

How To: Virtual Civic Engagement

How to Advocate from a Distance

How do you advocate during a time when in-person gatherings and meetings are not possible? Thankfully, the principles for civic engagement are not terribly different. Here are three ways to make your voice heard from home!

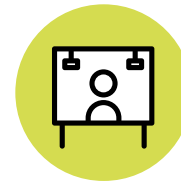
Virtual Civic Engagement Opportunities



PHONE CALLS



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



VIRTUAL LOBBY VISITS

Not sure who your representative is or how to get in touch with them? Go to <http://vpap.org>.

PHONE CALLS



- Find your legislator's phone number on viriniageneralassembly.gov (and double-check who they are with the "Who's My Legislator?" function).
- Prepare and deliver a quick script that covers these bases:
 - Politely introduce yourself and identify yourself as a constituent.
 - If you have any particular issue expertise, briefly mention it.
 - Make 1-2 points about the topic you have called to discuss.
 - Make an explicit ask; i.e. "I am calling to ask Senator Lewis to support a moratorium on utility shut offs while COVID-19 remains a threat."
 - Thank them for their time.
- Get five (or more!) of your peers to call that same day. Ask each of them to ask three friends to call, too.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



- **Prepare**
 - Find 2-3 recent articles in local newspapers that touch on the topic you wish to discuss.
 - Research the guidelines for your local paper, including the maximum word count and the required personal information to include.
 - Choose 1-2 major talking points to focus on.
- **Structure**
 - **The hook:** attention-grabbing first sentence that states the topic at hand.
 - **The facts:** 1-2 facts about the issue.
 - **The personal touch:** explain why this issue is important to you personally.
 - **The ask:** name your target (Governor, a particular legislator, etc) and state clearly what you think they should do.
- **After**
 - Call the newspaper the following day to confirm they received it and ask whether they plan to publish it
 - If published, send your legislators an email including the article and repeat your ask, and ask friends and neighbors in the district to do the same

For questions or more information, please contact engagement@vcnva.org or call (804) 644-0283.



Because in-person district office visits are not currently viable, many legislators are open to setting up virtual meetings with constituents. These follow the same format as an in-person lobby meeting, with the additional benefit of being able to quickly share links to relevant resources.

- **Setting up the meeting**
 - Recruit 2-3 friends and/or neighbors in-district to help prepare and deliver some of the agenda (and make a bigger impression).
 - Share/provide feedback on talking points several days in advance.
 - Call your legislator's district office number, identify yourself as a constituent, and ask the staff person who answers about setting up a virtual meeting. Let them know how many people you expect to attend. They likely have a preferred platform.
 - Suggest a few 30-minute windows and prepare to be flexible.
- **Running the meeting**
 - This structure will help you stay on track during the meeting:
 - **Introduction:** make a personal connection to your legislator.
 - **Present the issue:** spend 2-3 minutes talking about the issue(s) at hand, and back that up with a few compelling facts.
 - **Tell your personal story:** connect the issue to the personal experience of you or someone you know.
 - **Ask:** directly make your request, and ask what their current position is.
 - **Invite questions:** if the legislator is not immediately on board, ask what questions they have or what further information they might need.
 - **Wrap up:** thank them for their time and let them know you will follow up with any information they requested.
- **Follow up**
 - One person should be point on following up with a thank-you email including any requested information.
 - As decision-making time for the issue you discussed approaches, ask each attendee to make a call to the legislator's office to thank them for your earlier meeting and express that you hope to see them make the right decision.

Best practices for video conferencing (using Google Hangouts, Zoom, or Skype Meet Now):

- In any group meeting (an LTE writing party or lobby meeting, for example), divvy up the agenda and assign attendees roles in advance.
- Mute when not speaking.
- Use the chat box to share helpful links and resources.

**Active conservationists like you are what make the difference for our lands, waters, and wildlife.
Thank you for being a voice for the conservation movement.**

