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Alliance of American Museums

Ten Rules for Engagement

1. **All Politics is Local.** All elected officials are interested in addressing the needs of their constituents. Be sure they know how your organization is serving—and supported by—the community.
2. **Remember Your Manners.** Always say please and thank you. Thank them for taking the time to meet with you and to listen to your concerns. Always thank them for their help in securing local, state or federal grants.
3. **The Squeaky Wheel Gets the Grease.** Those speaking up for their issues get attention. If you do not ask, people will not know the issue is important to constituents.
4. **To Change Public Policy, Take the Long View.** Public policy changes are often going to be incremental and dramatic policy shifts take time. It took nearly 10 years for The Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids to get Congress to prohibit the advertising of tobacco products to kids.
5. **Politicians Are People Too.** They have hobbies, families and favorite causes. By learning about them as people, you might find new ways to build a relationship.
6. **Tell the Truth.** Do not make things up. Give them the facts, even if they might hurt your case. You need to maintain your credibility as a trusted source for information.
7. **Treat the Staff with Respect.** The staff for elected officials are a valuable part of the team. They advise their members and work hard for little pay. They can be a great internal champion for your cause and, someday, they may run for office themselves.
8. **Make Advocacy a Habit.** Don't rely on one visit a year to make the case for your organization. Keep in touch with your elected officials and their staff. Invite them to visit your organization and make sure they are on your mailing list and/or your media list. Connect with them on social media.
9. **Reward Good Work.** If your elected officials do good things for your organization, tell everyone. Put it in your newsletter, honor them at your next event and share it with the media.
10. **You Can Make a Difference and Ask Others to Help.** Volunteers, visitors, teachers and supporters can all support your advocacy efforts. Trustees can be especially important in this area. Get started by putting advocacy on your organization's next board meeting agenda.