



Connecticut

Connecticut Chapter of the American Planning Association

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Twelve Steps for Sending Effective E-mail to Elected Officials

- 1. Put Your Name and Address at the Top of Message.**

The first thing your representative wants to determine is if you live in his or her district. If you don't ... delete. Representatives and staff do not have any obligation and little time to read messages from people who are not constituents, so it is vital that you make it clear that you live in the district.
- 2. Humanize Your Message.**

This is one of the most important things you can do to ensure your e-mail makes an impact. Many people are uncomfortable sharing their feelings or talking about their own experiences, or believe that such information is inappropriate to the legislative process. Yet, it is this information that separates one's message from the standardized, bulk messages drafted by interest groups. These messages are more likely to be read than simply tallied.
- 3. Be Brief.**

Members of Congress and their staff are extremely busy. Respect their time and try to tell them only what they need to know. Two or three paragraphs should be sufficient. Do not feel that you have to make every single argument that relates to the issue, only the strongest points you can make.
- 4. Be Clear About Your Position.**

Your request should be stated as a concrete, actionable item, e.g., "I would like you to support H.R. 100."
- 5. Make Your Message Timely.**

Send your message when the legislation is being considered. Your message is worthless if it arrives after a critical vote. Look to APA to keep you informed about the timing of critical stages in the legislative process.
- 6. Don't "Flame."**

You are allowed to disagree with your member of Congress, but you will not be effective if you abuse or threaten them. Abusive letters seem more desperate than intimidating to the recipient, and they are seldom taken seriously.
- 7. Avoid Attachments.**

Congressional offices rarely print or read attachments to e-mail. Offer to provide supporting documents on request, but avoid sending attached files.
- 8. Don't Become "Spam."**

Do not send Congress a message every single day about every issue you read about or develop an opinion on.

An office that receives numerous messages from a single person quickly loses sight of the urgency or expertise that the constituent can bring to a specific issue.

9. **Establish Your Credibility.**

Explain if you are an expert in some area. Also, do not shy away from saying that you are either a personal supporter or a party supporter (but never imply that because you voted for somebody or contributed money to their campaign that they owe you a vote).

10. **Don't Lie.**

Political professionals are adept at spotting a tall tale. Any story that sounds too perfect or any statistic that is not substantiated will not bolster your position.

11. **Don't cc Everybody.**

Resist the urge to send a copy of your message to every member of Congress. You will persuade no one and annoy everybody. A legislative office wants to know that you have appealed to them for specific action, not just sent them a copy of a memo distributed to all.

12. **Proofread Your E-mail.**

Too often the speed and ease of sending e-mail is reflected in poor grammar and sloppy spelling. Even if a congressional staffer is able to determine your meaning, such errors reflect badly on your overall argument. Take a break before you press "send," and proof your message.

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