

## TIPS FOR GETTING TO KNOW YOUR POLICYMAKERS

*Week Without Violence is a great time to focus in on educating elected officials about gender-based violence and your association's advocacy.*

### WHO ARE YOUR ELECTED POLICYMAKERS?

- **Make a list of the local, state, and federal legislators you want to influence.** Make sure you cover the entire area that you serve and where your staff and volunteers live; don't just limit yourself to where your YWCA is physically located. Consider asking members of your board if they have any personal or professional relationships with lawmakers and can help connect you to them.

**TIP:** You can find your federal legislators [here](#). Through GovTrack, you can also see their bio, committee assignments, official website, donors, and scores from interest groups on their votes.

- **What Do You Know About Them?** Learn the basics such as:
  - Which committees do they serve on? Prioritize building relationships with lawmakers who serve on key committees.
  - What is the e-mail and contact information for their staff? On a state and local level, prioritize Chiefs of Staff. On a federal level, include key

Washington, D.C. staff aides who handle health and children's issues, local district directors, and schedulers (Note: D.C.-based legislative staff have a high turnover, so set a reminder to confirm the staff on a regular basis such as every six months).

- What are their social media channels?
- What biographical information might be important for you to know about them?
- What are their voting records or sponsorships on legislation that is central to your work?

**TIP:** For example, Congress' Appropriation Committees are key to federal funding decisions. The federal Judiciary Committees are key on VAWA's reauthorization. The Senate Banking Committee determines housing policy.

- **You also need to determine:**
  - Are they known to your Board Members, other senior leadership, or volunteers? Do you have people in your network who personally know these legislators?
  - What issues do they care most about? The answer to this question is essential to know before you meet. Be sure to check official websites and read up on the issues noted and legislation co-sponsored.

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## STARTING AND KEEPING A RELATIONSHIP

- Make a point of introducing your YWCA to each newly elected or re-elected legislator by:
  - Sending a letter expressing interest in working together in the years ahead.
  - Providing brief background information, including, for example, your annual report or promotional brochure, along with a standing invitation to visit your local association to see your services.
  - Put the legislator on your outreach list as you would a potential big donor and join their e-newsletter/follow their social media channels.
  - When you are ready, request a meeting at the legislator's office to discuss your organization, its current situation, future plans, and issues of concern. Consider checking in with your state legislator once a quarter and, at minimum, a month or two before the legislative session begins and once during session.

A member of Congress should meet with representatives of your organization about once a year, and additionally, you should try to interact with their staff at least once a quarter. If you are hoping to meet with the Member of Congress, suggest dates that are during Congressional Recess. Periodic, regular interactions are critical to building relationships, so that Members of Congress take your call or respond to your email when there is a time-sensitive vote or policy ask. The regular check-in can be simply sharing a success story, inviting them to your big fundraising gala, or sharing a publication from YWCA or one of your other professional partners.

## FACILITY TOUR

- What better way to cultivate a relationship with a policymaker than inviting them to see your organization in action while also keeping in mind safety requirements? Check out our hosting a legislator how-to guide in the toolkit!

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