfcoffice.org) or (888) ASK-NVFC.

### **"All Politics is Local"**

Thomas "Tip" O'Neill, one of the most famous Speakers in the U.S. House of Representatives, used this phrase to emphasize the fundamental importance of grassroots opinion in the political arena. It just makes sense. Whether in the U.S. Congress or your state legislature, every legislator has to stand for election and re-election.

The politicians with the most public support at the local level get themselves into office and stay there. It is a great oversimplification, but no elected official ever forgets this fact. That's why grassroots is important. When you step forward as a spokesperson of the volunteer fire and

emergency services, national and local politicians from your state will listen and, in most cases, appreciate the expertise you provide.

### **What Will I Have to Do?**

This manual is designed to explain to NVFC members the leadership role you can play in our grassroots effort. In short, you will be communicating by e-mail, letter, telephone, and in person with elected policymakers and their key staff members. You'll learn not only *what* you can do, but also *how to do it effectively*. Legislators, who get a national perspective from NVFC staff in Washington and a regional perspective from your state associations, will hear how to best address the local issues and concerns of the fire and emergency medical services from you. Because "all politics is local," a lot is riding on your participation at the grassroots level.

## Chapter 1: The Tools of Effective Communication

### Objective:

Learn how to communicate with elected and appointed officials in writing, through e-mail, by phone, and in person, which is essential to any grassroots campaign.

### Major Points:

1. Always make sure your communication is simple, concise, and to the point.
2. Always answer more questions than you raise.
3. Always address the "5 W's" (who?, what?, where?, when?, and why?)
4. Always work to build consensus.
5. Personal visits always establish the strongest, most lasting bond.
6. The NVFC staff and your state association partners can help you!

### Consider These Questions:

- Why are the most effective communicators short and to the point?
- Why are "thank you" letters and other follow-up communications so important?
- How can the NVFC and your state association help volunteer firefighters and EMS personnel and vice versa?

### Tool #1: Letters and Emails

Simple as it is, a well-crafted letter or email is the most commonly used and effective means of communicating with elected officials. Their offices are set up to receive, log, and respond to constituents' letters. (Well-written letters from constituents get noticed; they positively impact the votes of elected officials.) Many, though not all, congressional and state legislator offices use email to communicate with constituents.

#### How to Do It

Sure, anyone can write a letter. However, constructing an effective letter to a lawmaker takes some skill. Your letter should follow a plan. It should not ramble and should usually be limited to one page. It should be to the point. Any broad statements need convincing evidence to support them. It should be polite and should compellingly make your case.

Here are the major ingredients for an effective letter:

**Who:** Include your position and the name of your department. It is beneficial to discuss the number of people in your department and the active role they take in the activities of the community. Remember to use department or personal letterhead.

**Why:** Right up front, clearly indicate the issue that you are writing about and your position on the issue. This is what the legislator's staff look for when they log-in the letter. It is best to limit each letter to one issue or subject.

**What:** Be clear about the issue and what you want the legislator to do about it. Maybe it is as simple as supporting or opposing a certain bill. Be specific in your request; i.e., use the bill number or its title if available.

**Where:** Discuss where the legislation or issue impacts you and your department. Also mention the specific impact on your department's ability to provide quality protection for your community.

**When:** Look to the NVFC or your state association for when the issue is expected to be acted upon, and let the legislator know. If time is critical, say so!

### To Score Points - Stick To the Point

- Be straightforward and clear in your wording. Avoid using firefighter/EMS lingo. (Do you think legislators really know what "PPE" means?)
- Keep it short (one page). Remember everyone is pressed for time.
- Make your primary point up front (i.e., "for" or "against").
- Avoid long, convoluted arguments that keep the reader guessing what your final conclusion may be.
- Use facts to back up your opinions. (Attach supporting materials to your one-page letter.)
- Use your credentials to substantiate your views. Share your expertise without boasting.
- Be tactful and polite – remember that you will usually be asking for something from the reader.
- Word-processed or typed letters are always best, unless you are personally thanking a member of Congress or other elected officials for their assistance. A hand-written note is a nice touch in this special case. If a group of firefighters or EMS personnel are writing

letters, a mix of word-processed and hand-written letters is extremely effective.

## **Tool #2: Visits With Elected Officials**

As in your ordinary business and social life, a personal visit generally has more immediate impact and leaves a more lasting impression than a letter. Every member of Congress has at least one local office in the district they represent, and most have several.

Congressional district offices are staffed with people whose job it is to communicate with constituents like you. There are no barriers to stopping by these local offices and establishing relationships with the Representative's staff. The welcome mat is out! Don't feel put off if you meet with a staff member. They are essential advisors to legislators.

### When the Legislator is Home, You're Invited

Most Representatives and Senators frequently travel to their home districts. Why? To meet with constituents, consult with their district staff, and keep in touch with local issues and voters.

It is all set up for you. Simply call a district office to set up an appointment to meet with your elected representative when they are back in town. Getting an appointment is easier if you have already established a relationship with the district staff. If you are in Washington, D.C., set up an appointment and visit your legislators in their congressional offices. They appreciate you sharing your views with them in Washington.

### Tips for Meeting Legislators

First of all, let the NVFC national office in Washington, D.C., know that you have scheduled a meeting. They can provide you with valuable information about the legislator and his or her position on specific issues or legislation. Oftentimes, your state association can provide the same type of assistance when you are planning to meet a state legislator.

- Call ahead of time for an appointment and tell them what issues you wish to discuss and whom you represent. Ask to talk with the scheduler or to whoever handles fire and emergency service issues.
- Time with legislators is extremely valuable. Have an agenda so that you don't just "chat" until the clock runs out. Ask staff in advance how much time you will have and plan accordingly.

- Do not be disappointed if you only meet with staff. Staff plays a key role in advising elected officials. Treat a meeting with staff as you would a meeting with any elected official.
- Expect them to say that they will have their staff "look into the issue." That's okay. The NVFC staff will follow up with their staff.
- Volunteer yourself as a source of local expertise on fire and emergency service issues.
- Consider including other volunteer departments or community members in the meeting you schedule to show unity and leadership.
- Stick to FACTS. Do not give way to emotional arguments or unsubstantiated opinions. And NEVER stretch the truth or you risk losing your credibility with the legislator. Give the legislator a one-page paper describing the issue and the solution.
- Be a good listener, even if the legislator disagrees with aspects of our position. Acknowledge where other views have merit, and stress that you want to work more closely wherever possible.
- Leave the meeting open-ended for further discussions – and ALWAYS follow up with a personal "thank you" note.

## Chapter 2: Understanding Legislators

Objective:

To understand the nature of your primary audience and the factors that influence and motivate them in their actions.

Major Points:

1. Many factors influence decision making by legislators.
2. The daily work of Congress and state legislatures are in their committees.
3. Most legislators' activities are budget-driven.
4. Most members of Congress and state legislators are constantly campaigning for re-election.

Consider These Questions:

- Why do legislators pay so much attention to keeping in touch with constituents back home?
- How can the NVFC's grassroots activities help them stay in touch?
- In what ways are politicians reactive and proactive?

### A Legislator's Typical Day

Legislating is a vague term and it does not sum up what a legislator really does most days. First, many people would be amazed at just how busy our elected representatives are. Most politicians' days are broken into ten-minute intervals (except for committee meetings, which can take hours) during which they:

- Shuttle between committee sessions
- Rush to the House or Senate floor to vote or speak on a bill
- Work with other legislators
- Meet with their staff or committee staff
- Meet with constituent groups – from Boy Scouts to the American Legion
- Meet with business, financial, labor leaders and others
- Take briefings from administration and federal agency officials
- Attend morning and evening fundraisers and receptions
- Meet after office hours with staff and lobbyists
- Travel home to their districts on Fridays

- Spend weekends meeting with district office staff and constituents and attending local functions...in time to fly back to Washington

## **Getting a Word in Edgewise**

It is obvious why it is not easy to get a conversation with a member of Congress or a state legislator. Even staffers often have to walk with them through the halls to get a moment of their time. As an active member of the NVFC – a prominent constituent from home – it is somewhat easier. But you should always keep in mind just what a hectic, time-pressured life a legislator leads when you are making contact.

## Committee Membership is Paramount

Members of Congress, as well as state legislators, tend to define themselves by the committees and subcommittees on which they serve. The responsibilities of committee membership take priority, and members tend to focus most of their attention on legislative issues under the jurisdiction of their committees. If your elected officials do not serve on a committee with jurisdiction over fire and emergency service issues, you may have more difficulty getting their attention.

## Be Aware of the Importance of Legislative Staff

Because no single member of Congress can stay on top of all the issues that come before Congress, every member has Legislative Assistants (LA's). LA's are assigned to specific subject areas or committee assignments and become very knowledgeable on current issues. They will study your fact sheets, respond to your letters, arrange your meeting and, most importantly, the LA's generally analyze issues and advise the Congress member of local feelings about the issue before any vote.

## Every Vote Is a Balancing Act

Each vote has political implications. So each vote is taken very seriously. A politician can vote "yea, nay, or present." All politicians will go to great lengths to avoid controversy or a vote that will come back to haunt them at election time.

With that in mind, it is important to consider the political context of every voting situation and try to frame the NVFC position in clear, easy to understand terms with an honest assessment of the issue. In appealing to

a politician for a vote, always try to consider each of the following elements that affect decision making.

**Information:** Politicians often suffer from information overload. Make sure they have all your information and that it is factual, accurate, and clear. The information you provide should always be concise and straightforward and limited to one page.

**Necessity:** Stress the timelines and urgency of the issue, especially for local volunteer firefighters/EMS personnel and the department where they volunteer.

**Fiscal Implications:** Money and budgets always count, usually against us. Work fiscal responsibility and cost savings into your argument wherever possible. However, always humanize the impact of legislation by talking about how it impacts volunteers in your state.

**Politics:** Know whether or not the vote you are asking for will go against the legislator's party line, and whether or what groups are against us. If there are apparent problems, directly address his or her concerns with sound counter arguments and effective counter examples. Never stretch the truth. If you do not know an answer, tell them so and that you can give them one after talking with an NVFC staff member.

**Visibility:** All politicians are open to intense public scrutiny and must be prepared to justify their vote on any issue – not only to their local constituents, but also to the entire nation. Give them the support they need to make that justification.

## Chapter 3: The Congress - Where the Action Is

### Objective:

To appreciate that power in Congress is centralized because of its leadership committee structure, and to understand that power in Congress is also diffused over many members and their staffs outside the leadership structure.

### Major Points:

1. The majority and minority leadership in Congress are the critical players in determining legislative outcomes.
2. Committees are where most legislation takes shape and where most important legislative discussions occur.
3. Congressional staffers are key in the legislative system. Their opinions on legislation are very important.

### Consider These Questions:

- What are the benefits and potential obstacles on "control" in Congress?
- What are the merits and liabilities on the congressional committee system?
- Why is it necessary for non-elected professional staff to play such a central role?

### Who's In Charge?

The majority rules in Congress as in no other institution. It is the primary job of the Speaker of the House and the Senate Majority Leader to see that this always holds true. They set the agenda, they decide which bills will be brought forward, they assign members to committees, and they make rulings and interpret rules during a dispute.

In the minority party, leadership figures play a similar role. And both parties have powerful members called "Whips" whose job it is to ensure the members of their respective political parties vote the same way on critical issues.

Despite the power and privilege of the leadership, they can't always control how each individual member votes on specific issue. There are many points of view across the wide spectrum of any political party. Personal

views have a bearing, and local concerns sometimes take precedence over the party line.

## **Line Up the Vote**

Just knowing the political process and understanding all the considerations that can affect how a legislator votes makes you a player in the game. And nearly everything said here about the U.S. Congress also applies with activities in state legislatures across the country. To be an effective player at the national or state level, follow these basic guidelines:

- When you ask a legislator for support, keep in mind all the pressure they are under.
- Factor in the legislator's party line and whether you are asking him or her to go against it.
- Understand that legislation must pass both the House and Senate in the same form, and that a presidential veto can occur even if you win these votes.
- If you know of concerns the other side will have, address them and make sure your case is stronger.
- Always assume the legislator you are lobbying may have to accept a compromise somewhere along the line. Compromise is what makes democracy work.
- Encourage the legislator to make sure that the fire and emergency service's position is treated fairly.

## **Committee Staff Are the Gatekeepers**

Just like in a personal congressional office, much of the work in committees is done by the staff. This is especially true for committees where the issues are highly complex and specialized staff expertise is vital.

Committee staff is the conduit through which information flows to the chairs and committee members. There is majority and minority staff on each committee. All committee chairs are of the majority party and generally loyal to the leadership and party agenda.

If the opportunity arises for you to spend time in Washington, D.C., here are some guidelines for dealing with congressional committees:

- Try to build relationships with key committee staff. You can do this by becoming the resource they need for unbiased, factual information.

- Realize that committee chairs have control over what bills are heard by their committee.
- Committee chairs nearly always listen to their senior committee staff advisors.
- It is generally not wise to try to go "over the heads" of senior committee staff. They are integral participants in the legislative process.

Remember, never ignore either committee or personal staff. They are usually the specialists, allowing their bosses to be generalists.

## Chapter 4: How to...

### How to...

### **PUT A LOCAL FACE ON NATIONAL ISSUES**

#### You Have a Great Story to Tell

You are an integral part of your community because you are a first responder to all emergencies, you protect the lives of the people in your community, and you volunteer your time.

As a local firefighter or EMT whose efforts generate enormous benefits for your community, people will appreciate your participation in community activities. Make the most of it! These activities can not only enhance your ability to provide quality protection, but also help establish in the public mind the linkage between the volunteer emergency services and the safety and well-being of the community.

#### Community Involvement Is the First Step

Just by getting to know elected officials in the course of community, county, statewide, and regional events, you make it less likely that they will target the fire and emergency medical services with burdensome legislation. Without a "human face" in mind, legislators are more apt to take what the fire and emergency medical services do for granted and may see them as easy targets.

How do you accomplish this personal contact? Just invest one or two more hours a month in some form of community participation. This will gain recognition for you and the volunteer fire and emergency services. It will put that all-important "human face" on issues of vital importance to your department and other volunteers in your area.

#### You're The Expert

Elected officials need to know what you know. National and state legislators and other elected officials are just people. You can approach them with confidence. Their job is to listen to and represent their constituents. And constituents like you have valuable expert insight to offer.

Whenever you have access to a legislator, talk positively about the many ways your department is protecting and contributing to the community.

Feel free to discuss issues you are concerned about as a volunteer firefighter or EMT.

Don't just chat. Talk about the people that you protect. Also, make it a priority to explain the potential positive or negative impact of pending legislation on your department, your community, and all volunteer firefighters and emergency services personnel.

### Checklist of Objectives

1. Get to know your national, state, and local elected officials well enough to see recognition in their eyes.
2. Get to know the staff in your legislator's local district offices.
3. Write to your legislators about issues that affect your department. Also ask for their viewpoints.
4. Invite national and state elected officials to tour your department.
5. Enlist other community leaders to urge support of fire service and EMS issues.
6. Urge other citizen advocates to join with you in promoting fire service and EMS issues.
7. Urge churches, clubs, academic, civic, and consumer groups to discuss issues relating to the protection of the community by volunteer firefighters and emergency medical personnel.
8. Above all, know the facts. Make strong arguments, but it's not a good idea to back a legislator into a corner. Allow him or her to disagree with you.

### **How to...**

### **UNDERSTAND THE POLITICAL PROCESS**

#### The WHY and the HOW

"All politics is local" as House Speaker Tip O'Neill, one of the most experienced politicians of our time, said. Relationships with local decision-makers are critical to the operation of your department and the emergency services as a whole.

Begin by developing a simple list of your national, state, county, and municipal elected officials and community leaders. Representatives, state legislators, and city and county officials vote on matters that affect you.

That is the bottom-line reason for your grassroots involvement. Now that you know the reason, the following sections will tell you how to practice some basic grassroots techniques effectively.

### Learn the Legislative Process

Out of the 20,000 bills introduced in Congress and the hundreds of thousands introduced in state and local legislatures, fewer than 10% are enacted into law. Among the bills that do get passed, many start out with just a small following and little public awareness. Therefore, it's very important to make your views known to your elected representatives as early in the legislative session as possible.

### Aim For Prime Time

When is the prime time to present the NVFC's position on a proposed bill? After one or more legislators introduce a bill, it is referred to one or more congressional committees responsible for the subject addressed by the bill. Usually the congressional committee chairs will refer the bill to a subcommittee, which holds hearings on the measure. This is the prime opportunity to present strong, organized, well-documented testimony on any bill affecting America's fire and emergency services. The NVFC National Office will help you to coordinate this process.

At the state level, this legislative and committee process works in much the same way, and it is the focus of much of the work by each state association affiliated with the NVFC.

### How the Process Works

1. The subcommittee with jurisdiction votes on whether to refer the bill to the full committee for action or to reject it.
2. If the committee votes to pass the bill, it is forwarded to the full House or Senate where the leadership decides whether or not to bring it to a vote.
3. If and when the House or Senate passes a bill, it goes to the other body where the process of referral, debate, and committee and subcommittee hearings starts over.
4. If both the House and Senate pass similar, but not identical, bills, a joint Conference Committee will be appointed to work out a compromise, which is then sent to each body for a final vote.

5. If approved by both bodies, the bill goes to the President (or governor in the case of state legislation) who may sign it into law or veto it.

This is a simplified scenario, and most proposed legislation goes around many more twists and turns – with changes and compromises at every turn. The important thing is that at every stop of this long and involved process, NVFC members have the opportunity to make their views known.

### **How to... REALLY MAKE A DIFFERENCE**

Personal relationships are the key to business success. The same is true in politics. So, get to know the national and state officials who represent you. Constituents who call, write, appear in person at public events, and visit their legislators will get attention.

- Make sure their local office phone numbers are in your Rolodex, computer, or personal phone book.
- Put reminders on your business calendar to keep in contact with them.
- Look at emergency service issues before legislators, and share your knowledge and expertise with them via letter or phone call.
- Ask for their positions on any issue of importance to your department.
- Follow up any phone call with a letter and ask for a written reply.

### Your Views Have Clout

Elected officials listen to constituents. Remember: It is you, not them, who is the expert on the volunteer fire and emergency services. Legislators look to local knowledge before having to vote on complex issues dealing with firefighters and EMS personnel. Thus, legislators expect to hear from you on issues of importance to your department.

Prepare for your political calls just as you would for a business call:

1. Educate yourself thoroughly on the issues.
2. Develop a message and make a case for each issue.
3. Condense these arguments into two or three powerful selling points.
4. Practice your delivery until you feel comfortable and confident in your presentation.

## **How to...**

### **ENLIST THE HELP OF THE NVFC AND YOUR STATE ASSOCIATION**

To help you get your grassroots initiative going, you should look to the NVFC National Office in Washington or your state association for:

- Background material on legislative issues.
- Background on your legislators and their support for our issues.
- Assistance in preparing to meet with your legislators.
- Assistance in dealing with the press.

Remember to encourage others to sign up for the NVFC's Legislative Update e-mail service.

Call us at (202) 887-5700 or (888) ASK-NVFC (275-6832). Or visit our web site at: [www.nvfc.org](http://www.nvfc.org)

## **How to...**

### **WORK WITH DISTRICT OFFICE STAFF**

A major key to being a successful legislative advocate is building relationships with staff in an elected official's local office. Specific staff members in each office are responsible for legislative issues that have a local impact. Discover who they are – and get to know them.

- Get acquainted with the district office staff of your Senators, Representatives, and state legislators.
- Stop by and see the staff to offer your personal assistance and to provide background information on the volunteer fire and emergency services.
- Offer to be a referral source for people who call their legislator asking for help on emergency service issues.
- Always leave your business card with staff no matter how many times you visit.
- Make certain the district office staff has information about your department and offer them a tour.
- Once you have made contact among the staff, send them copies of your department newsletters and other publications.
- Invite interested staff members to special events.

All this will make you a familiar face and name around your elected lawmaker's local base of operations. When local experts are sought, you will be a natural choice.

## **How to...**

### **WRITE LETTERS TO THE EDITOR**

Letters to the editor are widely read in local and regional newspapers and magazines. Many elected officials assign a staff person the job of reading all letters in any newspaper that circulates in their home district so as to keep a finger on the public pulse.

Any issue facing the volunteer fire service is a potential topic for a letter to the editor. Your letter does NOT have to be long or written in high-blown oratorical language. It's usually best to present your position in a simple, positive, and rational way. Avoid personalities and emotions. Be straightforward and sincere. Most of all, be concise – one page maximum.

Try it. Write a letter on a subject that you feel comfortable with. Keep in mind the NVFC staff can assist you. Mail it to the editor of your local paper. See how good you feel when you see it in print!

ALWAYS be sure to send clippings of any published letters to the editor on the fire and emergency services to the NVFC National Office. Every letter helps build our case. We can reprint letters to the editor and use them as an information tool.

## **How to...**

### **MAKE GRASSROOTS INITIATIVES PAY OFF**

#### A Final Word

As you consider how much time and effort to invest in public affairs activities, consider what is at stake: your department, your fellow volunteers, your future.

National and state legislators have immense power over the future of volunteer firefighters and EMS personnel. A stroke of a pen, a behind-the-scenes agreement on Capitol Hill, or a committee room in your state legislature can impact the emergency services any day of the week.

#### Know the Rules of the Game and Protect Your Interests

First, educate yourself about the political process and the part you can play in it locally. Then educate your fellow firefighters or EMS personnel. There is strength in numbers, especially when the goal is to win the attention of

elected officials who are always counting votes and looking to their next election campaign.

Here is a brief review of your goals:

- Get involved.
- Encourage other volunteers to get involved.
- Create opportunities to tell your story.
- Become recognized in your community.
- Gain the positive attention of elected officials.
- Establish and develop personal contacts.
- Win access to national and state elected officials.
- Learn the political game – and become a skilled player!

### The Price of Inaction is High

When local voices are not raised because everyone is expecting "someone else" to act, we lose the initiative. The kinds of broad-based NATIONAL AND STATE initiatives, which the volunteer firefighter and EMT needs to meet, lose their momentum without LOCAL initiative.

### Now, Let's Get Active!

It is in your interest to take a leadership role. We have issues that the public needs to know...and elected officials need to hear from as many constituents as possible. When you step forward to speak out, you help your own department, as well as volunteers across the nation.

Remember, an individual in a democratic society can make a difference by helping to MAKE IT HAPPEN.

## Chapter 5: Hill Basics

### Hill Basics: Congressional Staff Roles

Each Member of Congress has staff to assist him/her during a term in office. To be most effective in communicating with Congress, it is helpful to know the titles and principal functions of key staff.

#### Commonly Used Titles

Administrative Assistant or Chief of Staff:

The Administrative Assistant reports directly to the member of Congress. He/she usually has overall responsibility for evaluating the political outcome of various legislative proposals and constituent requests. The Administrative Assistant is usually the person in charge of overall office operations, including the assignment of work and the supervision of key staff.

Legislative Director, Senior Legislative Assistant, or Legislative Coordinator:

The Legislative Director is usually the staff person who monitors the legislative schedule and makes recommendations regarding the pros and cons of particular issues. In congressional offices, there are also several Legislative Assistants, and responsibilities are assigned to staff with particular expertise in specific areas. For example, depending on the responsibilities and interests of the congressional member, an office may include a different Legislative Assistant for fire and emergency service issues, environmental matters, taxes, etc.

Press Secretary or Communications Director:

The Press Secretary's responsibility is to build and maintain open and effective lines of communication between the member, his/her constituency, and the general public. The Press Secretary is expected to know the benefits, demands, and special requirements of both print and electronic media, and how to most effectively promote the member's views or position on specific issues.

Appointment Secretary, Personal Secretary, or Scheduler:

The Appointment Secretary is usually responsible for allocating a legislator's time among the many demands that arise from congressional

responsibilities, staff requirements, and constituent requests. The Appointment Secretary may also be responsible for making necessary travel arrangements, arranging speaking dates, visits to the district, etc.

Caseworker:

The Caseworker is the staff member usually assigned to help with constituent requests by preparing replies for the legislator's signature. The Caseworker's responsibilities may also include helping resolve problems constituents present in relation to federal agencies. There are often several Caseworkers in a congressional office.

Other Staff Titles:

Other titles used in a congressional office may include: Executive Assistant, Legislative Correspondent, Executive Secretary, Office Manager, and Receptionist.

### **Hill Basics: Tips On Telephoning Your Representatives**

To find your representative's phone number you may call the U.S. Capitol Switchboard at (202) 224-3121 and ask for your Senator's and/or Representative's office.

Remember that a staff member, not the member of Congress, often takes telephone calls. Ask to speak with the aide who handles the issue to which you wish to comment.

After identifying yourself, tell the aide you would like to leave a brief message, such as: "Please tell Senator/Representative (Name) that I support/oppose (S.\_\_\_\_/H.R.\_\_\_\_)."

You should also state the reasons for your support or opposition to the bill. Ask for your Senator's or Representative's position on the bill. You may also request a written response to your telephone call.

### **Hill Basics: Building Coalitions**

In addition to your own personal political activity, it is sometimes also necessary to build coalitions with other community groups and organizations. The following is a checklist for coalition building.

Step 1: Compile a list of local organizations likely to join forces with the NVFC on a particular issue. An attempt should be made to balance the list

with representatives from varied organizations: religious, civil rights, minority, women's, consumers, public interest, and community service groups.

Step 2: Develop a list of well-known individuals who generally support fire and emergency service issues, i.e. radio-TV personalities, state legislators, lawyers, "good" business leaders, civic and religious leaders, law enforcement groups, etc.

Step 3: Contact these individuals and organizations and ask them to join in endorsing a statement of principles as a first step. A copy of the statement with a cover letter inviting their participation should be mailed and followed up with a phone call.

Step 4: Develop a steering committee of six to 10 reliable people. They should meet and be provided with a list of possible activities for their organizations and the other members of the coalition. The advice of the steering committee should be solicited.

Step 5: Be specific in the kind of action requested of each group. For example, they should be provided with a sample resolution to consider. Once the resolution is passed, the volunteer firefighter or EMT should make sure that it gets sent to the appropriate elected officials and the local news media.

Step 6: Keep in touch with the coalition participants, share information with them, and call and meet with them occasionally. They should be asked to complete specific tasks. For example, each organization should be asked to send 50 letters to their Representatives and Senators, generate 25 telephone calls, represent the coalition on radio programs, write letters to the editors, etc.

Step 7: Issue news releases periodically about the activities and work of the coalition to the local newspapers, radio, and TV stations.

Step 8: Notify the NVFC National Office of the coalition's activities and planned events. Assistance is available from the NVFC. Send copies of correspondence to Congress to the NVFC's National Office.

Besides building long-term coalitions, it is also possible to develop short-term coalitions that revolve around a single issue.