

You can communicate with your elected officials in several ways: invitations, letters and emails, phone calls, social media, and of course in-person meetings. Your communication is counted and makes a difference!

INVITE ELECTED OFFICIALS TO YOUR EVENTS

Treat elected officials as you would major donors — with care, attention, and respect.

- **Invite consistently:** Your invitations help elected officials learn about your work, and it shows respect for their office. Treat elected officials and their staff as you would a special donor (current or prospective). Invite them to your events consistently, even if they do not attend. Engaging officials around your work will only deepen their understanding and respect for your contributions to society.
- **Be gracious and social:** An official’s attendance at your event gives your organization a chance to build a relationship with that official. Take the time to connect with them. Even a brief moment of dialogue can help establish a relationship that may be useful in the future.
- **Do not offer to pay for the ticket:** Due to congressional gift rules, as well as varying state gift rules, it is best to invite elected officials to events without offering to pay for (or gift them) a ticket. There are circumstances in which gifting may be permissible. However, it is best to play it safe — do not offer gifts to elected officials.¹

Legislators need to hear from their constituents.
Do not assume an official or their staff knows more about an issue than you do.
YOUR VOICE IS NECESSARY!

LETTERS & EMAILS TO ELECTED OFFICIALS

- **Be concise:** Write your letter/email with only the most relevant points, and keep it to one page.
- **Make it personal:** Tell a personal story related to your legislative ask, if possible. Personal stories make your message memorable and more effective. Keep your story brief and connected to the issue.
- **Be direct:** Don’t be afraid to tell the legislator what you want. If there is a specific legislative bill, state the bill number and ask them to vote in a specific direction. Use the correct bill numbers such as “H.R.” for the House and “S.” for the Senate, at the federal level.
- **Be respectful:** Messages with a disrespectful and negative tone will not be effective. Be strong but also courteous in your communication.

SOCIAL MEDIA

- Remember this is a **public-facing message**.
- **Tag your elected official(s)** in a social media post to get their office’s attention.
- **Thank your officials** for their action, e.g., “Thank you for voting for H.R. 0000!”
- **Urge them to vote** in favor (or against) a bill with a short reason, e.g., “Please vote for H.R. 0000 to preserve the charitable deduction!”
- **Be courteous:** As with letters and emails, disrespectful social media posts will be ineffective and may hurt your cause.

MEETINGS WITH OFFICIALS (IN PERSON OR VIA VIDEO)

- **Know the legislative calendar:** Before you meet with an elected official about a specific piece of legislation, know the legislative calendar. Have the bills been introduced? Are bills in review in a subcommittee? Speaking to legislative offices when they are soon to consider a bill makes your “asks” much more effective.
- **Be early:** Elected officials and their staffs are very busy. If in person, arrive early to pass through security, find their office, and collect yourself. If on video, arrive early to make sure your audio and video are working properly. If you are late, your meeting may be canceled and may not be rescheduled.
- **Remember, officials and staffers are people, too:** Take a moment to say hello, engage in brief small talk, and shake hands or fist-bump if in person. Your time with them may be brief, but treat them as a person, too.
- **Be prepared with short talking points and handouts:** After a friendly introduction, clearly state your reason for the meeting. Be direct. Have concise talking points. Provide them with handouts about your ask.
- **Be flexible:** You might have to wait ... for a while. Elected officials and their staff can be called into all kinds of last-minute meetings and votes. Be patient. And, if they ask to take your meeting in a hallway or by phone — go with it! Accept whatever time they have for you and make it matter.

SAMPLE LETTER TO AN ELECTED OFFICIAL

Date

Your Name

Your Address

Your Email Address & Phone Number

The Honorable Sarah Smith

House of Representatives (or United States Senate)

Office Address

City, State, ZIP

Dear Representative Smith,

My name is John Miller, and I am writing to you from your district in Dade, OH. I am the executive director of the Dade Opera Theater, which employs nearly 250 artists and staff and reaches more than 150,000 audience members, students, and local community members each year through our education programs, regional parks partnerships, live performances, and special events. It is due to our tax-exempt status and the charitable giving incentive that Dade Opera Theater is able to bring the joy, healing, and education of the arts to our city.

Our organization is 60% supported by grants and donations and 40% by earned revenue from ticket sales. The charitable deduction incentivizes donors to support our work, allowing us to reach community members of all ages, ethnicities, and backgrounds. Our after-school opera camp recently won a “Best After School Program” award for ages K through 12.

As your constituent, I urge you to vote in support of bill H.R. 0000 to preserve charitable giving incentives to nonprofit organizations. Please protect the full scope and value of the charitable tax deduction.

Nonprofit arts organizations are part of the larger nonprofit sector that contributes \$1.1 trillion in services each year. This sector supports 13.5 million jobs (approximately 10% of the U.S. workforce), provides direct services to human needs, and supports healthy communities. Studies have shown that proposals to limit the charitable deduction will result in reduced giving, limiting organizations’ core services and reducing the public’s access to these services.

Please protect incentives for charitable giving and vote in support of bill H.R. 0000. I look forward to your support!

Thank you,
John Miller

ⁱ Gifts Guidance, House Ethics Committee; <https://ethics.house.gov/house-ethics-manual/gifts>. (March 2, 2024).

OPERA America’s advocacy guides were developed in 2024 by Amy Fitterer, consultant, with support from The Music Man Foundation.