

The Grassroots Manual



The Basics on
**Political Involvement for the
Small Business Owner**

“ “ Lawmakers gain a better understanding of the consequences created by the legislation they enact when they hear directly from job creators like NFIB members. **” ”**

- Brad Close, NFIB Vice President, Federal Public Policy

Decisions made in Congress, state legislatures and regulatory agencies can determine the future success of your business just as much as your own decisions can--sometimes even more. As an experienced representative of your business, you are the most qualified to advise these policy makers on issues that affect your bottom line.

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1 Grassroots Basics

NFIB's lobbying efforts are strongest when supported by the real voices of small business owners. There's never been a more important time—or more opportunities—for you to get involved. Whether you want to take an action without leaving your desk or appear before a Congressional committee on Capitol Hill, NFIB encourages you to take action on behalf of small business.

NFIB Member Advocates: Get Involved and Tell Your Story

- Build relationships with your legislators and contact them about an issue that concerns you
- Speak out to the media; write an op-ed or letter to the editor in your local newspaper
- Testify before Congress
- Engage with lawmakers and fellow NFIB advocates using social media platforms and other online tools

Building a Relationship with your Lawmaker

- Don't wait for a problem to arise to reach out to your lawmaker; take the time to introduce yourself and get acquainted
- Attend a town hall meeting and introduce yourself as a local constituent and business owner
- Contact the lawmaker's state or district office and schedule a personal meeting with him/her or their staff
- Other official functions (public project dedications, award ceremonies) are also a great opportunity for face time
- Take advantage of event opportunities offered by NFIB or other organizations
- Host a meet and greet at your business; invite your lawmaker to come speak about issues that affect your business and your community

Speaking Out to the Media

- NFIB prepares sample op-eds and letters to the editor that you can customize with details, stories and concerns about your own business
- Lawmakers pay close attention to their local media outlets; if you get their name mentioned in the press, they'll pay attention

Commenting on Regulatory Actions

- The best way to submit comments on regulatory initiative is by visiting www.regulations.gov; there you can search for specific rules and follow the simple instructions to submit comments
- Include specific information about how a proposed rule will affect your business, for example: estimated compliance costs, time it takes to fill out paperwork and additional employees that may need to be hired
- Agencies often hold field hearings, and the public can sign up in advance to participate. If you are interested in a particular rule, you can contact the agency directly to find out if there is a hearing in your area

Getting Involved Politically

- SAFE Trust, NFIB's political action committee (PAC), works to elect pro-small business candidates; your contribution allows NFIB to have a greater impact on the political process
- Educate your employees about how the political process works during a brown-bag lunch
- Volunteer for a campaign; not only will you be actively involved in electing candidates that will be friendly to your causes, but you can also build valuable relationships with the potential lawmaker and their staff
- Run for office! There are more than 25 NFIB members serving in Congress—the perspective of small business owners has never been more vital to the lawmaking process. NFIB has helped elect a number of members of Congress and has valuable tools to offer

Using Social Media Platforms and Online Tools to Engage Your Lawmakers

- Respond to action alerts and send letters to your legislators directly from NFIB's Web site
- Social media channels such as Facebook and Twitter have made it easier than ever to send real-time messages to your lawmakers
- If you take an action on NFIB's grassroots action page, share it on Facebook and ask your friends to do the same
- Many members of Congress have a dedicated staffer to read and sometimes respond to each and every Facebook post or Tweet
- Some legislators even interact with their constituents first hand—for example, Missouri Senator Claire McCaskill reads her @replies on Twitter each evening
- New York Congressman Steve Israel said when he has tweeted about an issue and gotten knowledgeable responses from his constituents, that information was valuable and even had more impact on his office than messages through some other channels

Personal meetings are the best way to get to know and communicate with your lawmaker.

Scheduling a meeting

- NFIB staff can be helpful in arranging a meeting
- Explain who you are, where you are from and your reason for requesting a meeting
- Do not overlook an opportunity to meet with a member of your lawmaker's staff
- If you are meeting with staff, request to meet with the staff member who deals with the issue you want to discuss
- Know your issue well and be familiar with how it affects your business and your interests

During the meeting

- Develop an agenda so that you can approach your meeting with a course of action
- Don't overwhelm your lawmaker with a large group of people. Go alone or bring one or two people if they have something important to add to the discussion
- Concentrate on only one issue, and plan to state your views in no more than 10 minutes
- Lawmakers, especially at the federal level, will likely meet for no more than 20 minutes
- Give the lawmaker a one-page summary of key points about the issue and your position

After the meeting

- Send an email thanking your lawmaker and the appropriate staff for the meeting and re-emphasize the points that were discussed

Corresponding with your lawmaker

- If you are unable to meet with your lawmaker in person, corresponding via letter or email is an excellent way to convey your message
- Be sure to emphasize that you are a constituent
- Make sure your return address is included—street address as well as email address
- State your reason for writing; Include the bill number and title if writing about specific legislation
- Keep your letter at one page or less
- Share personal stories about how specific issues or legislation could affect your business
- Avoid form letters and stereotypes. Letters written in your own words are much more effective
- Your message is much more likely to be received in a timely manner if it's an email

Congress Wants to Hear from You

Bring Your Voice to Capitol Hill

Thanks to the support from NFIB members like you, 25 NFIB members were elected to Congress in the 2010 elections. With the small business voice amplified on Capitol Hill, there are more opportunities than ever for small business owners to serve as witnesses and citizen lobbyists to bring their insights on policy issues and impending regulations directly to Capitol Hill.

Congressional leaders are ready to hear what small business owners like you have to say on pressing economic issues like healthcare, regulatory reform, tax relief and labor policy. There is no better way to convey your stories, triumphs and struggles as a small business owner than testifying before a Congressional committee.

NFIB's lobbying efforts are strongest when supported by the real voices of small business owners.

- NFIB's policy team makes it easy by helping you design your testimony to be readable, concise and persuasive
- We will help you bolster your background on the issue and prepare you for the questions you'll be asked
- If you are invited to testify on behalf of NFIB, our staff handles the behind-the-scenes legwork like arranging your testimony and travel plans, allowing you to take the front role as the "face of small business"

“ [the] most rewarding experience is testifying. You hope you can make a difference for hundreds of thousands of small businesses that could benefit from change in regulation. ”

– NFIB Member Brian Landon
Canton, PA

A meet and greet is an event a business or individual hosts to exchange views with legislators on issues of concern.

Hosting an Event

Hosting a meet and greet provides you with an opportunity to develop relationships and discuss issues with lawmakers face-to-face. This forum is also an excellent way to give elected officials an inside look at how their decisions can affect the day-to-day operation of your business.

Developing relationships early in an individual's term of office through a meet and greet can be extremely helpful in influencing future public policy decisions affecting your company. Since strong personal relationships with policy makers are essential to successful grassroots advocacy, a meet and greet is an effective tool in building long-term relationships.

One-Hour Format is Best

- A meet and greet usually works best when kept to an hour in length. The official can greet the participants and talk informally among them before sitting down to discuss the issues
- Begin the meeting by having the participants introduce themselves, mentioning their affiliations and issues of interest, and then introduce the guest
- Have the guest speak for 10-15 minutes about his or her views on the issues, the upcoming election, etc.
- Be sure to allow time for questions and answers and a dialogue on the issues

Checklist for Conducting a Meet and Greet

- Invite the official by telephone, email or letter. Be sure to explain the nature of the event and the audience. Offer a range of dates to accommodate the official's schedule
- Plan to have the event on-site at your business
- Determine the issues for discussion. Designate individuals to discuss each issue to ensure that all the priority topics are discussed during the meeting
- Send a thank-you note to the guest after the event. Reiterate the points discussed during the meeting
- Stay in touch with the guest after the meet and greet. Offer to lend a small business perspective on issues that were discussed

Connecting with NFIB online allows you to stay up to date on all the issues affecting small business owners.

We all know that small business is the engine that drives our economy. Help your business and thousands of others by serving as the voice of small business on Capitol Hill.

If you have a special interest in getting involved with the issues that Congress will be considering or would like to learn more about any of the opportunities mentioned here, please contact Keeley Mullis, NFIB's Legislative Advocacy Coordinator, at 202-406-4411 or by email at keeley.mullis@nfib.org.

Stay tuned to NFIB.com and other NFIB publications for spotlights of NFIB members who are getting involved and taking action on behalf of small business.

Stay connected with NFIB:

On the Web: www.NFIB.com/grassroots

On Facebook: www.facebook.com/NFIBForce

By email: grassroots@nfib.org