

Oregon State University Legislative Advocacy Protocol and Resources

For OSU Extension and Extension Community Advisory Network

Opportunities to Engage

With Extension's statewide and ongoing presence in Oregon communities, there are plenty of opportunities to engage with—and encourage community members to engage with—elected officials to help them understand Extension's impact in their district. Examples of potential engagements include:

- Request a meeting after the election and before the legislative session to provide an overview of Extension and discuss programming in your community.
- Invite them to an event as a participant or even a featured guest.
- Provide a tour of local facilities.
- Participate in a legislator town hall or coffee hour.
- Forward OSU Extension news and impact stories that highlight the work of Extension in their district.
- Include elected officials on mailing lists for Extension newsletters.

Remember: It's important to approach this work as a team with those from your region. As representatives of OSU and OSU Extension, it's crucial to not get our wires crossed when cultivating relationships with legislators. Communication is key.

See also: [OSU Extension Legislative and stakeholder relations resources](#)

Contacting Elected Officials

Get to know your elected officials. Any contact you make will be more effective if you have a relationship based on past work or support. Letter writing campaigns may get the message across, but they aren't as effective as personal contact based on a past history of support and credibility. Personal letters and phone calls can be helpful if you follow a few simple rules.

Six simple rules to follow when contacting a legislator

1. Email is the preferred method of communication. Most legislators prefer email because it is faster, and more convenient to respond to and track. When writing by email, identify your association with OSU Extension and that you (or your program) is a constituent of their district. Please CC others in your region who are involved in this work.
2. Personalize your message. Use your own words and tell your story. Don't just cut and paste or forward template language. If you're writing to several legislators on the same subject, use separate e-mails. Do not send form letters.
3. Be constructive. Don't make demands or threats. Suggest, don't demand, a course of action. Don't promise rewards, and don't insult the opposition.
4. Be precise and keep it short.
5. Express your appreciation. Say thank you for their support of higher education and the OSU Extension Service.
6. If you don't hear back in a week, follow up with a phone call.

Advocacy Basics

1. Knowledge is power and is important to build a relationship with legislators.
 - a. Know your subject and be specific; identify your subject matter clearly and concisely.
 - b. Personalize the information. Describe how the issue/topic affects their district.
 - c. Sign up for a legislator's newsletter and attend town halls to learn what issues are important to them.
 - d. Know the players—members, staff, and other interests.
2. Credibility is your most precious asset. It takes time to build and can be destroyed quickly. Once destroyed, is difficult to recover.
 - a. If you don't know the answer to a question, say you don't know and use the opportunity to follow up with rather than making something up, and running the risk of getting caught and damaging your credibility.
 - b. You are the best person to deliver bad news, rather than letting somebody else shape your message.
 - c. "No Surprises" is key to building an effective political relationship.
3. Keep the message simple and easy to understand. You have about two minutes to make an issue compelling, and about another five to make it convincing.
4. Be polite to staff. They control access, and, in the Oregon State Legislature, they are frequently related to the legislator.
5. Build coalitions. The broader the base of support, the greater your chances of success.
6. Don't fight yesterday's battles. If you lost something, give it up and move onto the next issue. Holding grudges will limit your ability to build coalitions. Nevertheless, legislators tend to remember everything, especially things that made them mad.
7. Keep legislators in touch with their constituents. **OSU Extension is uniquely positioned to do this successfully.** Share constituent awards and news to keep legislators aware of how constituents are involved in and affected by OSU Extension's work. Make constituents aware of opportunities to engage with legislators.
8. Know how to take no for an answer and move on. Never give up on anyone, but understand the limitations they might face in the moment.
9. Connect early, often, and late. With some legislators, it's the last person who speaks to them who sticks in their mind. For some, it's the first or most frequent. You can't wait until the 11th hour to get your message heard.
10. Say thank you, write thank you, and show thank you.

Reporting Engagements

OSU Extension is implementing tools and systems that provide a more complete picture of our legislative and stakeholder engagements. This allows Extension leadership to respond to actionable information and follow-up needs in a timely and coordinated way, and to efficiently share information with OSU Government Relations.

Report an engagement here: <https://beav.es/log-engagement>

- The initial focus is on engagements with elected officials.
- You'll be asked to provide basic details, such as who met with whom when, topics discussed, and follow-up needs.
- Information goes directly to Extension senior leadership and OSU Government Relations for awareness and to coordinate follow-up.

Laws for Public Employees

ORS 260.432 states that a public employee may not, while on the job during working hours, promote or oppose election petitions, candidates, political committee or ballot measures. Additionally, no person (including elected officials) may require a public employee (at any time) to do so.

This law applies only to engaging in elections, and not in legislative matters. OSU as an institution may take positions on some political issues (including state and federal legislation), but may not take positions on political candidates, ballot measures or initiative petitions being circulated for placement on a ballot. The OSU Office of Government Relations oversees OSU's political interests and advocacy at state and federal government levels, and advises and coordinates with the President and the Board of Trustees on political issues. No employee may commit OSU to a political advocacy position without authorization from the Office of Government Relations. Please see this [quick card](#) for more information.

Additional Resources

Advocacy

- [Legislator look-up](#)
- [OSU Government Relations website](#)
- [OSU Government Relations blog](#)
- [OSU District Profiles](#)
- [How to testify before a committee](#)

Sources for stories to share

- [Our Impact](#) (success stories from OSU's Statewide Public Service Programs) *Search and filter by county, legislative district, region, program, and more.*
- [OSU Extension news stories](#)
- [Local OSU Extension webpages](#) provide current information on local programming and services, as well as display relevant news and impact stories
- Local or programmatic OSU Extension newsletters
- OSU Extension regional directors and local liaisons

Contact Information

OSU's Government Relations and Extension Communications teams are available to provide support and guidance for your advocacy work. We also collaborate with OSU Extension and university leadership on centralized legislative advocacy work at the state and federal levels.

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