



Communications for DC Advocates:

How-to's and lessons learned over 15 years

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About Susie Cambria

This guide reflects the years of experience I have in advocacy and the many lessons learned doing public policy and budget advocacy work nationally, in Connecticut and most extensively in the District of Columbia.

I have more than 15 years of experience in DC children's policy and budget issues. In my work at DC Action for Children (1997 – 2008), I helped create a robust budget analysis and advocacy operation by establishing and maintaining relationships with elected and appointed officials and engaging the community in the work of protecting and nurturing children and youth across the District. I also created public education materials, trained others on effective budget and policy practices, and was (and remain, I am told) a respected advocate and analyst.

I've had the privilege to work on policy and budget issues important to children, youth and families including successfully lobbying for and helping implement the District's children's budget and lobbying for the requirement to create a citywide child abuse and neglect prevention plan. I was the lead staffer on the convening of a large group to support a tobacco settlement plan that addressed the causes and results of tobacco use, and generally calling attention to the need to invest in children and youth.

Thanks

I am grateful to Jaime S. Fearer, MCP and Marina Streznewski for editing the guide and to Veronica Davis for offering some outstanding recommendations.

I am incredibly grateful that the five wonderful women who founded DC Action for Children gave me my start in local advocacy work. They showed me what the combination of commitment, passion, work, and justice looked like and what the result could be. My deepest thanks to Diane Bernstein, Marian Guggenheim, Cindy McGrath, Liz Siegel, and Susan Zox Smith. There are others who, along the way, made me better and taught me what a good advocate did: Phyllis Campbell Newsome who died well before her time; Kathy Patterson, former Ward 3 Councilmember; Gregory McCarthy, friend and former senior staffer to Mayor Anthony Williams; and T.J. Sutcliffe, friend and analyst and advocate extraordinaire. Thanks for the tough love and incredible support, all.

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Table of contents

1	Introduction: Selecting the best method of communication to achieve your advocacy goals
2	Section I: Writing to the Mayor and members of the DC Council, and ANCs
5	Section II: Writing to appointed officials
7	Section III: Preparing testimony and statements for the record
10	Section IV: Delivering testimony
14	Section V: After the hearing
16	Section VI: Executive branch agency hearings
18	Section VII: Commenting on proposed/emergency regulations
20	Section VIII: Fact sheets
22	Section IX: Meeting with elected and appointed officials
24	Section X: Briefing elected and appointed officials
26	Section XI: Meeting with legislative and executive branch staff
28	Section XII: Phone calls to elected officials
29	Section XIII: Facility tours
31	Section XIV: The value of nice
32	Section XV: Conclusion
33	Section XVI: Resources and extras

Introduction:

Selecting a communication method to achieve your goals

Different situations and audiences call for different methods of communication. Selecting the right one(s) and having the resources to implement it are important. Using the right method can mean the difference between an effective and ineffective advocacy effort.

These days, there are many ways to deliver your message to elected and appointed officials. The technology-related ones—email, Twitter, and Facebook, for example—supplement the more traditional ones of phone calls, meetings, walk-arounds, and facility tours.

Communications choices won't overwhelm you if you let your advocacy goals drive the communications method(s). Goal-oriented and -driven decisions will serve you well. This way of making decisions keeps the proverbial eye on the prize and makes it easy to set aside inappropriate communications methods.

There are some special tips for service providers that apply to the communications methods in this guide. The overarching tip is that any advocacy communication with elected officials should be neither the first nor last time they hear from you. Some ways to remain in touch include:

- Presenting detailed aggregated information about your client population including their needs and your capacity to assist them.
- Regularly reporting basic service data to the mayor and council; keeping your organization in front of these elected officials when not asking for something improves your credibility and provides them with valuable information.
- Working with organizations in your community to combine information and prepare an annual report of sorts. This would be useful to elected and appointed officials as well as advocates.

Another overarching tip, this time for service providers and advocates alike, is to follow and engage with elected and appointed officials and staff on social media. You may not agree with the positions the officials take, but knowing what they think, what information they share, and the like, is intelligence worth having and using.

This guide provides users with the basics—with some superstar tips thrown in for good measure—to conduct foundational advocacy communications. A list of resources associated with each communication method is also included. This guide will also help you use the method well. What you will not find here is how to make general strategic decisions. There are many other resources to help you with this.

Note

URLs are subject to change.

Section 1:

Writing to the mayor, members of the DC Council, and ANCs

Addressing correspondence:

To the mayor:

Inside address

The Honorable (first name and last name)
Mayor of the District of Columbia
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Suite (suite number)
Washington, DC 20004

Salutation

Dear Mr. Mayor *OR* Dear Mayor (last name):

To members of the DC Council:

Inside address

The Honorable (first and last name)
Council of the District of Columbia
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Suite (suite number)
Washington, DC 20004

Salutation

Dear Councilmember (last name):

To Advisory Neighborhood Commissioners (ANCs):

Inside address

Commissioner (first and last name), ANC (SMD number)
(address)
Washington, DC (zip)

Salutation

Dear Commissioner (last name):

Note

When writing to the chair of a committee, it is appropriate to use the salutation
Dear Mr. Chairman: *OR* Dear Madam Chair:

Note

Where to find elected officials:

- DC government, dc.gov
- Council of the District of Columbia, <http://www.dccouncil.us>; the information includes suite numbers
- Advisory Neighborhood Commissioners (ANCs), www.anc.dc.gov

Contents and format of the letter:

First Paragraph

1. If you represent an organization, start with a statement about your organization including the ward in which you are located and the population served. If you are a resident, start with the ward (ANC if you are writing to an ANC commissioner) in which you live.
2. Briefly explain why you are writing. Include a short statement about the consequences of doing nothing (keep to one/two sentences).
3. Thank the official for taking an interest in the issue (if applicable).

Middle Paragraphs

1. Solutions/recommendations, action you want taken. Be specific.
2. What it will take for the solutions/recommendations to be implemented—funding, policy change, practice shift, compliance with existing law
3. Party responsible for implementing changes
4. Consequences of doing nothing
5. How you will know changes have occurred. Be sure to include measureable outcomes.

Last Paragraph

1. Summarize the issue and action you want taken
2. Offer assistance and be sure to provide your phone and email

Tip

- Use letterhead. If emailing, you can either summarize the message in the body of an email or paste the entire letter (only if letter is one-page or less). Attaching the letter on letterhead with a signature is important, particularly if letter will be added to a legislative record. The record is public and often comments are included in committee reports. You want your official communication (with logo and signature) included.
- Include all of your contact information
- Be courteous and do not threaten

Resources required:

- Time to draft and proofread the letter
- Letterhead in print or electronic copy
- Proofreader
- Contact information for elected officials and staff
- Postage if letter is being mailed
- Transportation if letter is being hand-delivered
- Time to blog or post on your website
- Understanding of the proposal or issue you are writing about
- Business card

Note

Where to find public policy, budget and other government information:

- Legislative Information Management System (LIMS), <http://dcclims1.dccouncil.us/lims/>
- *District of Columbia Register, DC Municipal Regulations* (DCMR), mayor's orders, <http://dcregs.dc.gov/>
- Mayor's proposed budgets, budget.dc.gov
- Approved budgets, cfo.dc.gov

Tip

When sending to the **mayor**, consider sending the letter to others in the executive branch who have responsibility for the issue you are writing about or who are working on the issue. Staff could be in the Office of the City Administrator, Office of Policy and Legislative Affairs, office of a deputy mayor (if there are any), or executive branch agencies. This information is found in various places online; start with the DC government website, dc.gov.

When writing to an appointed official such as the city administrator, an agency director or the director of the Office of Policy and Legislative Affairs, use Mr./Ms./Mrs./Dr., not their title.

When sending to the **DC Council**, consider sending the letter to the staffer working on the issue or the Chief of Staff. Find this information online here: www.dccouncil.us.

Section II:

Writing to appointed officials

Addressing correspondence:

Inside address

Mr./Ms/Mrs./Dr. (first name and last name)
(title)
(agency)
(address)
Washington, DC (zip)

Salutation

Dear Mr./Ms/Mrs./Dr. (last name):

Contents and format of the letter:

First Paragraph

1. If you represent an organization, start with a statement about your organization including the ward in which you are located and the population served. If you are a resident, start with the ward in which you live.
2. Briefly explain why you are writing. Include a short statement about the consequences of doing nothing (keep to one/two sentences).
3. Thank the official for taking an interest in the issue (if applicable).

Middle Paragraphs

1. Solutions/recommendations, action you want taken. Be specific.
2. What it will take for the solutions/recommendations to be implemented—funding, policy change, practice shift, compliance with existing law
3. Party responsible for implementing changes
4. Consequences of doing nothing
5. How you will know changes have occurred. Be sure to include measureable outcomes.

Last Paragraph

1. Summarize the issue and action you want taken
2. Offer assistance and be sure to provide your phone and email



Where to find appointed officials:

- DC government, <http://mayor.dc.gov/DC/Mayor/About+the+Mayor/Cabinet+Appointees>
- Office of Boards and Commissions, <http://obc.dc.gov>

Resources required:

- Time to draft and proofread the letter
- Letterhead in print or electronic copy
- Proofreader
- Contact information for elected officials and staff
- Postage if letter is being mailed
- Transportation if letter is being hand-delivered
- Time to blog or post on your website
- Understanding of the proposal or issue you are writing about
- Business card

Note

Where to find public policy, budget and other government information:

- Legislative Information Management System (LIMS), <http://dcclims1.dccouncil.us/lims/>
- *District of Columbia Register, DC Municipal Regulations* (DCMR), mayor's orders, <http://dcregs.dc.gov/>
- Mayor's proposed budgets, budget.dc.gov
- Approved budgets, cfo.dc.gov

Note

When writing to an appointed official such as the city administrator, an agency director or the director of the Office of Policy and Legislative Affairs, use Mr./Ms/Mrs./Dr., not their title.

Tip

- Use letterhead. If emailing, you can either summarize the message in the body of an email or paste the entire letter (only if letter is one-page or less). Attaching the letter on letterhead with a signature is important, particularly if letter will be added to a legislative record. The record is public and often comments are included in committee reports. You want your official communication (with logo and signature) included.
- Include all of your contact information
- Be courteous and do not threaten

Section III:

Preparing testimony and statements for the record

For some, testifying is an occasional advocacy action performed. Others testify on a regular basis. No matter which camp you fall into, preparing solid, thoughtful and thorough testimony is important if you want to effectively convey your analysis and recommendations.

The items listed below are common components of testimony and statements for the record.

Title

This can either be on a page of its own or on the top of the first page and include:

1. Testimony before the (committee, subject on which you are testifying, i.e., B19-0003, FY 2011 DHS budget), *OR* Statement for the Record submitted to (committee, subject on which you are testifying, i.e., B19-0003, FY 2011 Department of Human Services budget)
2. Your name, position and organization
3. Date on which you are submitting the testimony/statement

First paragraph

1. Testimony typically includes the opener “Good morning Chairman Smith *OR* Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee on XYZ.”
2. Introduce yourself. Include your name, title, and organization.
3. If you represent an organization, start with a statement about your organization including the ward in which you are located and the population served. If you are a resident, start with the ward in which you live.
4. Next briefly explain why you are writing. Include a short statement about the consequences of doing nothing (keep to one/two sentences). Be sure to include a list of the agencies/divisions involved.

Middle Paragraphs

1. Details about the problem. Include analysis, data, charts, and tables.
2. Solutions/recommendations, action you want taken. Be specific.
3. What it will take for the solutions/recommendations to be implemented—funding, policy change, practice shift, compliance with existing law
4. Party responsible for implementing changes
5. Consequences of doing nothing
6. How you will know changes have occurred. Be sure to include measureable outcomes.

Last Paragraph

1. Summarize the issue and action you want taken
2. Thank the chair and the committee for the opportunity to comment
3. Offer assistance. In testimony include a statement such as “If you have any questions, I would be happy to answer them.” If you are submitting a statement for the record, include the names of people who can respond to questions as well as the phone numbers

Resources required:

- Time to prepare, review, edit
- The legislation/proposal/regulations/budget as well as the title, number, and understanding
- Letterhead in print or electronic copy
- Proofreader
- Data
- Software to create tables, charts—this can be Word, WordPerfect, Excel, or something comparable. The point is that you don't need complicated or expensive software.
- Copies for councilmembers, staff, agency staff, public, and media
- Postage if statement is being mailed
- Transportation to get to hearing or if statement is being delivered in person

Note

Where to find public policy, budget and other government information:

- Legislative Information Management System (LIMS), <http://dcclims1.dccouncil.us/lims/>
- *District of Columbia Register, DC Municipal Regulations* (DCMR), mayor's orders, <http://dcregs.dc.gov/>
- Mayor's proposed budgets, budget.dc.gov
- Approved budgets, cfo.dc.gov

Tip

- Be germane
- Double space (or space and a half) your testimony/statement.

Tip

Your written testimony may be any length. If long, prepare a shorter version to deliver at the hearing or roundtable. Practice and time it to make sure you are within the time limit. If you testify from the shorter version, provide to CMs; they like to follow along as you testify.

And speaking of time limits, this information can be found in the hearing or roundtable notice. Individuals and panels typically have different amounts of time allotted. Some members strictly enforce time limits, others don't.



Develop testimony and statement for the record templates. Templates can include title page or paragraph, organization description, and conclusion. They will make your life so much easier and ensure consistency across your organization.



If there is a quote, statement, or piece of data that is particularly compelling, consider making it into a poster (dry-mounted) and displaying it at the hearing.

Help the DC Council do its job:



- Check with the committee at least one month before a hearing to find out their deadline for the advance questions to agencies. Offer to meet to talk through issues/concerns, especially if they are not knowledgeable about the topic. Then submit your questions to the committee by the deadline.
- A few days before the hearing, provide questions to the committee for the member to ask at the hearing.
- If strategic, provide the committee with your testimony prior to the hearing so they have a chance to become familiar with your perspective. Find out whether the staff will make copies with this advance copy.

What's the difference between testimony and a statement for the record?

Testimony is delivered in person, from the witness table while statements are submitted to the committee before, during, or after a hearing. Otherwise, they are identical.



Testimony versus statement for the record

There are numerous reasons why someone will choose one over the other. Delivering testimony in person is a great way to see and be seen. It provides face time, even if not one-on-one with Councilmembers, staff, executive branch staff, and media.

Not all hearings are convenient to attend, however, and so being able to submit a statement allows you to share your views. Some advocates have been known to submit statements when they don't want to be asked any questions from the dais.

Section IV: Delivering testimony

If you want to maximize your influence as a witness at a public hearing or roundtable, take a look at the tried-and-true tips that follow.

In advance

- Before you leave for the hearing, call the committee to determine if the hearing will be starting on time.
- The day before the hearing, find out where you are on the witness list. This is important if you are not attending the entire hearing and are timing your arrival. The committee clerk and/or administrative staff will have this information. Note that the order of witnesses may change. Be sure to ask if this might happen.
- If your organization has buttons, wear one.
- Take copies for the committee, government, community, and media. The hearing notice notes the number of copies to be provided; bring them. If you can't, provide one copy the day before the hearing and the committee staff will make copies.

Tip

If testifying in the Council Chamber (Room 500), don't wear a Granny Smith apple green top. If testifying in Rooms 120, 123, or 412, don't wear a medium or light blue top.

~~500~~

~~120,
123,
412~~

Note

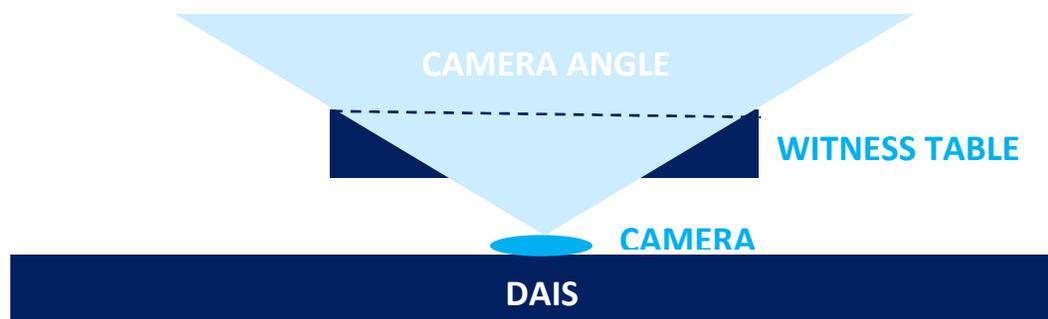
The John A. Wilson Building, along with all other DC government buildings, has a 100% ID check policy. This means that all visitors must have a photo ID—either a driver's license or government-issued ID card.

It is possible for those without a photo ID to enter DC government buildings. A government worker, someone from the office or agency with which you are meeting, must sign these individuals into the building. When an individual without ID arrives at a government building, call up to the office they are visiting; the staffer must come down and sign the person in.

In the Council Chamber

- Unless you want others to see your expressions, do not sit in the sight line of the camera capturing the witnesses while you are waiting to testify. (See illustration below.)
- There is no eating or drinking in any of the hearing rooms.
- You can get copies of testimony from the committee staffer sitting to the right of the dais.
- Not all committee members attend hearings and roundtables. Sometimes councilmembers send staff to listen; staff will sit at the dais and use the name plate of their boss. Councilmembers and staff, when not in the chamber, will often watch the hearing televised live as they do other work in their office.

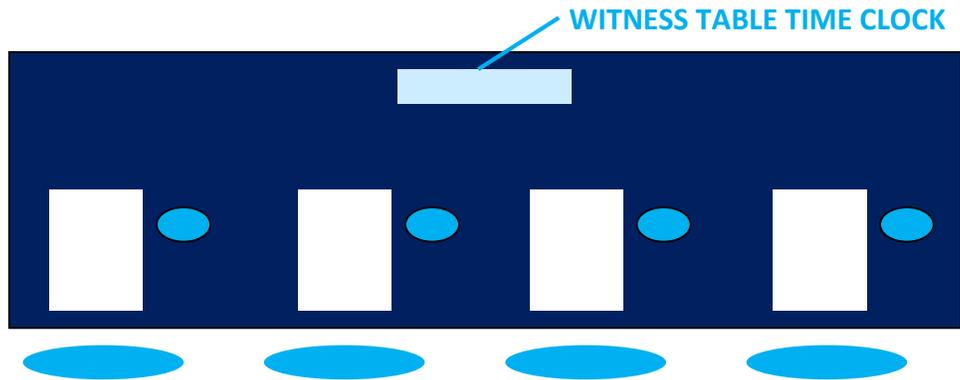
Camera sight line from the dais to the audience



Note

You may be called up to the witness table with people you don't know or with whom you do not agree. Don't panic. You are not associated with them; filling the seats at the table expedites the delivery of witness testimony.

What the witness table looks like and optimal placement of testimony and microphone



Optimal placement of statement (white) is next to your microphone. Feel free to switch the places of the statement and the microphone (dark turquoise).

You may also bend the neck of the microphone.



If you are using social media. . .

- Post your full testimony on your website and blog, and include it in e-letters or other communications with community, colleagues, donors
- Tweet about your testimony and link to website and blog
- Share your homework via social media networks



When you follow witnesses who have said what you planned to say, consider saying something like “I agree with those before me who asserted that. . . .” This shows you have been paying attention to others, is respectful of time, and allows you to mention another concern.

At the witness table

- Take a pen up with you; you may need it to write down questions the members have for you and/or homework they assign.
- Speak clearly and close to the microphone. The microphones have on/off buttons. Green is on, red is off.
- Respect the time limits—keep your remarks within the time allotted. There is a timer on the table; it counts down your time and blinks when your time is up. The timer also has a green and red light on the top. The green light is on when you have time remaining, red when time is up.
- Limit the time spent reading your testimony. Try to have eye contact with members on the dais.
- Remember you are testifying not only to the committee but also to the community. Hearings are shown live on [Channel 13](#) and the Internet via the [Office of Cable Television \(OCT\)](#), replayed on cable, and can be viewed on-demand via computer. So use this as an opportunity to educate the community on the problem and the solution.

Resources required:

- Time to travel and testify
- Public speaking skills (you don't have to be a pro)
- Money to pay for transportation/parking
- Copies of testimony for councilmembers, staff, public, agency staff, and media
- Paper and pen to take with to witness table
- Time to practice delivering testimony

The microphone at the witness table looks like this



Photo from:
<http://www.shure.com/americas/products/microphones/microflex-gooseneck-microphones>

Section V: After the hearing

Action after a hearing or roundtable is important. Post-hearing action provide the opportunity to reinforce your message, answer questions, offer clarification, rebut arguments, and more with elected and appointed officials, the public, your allies, and the media.

Some of the things you can do related to the DC Council:

- Write a thank you note. That's right, write a note, a handwritten note. Thank the chair of the committee for the opportunity to testify. Thank staff as well.
- If you are given homework by a member, be sure to complete it in a timely manner.
- Send your testimony to other councilmembers. While the committee ostensibly collects copies of your testimony at the hearing so it can be shared with all members after the hearing, staff report that this does not actually happen. So be sure to email. If there is something in particular you want them or staff to read, highlight and tab and mention it in your cover letter/email.
- If you did a call to action to turn people out to testify and the committee or a particular CM supported your message, do a call to action to thank the appropriate party. Provide phone numbers and emails. If including an email list, provide a comma-separated or semicolon-separated list.

Some other things you can do to get your message out:

- Post your testimony or statement for the record on your website or blog.
- Announce on Twitter, Facebook, and other outlets that you testified and link to video (be sure to mention the time you are on). You can also grab a screen shot of the hearing for your blog or website.
- Encourage others to weigh in on issue with the DC Council; provide your testimony or statement for the record as example. Be sure to include the deadline for statements for the record. The record closing date is in the hearing notice.

Resources required:

- Time to follow up—completing homework and writing thank you
- Contact information for councilmembers, staff, agency staff, public, and media
- Postage if testimony or statement is being mailed
- Time to blog or post on website



Buy personalized note cards for your organization. Include the logo, brief description, and all contact information (phone, address, website, Twitter, Facebook). Use these for handwritten notes.



If you are using social media. . .

- Post your full testimony on your website and blog, and include it in e-letters or other communications with community, colleagues, donors
- Tweet about your testimony and link to website and blog
- Share your homework via social media networks



When you follow witnesses who have said what you planned to say, consider saying something like “I agree with those before me who asserted that. . . .” This shows you have been paying attention to others, is respectful of time, and allows you to mention another concern.

Section VI:

Executive branch agency hearings

It is common for agencies to hold hearings on policies, plans, and proposals. Hearings are generally noticed in the [DC Register](#). The components of the testimony (or statement) are similar to those submitted to the Council of the District of Columbia.

Title

This can either be on a page of its own or on the top of the first page and include:

1. Your name, position, and organization
2. Testimony before the (agency, subject on which you are testifying) *OR* Statement for the Record submitted to (agency and subject)
3. Date on which you are submitting the testimony/statement

First Paragraph

1. If you represent an organization, start with a statement about your organization including the ward in which you are located and the population served. If you are a resident, start with the ward in which you live.
2. Briefly explain why you are writing. Include a short statement about the consequences of doing nothing (keep to one/two sentences).

Middle Paragraphs

1. Details about the problem. Include analysis, data, charts, and tables.
2. Solutions/recommendations, action you want taken. Be specific and be sure they are linked to the problem you have described.
3. What it will take for the solutions/recommendations to be implemented—funding, policy change, practice shift, compliance with existing law
4. Party responsible for implementing changes
5. Consequences of doing nothing
6. How you will know changes have occurred. Be sure to include measureable outcomes.

Tip

Your written testimony may be any length. If long, prepare a shorter version to deliver at the hearing or roundtable. Practice and time it to make sure you are within the time limit. And remember to double space or space and a half your testimony/statement.

Note

Where to find public policy, budget and other government information:

- Legislative Information Management System (LIMS), <http://dcclims1.dccouncil.us/lims/>
- *District of Columbia Register*, *DC Municipal Regulations* (DCMR), mayor's orders, <http://dcregs.dc.gov/>
- Mayor's proposed budgets, budget.dc.gov
- Approved budgets, cfo.dc.gov

Last Paragraph

1. Summarize the issue and action you want taken
2. Offer assistance. In testimony include a statement such as “If you have any questions, I would be happy to answer them.” If you are submitting a statement for the record, include the names of people who can respond to questions as well as the phone numbers and email at which they can be reached.

Resources required:

- Time to prepare, review, edit
- The legislation/proposal/regulations/budget as well as the title, number, and understanding
- Letterhead in print or electronic copy
- Proofreader
- Data
- Software to create tables, charts—this can be Word, WordPerfect, Excel, or something comparable. You don’t need complicated or expensive software.
- Copies for councilmembers, staff, agency staff, public, and media
- Postage if statement is being mailed
- Transportation to get to hearing or if statement is being delivered in person

Tip

If you are using social media. . .

- Post your full testimony on your website and blog, and include it in e-letters or other communications with community, colleagues, donors
- Tweet about your testimony and link to website and blog
- Share your homework via social media networks

Note

The John A. Wilson Building, along with all other DC government buildings, has a 100% ID check policy. This means that all visitors must have a photo ID—either a driver’s license or government-issued ID card.

It is possible for those without a photo ID to enter DC government buildings. A government worker, someone from the office or agency with which you are meeting, must sign these individuals into the building. When an individual without ID arrives at a government building, call up to the office they are visiting; the staffer must come down and sign the person in.

Section VII:

Commenting on proposed/emergency regulations

Regulations provide more details and processes for implementing the laws they concern. The legislation assigns responsibility for implementation, including regulation promulgation, to one or more agencies.

Regulations are developed in numerous ways. Sometimes an agency will draft and then provide and opportunity, as is required by law, for public comment. Other times an agency will provide a framework for the regulations, also known as rules, and the public will help provide the content.

Whether you have participated in the development of the regulations, you do have the right to submit comments.

The components of the comments are typically in letter form. Naturally, if an agency calls a hearing, the comments may be written as testimony (or statement).

First Paragraph

1. If you represent an organization, start with a statement about your organization including the ward in which you are located and the population served. If you are a resident, start with the ward in which you live.
2. Next briefly explain why you are writing. Include the name or description of the proposed or emergency regulations about which you are commenting.

Middle Paragraphs

1. Solutions/recommendations, action you want taken. Be specific. If there is language you believe should be changed, give the language in the proposed regulations and the language you believe should replace it.
2. Provide a rationale for the changes. If based on research, provide the research and/or a link to it.

Last Paragraph

1. Summarize the issue and action you want taken
2. Offer assistance and be sure to provide your phone and email

Note

Where to find proposed regulations: *District of Columbia Register*, <http://dcregs.dc.gov/>

Resources required:

- Time to prepare, review, edit
- The regulations and understanding
- Letterhead in print or electronic copy
- Proofreader
- Data
- Software to create tables, charts—this can be Word, WordPerfect, Excel, or something comparable. You don't need complicated or expensive software.
- Copies for councilmembers, staff, agency staff, public, and media
- Postage if statement is being mailed

Note

Be sure to pay attention to the comment period deadline. The days counted in the comment period are calendar days.

Tip

If you are using social media. . .

- Post your full testimony on your website and blog, and include it in e-letters or other communications with community, colleagues, donors
- Tweet about your testimony and link to website and blog
- Share your homework via social media networks

Section VIII:

Fact sheets

Fact sheets are an effective way to get your points across quickly. As such, they are especially useful with elected and appointed officials and the media. Fact sheets are also a great tool to educate the public. Finally, they are useful in keeping partners focused on the message.

The optimal length is one page but two pages are fine, especially if printed on both sides. As always, be sure to include the name of your organization and contact information.

The Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired's [*Advocacy and Fact Sheets: Guidelines and Tips*](#) walks readers through every aspect of fact sheet creation. Highlights are:

- Ask for what you want and make requests specific
- Identify the party responsible for making the change, implementing the recommendation
- Keep the message simple and to the point and directed to the audience
- Avoid acronyms and jargon. Use full sentences
- Use language that inspires action and change
- Pay attention to formatting. For example, white space is important, as are graphics, images, and fonts (and size)

Be sure to include all of your contact information. This is often forgotten.

Resources required:

- Time to create, edit, and design
- Time to have reviewed particularly if more than one organization is involved
- Data and information to share
- Software to create tables, charts—this can be Word, WordPerfect, Excel, or something comparable. You don't need complicated or expensive software.
- Postage if fact sheet is being mailed
- Transportation if fact sheet is being hand-delivered
- Colleagues, partners, collaborators (if a collaborative effort)
- Time to blog or post on your website
- Outreach plan and the time to implement it

Where to find public policy, budget and other government information:

- Legislative Information Management System (LIMS), <http://dcclims1.dccouncil.us/lims/>
- *District of Columbia Register, DC Municipal Regulations* (DCMR), mayor's orders, <http://dcregs.dc.gov/>
- Mayor's proposed budgets, budget.dc.gov
- Approved budgets, cfo.dc.gov

Note



Tip

Publish the fact sheet in Word (.doc) or PDF. Avoid programs many individuals don't have, such as Publisher and PowerPoint.



Tip

If you are using social media. . .

- Post your full testimony on your website and blog, and include it in e-letters or other communications with community, colleagues, donors
- Tweet about your testimony and link to website and blog
- Share your homework via social media networks

Section IX:

Meeting with elected and appointed officials

Meeting with government officials is a good way to introduce yourself and your organization, share ideas, work out problems with legislation/budget proposals, address implementation challenges, and create better ways of meeting the needs of residents. The information shared in this and in other ways helps the officials do their jobs better.

Listening cannot be overemphasized. Members and staff have thoughts and questions and if you want to be helpful you will listen and try to address them.

You should also meet with executive and legislative branch staffers. The staffers do all the research on legislation and budget proposals and they use the information to help their bosses form their positions. As is the case with officials, staff appreciate and value research, introductions to experts, briefings on issues, and questions to ask government representatives at public hearings and roundtables.

The mechanics of meeting with government officials:

- Schedule the meeting: Contact the official's scheduler or assistant with the meeting request. The request should provide the basics about the purpose of the meeting. Be sure to find out the amount of time you will have. This should be done well in advance.
- Meeting attendees: The group meeting with the official should be small; three is optimal when only the official is present, four is okay with an official and a staffer.
- Prepare and practice: Know your issue inside and out, including arguments against it so you can address them should they arise. If you have materials—such as a fact sheet—explaining your issue, bring and provide to the official and staff. Each attendee should have a role to play in the meeting and you should practice—and time—the meeting.
- One person should be the group leader, keeping the meeting and messaging on point.

Note

Where to find elected officials:

- DC government, dc.gov
- Council of the District of Columbia, www.dccouncil.us
- Advisory Neighborhood Commissioners (ANCs), www.anc.dc.gov

Note

Be flexible; meeting times and duration change.

Some do's and don'ts from Volunteers of America:

- Do not be surprised by a lack of interest, or what seems like a negative or skeptical reaction. Do not be defensive or argumentative.
- Do not answer a question if you do not know the answer. Make note about the question and tell him/her that you will call or write back with the answer.
- Do not threaten an official who does not support your position or issue with action against him/her by your organization. Such threats are always counterproductive.
- Do not ignore, insult, or burn bridges with an official or staffer, no matter how insignificant his/her role.
- Do not make disrespectful remarks about the current administration (e.g., for not proposing sufficient funding for your program). You do not need any enemies in the executive branch.
- Do not talk negatively about an official or staffer while you are in, or near, the John A. Wilson Building. No matter where you go—in the hallways, in the break rooms, on the sidewalks—you never know who may be listening.

Resources required:

- Time for scheduling the meeting, attending the meeting, coordinating attendees, and follow-up
- Contact information for officials and staff
- Transportation to get to meeting
- Organizational skills if bringing a group with
- Colleagues, partners, collaborators if applicable
- Agenda for meeting—it does not have to be formal, but something written is appreciated by the officials and staff
- Business cards

Where to find public policy, budget and other government information:

- Legislative Information Management System (LIMS), <http://dcclims1.dccouncil.us/lims/>
- *District of Columbia Register, DC Municipal Regulations* (DCMR), mayor's orders, <http://dcregs.dc.gov/>
- Mayor's proposed budgets, budget.dc.gov
- Approved budgets, cfo.dc.gov



Note



Tip

Find out how officials and staff learn. Are they visual, auditory, or tactile? Once you know, try to provide information to them so they will first pay attention and second learn about your issues.

Section X:

Briefing elected and appointed officials

Briefings are usually focused on one issue and are interactive with a panel presentation and questions from the audience. They can be used to introduce a report or analysis, introduce leaders to the issue, or kick off a campaign or new initiative.

The practical issues associated with planning a briefing for DC elected and appointed officials:

- They are best attended when held at the John A. Wilson Building. Get a councilmember's office to reserve the room for the event.
- Food is a magnet but it does not have to bankrupt you. Staff are perfectly happy with bagels, muffins, fruit, coffee, tea, and juice.
- Morning seems to be the best time for DC officials.
- Send the first invitation about three weeks before the event. Then send a reminder one week out and one day out. The day of, distribute fliers (presuming invitees are in the JAWB).

More information about briefings, albeit from the government's perspective, is available from the [Federal Highway Administration](#).

Note

Where to find elected officials:

- DC government, dc.gov and <http://mayor.dc.gov/DC/Mayor/About+the+Mayor/Cabinet+Appointees>
- Council of the District of Columbia, www.dccouncil.us
- Advisory Neighborhood Commissioners (ANCs), www.anc.dc.gov

Note

Where to find public policy, budget and other government information:

- Legislative Information Management System (LIMS), <http://dcclims1.dccouncil.us/lims/>
- District of Columbia Register, DC Municipal Regulations, mayor's orders, <http://dcregs.dc.gov/>
- Mayor's proposed budgets, budget.dc.gov
- Approved budgets, cfo.dc.gov

Tip

Don't schedule briefings on the first and third Tuesdays of the month. These are legislative meeting and Committee of the Whole days.

Resources required:

- Time to organize the event, invite officials and staff, order or buy food, distribute reminders the day of the event, and develop and copy presentation materials
- Supplies for the event—signs for the room, sign-in sheets, handouts, table tents (if you are doing a presentation), plates and the like (if not provided by caterer)
- Transportation to and from the John A. Wilson Building
- Organizing skills if other organizations are involved
- Outreach skills to officials and staff, partners (if appropriate), and the public (if appropriate)
- Public speaking skills
- Media access (if appropriate)
- Influence peddlers (if appropriate)
- Colleagues, partners, collaborators
- Money for food
- Photographer

The John A. Wilson Building, along with all other DC government buildings, has a 100% ID check policy. This means that all visitors must have a photo ID—either a driver’s license or government-issued ID card.

Note

It is possible for those without a photo ID to enter DC government buildings. A government worker, someone from the office or agency with which you are meeting, must sign these individuals into the building. When an individual without ID arrives at a government building, call up to the office they are visiting; the staffer must come down and sign the person in.

Tip

Check out this free event planning guide online (Word, .doc). A room set-up guide, from Fine Speakers Bureau, is [here](#).

Tip

Follow up with all the invitees with special thanks to those who attended. Attach handouts to the email.

Section XI:

Meeting with legislative and executive branch staff

Working with staff is one of the most important things you can do to advance your public policy, practice, and budget agenda. Executive and legislative branch staff do the work, and thus are the people you should communicate with on a regular basis. Sure, their bosses set the agenda, but the staffers implement it and have a great deal of leeway.

The mechanics of meeting with staff:

- Schedule the meeting: Contact the staffer via email or phone; an official request via letter is not necessary. Naturally, you should provide the basics about the purpose of the meeting. Be sure to find out the amount of time you will have.
- Meeting attendees: The maximum size of a group meeting with one staffer is three.
- Prepare: Know your issue inside and out, including arguments against it so you can address them should they arise. If you have materials—such as a fact sheet—explaining your issue, bring them. Meetings with staff are generally less formal than meeting with officials. Nonetheless, having roles for each member of the group makes sense if it is a first meeting or there are numerous points being addressed.
- One person should be the group leader and keep the meeting and messaging focused.

Some do's and don'ts from Volunteers of America:

- Do not be surprised by a lack of interest, or what seems like a negative or skeptical reaction. Do not be defensive or argumentative.
- Do not answer a question if you do not know the answer. Make note about the question and tell him/her that you will call or write back with the answer.
- Do not threaten an official who does not support your position or issue with action against him/her by your organization. Such threats are always counterproductive.
- Do not ignore, insult, or burn bridges with an official or staffer, no matter how insignificant his/her role.
- Do not make disrespectful remarks about the current administration (e.g., for not proposing sufficient funding for your program). You do not need any enemies in the executive branch.
- Do not talk negatively about an official or staffer while you are in, or near, the John A. Wilson Building. No matter where you go—in the hallways, in the break rooms, on the sidewalks—you never know who may be listening.

Note

Be flexible; meeting times and duration change.

Resources required:

- Time to schedule and attend meeting
- Understanding of who does what
- Transportation to and from meeting
- Organizing skills if multiple parties are invited
- Influence peddlers to attend meeting
- Money to pay for parking or transportation
- Business cards

Note

Where to find elected officials:

- DC government, dc.gov and <http://mayor.dc.gov/DC/Mayor/About+the+Mayor/Cabinet+Appointees>
- Council of the District of Columbia, www.dccouncil.us
- Advisory Neighborhood Commissioners (ANCs), www.anc.dc.gov

Note

Where to find public policy, budget and other government information:

- Legislative Information Management System (LIMS), <http://dcclims1.dccouncil.us/lims/>
- District of Columbia Register, DC Municipal Regulations, mayor's orders, <http://dcregs.dc.gov/>
- Mayor's proposed budgets, budget.dc.gov
- Approved budgets, cfo.dc.gov

Note

The John A. Wilson Building, along with all other DC government buildings, has a 100% ID check policy. This means that all visitors must have a photo ID—either a driver's license or government-issued ID card.

It is possible for those without a photo ID to enter DC government buildings. A government worker, someone from the office or agency with which you are meeting, must sign these individuals into the building. When an individual without ID arrives at a government building, call up to the office they are visiting; the staffer must come down and sign the person in.

Section XII:

Phone calls to elected officials

Telephone calls can be effective when your goal is to record your views on a proposal or pending vote. They are also effective when you can state your position clearly and concisely. As such, they are commonly used as part of a call to action—a way to engage the community to weigh in on an issue.

Receptionists and not officials take the calls as a rule.

Phone calls are not generally used to communicate complicated issues or to educate officials on an issue.

The mechanics of phone calls:

- Be clear and succinct when you leave your message
- Ask the official to take a specific action
- You may be asked for your name and ward of residence. If you reside in the member's ward, mention this. If you are a DC resident calling an At-large member, tell them what ward you live in. If you work in the District, tell the staffer what ward your organization is in.

Resources required:

- Time to make the call
- Contact information for elected officials

Note

Where to find elected officials:

- DC government, dc.gov and <http://mayor.dc.gov/DC/Mayor/About+the+Mayor/Cabinet+Appointees>
- Council of the District of Columbia, www.dccouncil.us
- Advisory Neighborhood Commissioners (ANCs), www.anc.dc.gov

Note

Where to find public policy, budget and other government information:

- Legislative Information Management System (LIMS), <http://dcclims1.dccouncil.us/lims/>
- *District of Columbia Register*, *DC Municipal Regulations* (DCMR), mayor's orders, <http://dcregs.dc.gov/>
- Mayor's proposed budgets, budget.dc.gov
- Approved budgets, cfo.dc.gov

Section XIII:

Facility tours

A visit to a community-based program and interacting with its clients can illustrate community member needs and challenges to elected and appointed officials like nothing else can. An added benefit is that the visit is a real way to establish or solidify a relationship with an elected official and his/her staff.

The steps for setting up a tour are straightforward, but know that it may take some time to get on the elected official's schedule.

Step 1: Invitation

Fax, mail, or email a letter of invitation to the official, his scheduler, and chief of staff. Mention the number of clients served by your program/facility, your service area, and the number of employees. Also estimate the time it would take for the tour, meeting with key staff, and any other activities you include in the tour.

Step 2: Getting ready for the visit

Involving a variety of friends of the organization—staff, board members, key volunteers—and clients is essential. Prepare staff and clients in advance about the purpose of the visit, the schedule, and the role they will play. The [Afterschool Alliance](#) among others suggests scheduling a panel or other interactive forum for the elected official and clients.

Share the most essential facts about your organization during the visit; you can share others in a packet, in the follow-up, or later in the relationship. For the visit, consider sharing information about the types of clients served, the services provided, the outcomes achieved by clients, best practices or innovative practices employed, the role your organization plays in the community, and the number of clients served along with the trends.

The National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization has other tips in a [one-pager](#) (PDF).

Send the official's scheduler or other staff person an agenda for the visit in advance.

Step 3: The visit

The executive director should greet the elected official, give a tour, and provide an opportunity for official to meet with clients and staff, as appropriate.

Step 4: After the visit

Send a thank you letter and include any other information you want to share with the official and his/her staff. Best is a handwritten note or typed letter, not an email.

Resources required:

- Time to organize the visit
- Postage if request is mailed
- Public speaking skills
- Media access if the media is invited to the event
- Influence peddlers to attend the event and meet with the elected official
- Money for food, etc.
- Photographer

Note

Where to find elected and appointed officials:

- DC government, dc.gov and <http://mayor.dc.gov/DC/Mayor/About+the+Mayor/Cabinet+Appointees>
- Council of the District of Columbia, www.dccouncil.us
- Advisory Neighborhood Commissioners (ANCs), www.anc.dc.gov

Note

Be flexible; meeting times and duration change.

Tip

Post pictures of the visit on your website or blog and write a story for your newsletter. Send pictures to officials; consider framing the best one for the official.

Section XIV:

The value of nice

Being nice goes a long way in maintaining relationships with elected and appointed officials and staff.

Nice means sending cards for births, deaths, promotions, marriage, and more. It also means calling occasionally to say hello and find out what's new.

Resources required:

- Time to learn the news
- Postage
- Cards



Buy personalized note cards for your organization. Include the logo, brief description, and all contact information (phone, address, website, Twitter, Facebook). Use these for handwritten notes.

Section XV: Conclusion

This guide should be viewed and used for what it really is: A starting place for advocacy, hopefully effective and engaging advocacy.

The step-by-step guides and the tips and notes are designed to help individuals and organizations do what is necessary to perform professionally and consistently. What is not contained in this guide is the passion and creativity needed to make these tips and steps shine. There are many ways for individuals and organizations of all kinds to add their own twist to the basics and I encourage you to get the basics down and then add your something special.

What is special? Special was the fairy tale about early care and education and pictures representing some of the children on the waiting list for the Child Care Subsidy Program. Special was the Halloween Costume Parade through the office of the DC Council with costumed children delivering the message of putting human needs first and delivering treats to the councilmembers and their staff. And special is the not shiny or public hard, regular work put in to achieve your agenda.

Creativity can flourish when you have the basics down. No time like the present to start getting the basics down.

Now go forth and do good.

Section XVI:

Resources and extras

Resources:

- Advisory Neighborhood Commissioners (ANCs), <http://anc.dc.gov/anc/site/default.asp> and <http://bit.ly/dc-ancs> (Excel file of names emails that can be imported)
- Afterschool Alliance, <http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/reachPolicySiteVisit.cfm>
- Approved budgets, cfo.dc.gov
- Citizen Atlas, <http://citizenatlas.dc.gov/atlasapps/reporhometab.aspx>
- Council of the District of Columbia, www.dccouncil.us
- DC government, dc.gov and <http://mayor.dc.gov/DC/Mayor/About+the+Mayor/Cabinet+Appointees>
- *DC Municipal Regulations* (DCMR), <http://dcregs.dc.gov/>
- *District of Columbia Register*, <http://dcregs.dc.gov/>
- Event planning guide, <http://www.keepandshare.com/doc/3092119/eventplanningtool-062511-doc-august-22-2011-10-29-am-92k?da=y>
- Federal Highway Administration, <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/reports/pittd/briefing.htm>
- Fine Speakers Bureau, http://www.finespeakers.com/room_setup.html
- Legislative Information Management System (LIMS), <http://dcclims1.dccouncil.us/lims/>
- Mayor's orders, <http://dcregs.dc.gov/>
- Mayor's proposed budgets, budget.dc.gov
- National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization, http://www.hospiceactionnetwork.org/learningcenter/tip_sheets_files/Tip_Sheet_Documents/5_Steps_to_A_Great_Facility_Tour.pdf
- Office of Boards and Commissions, <http://obc.dc.gov>
- Office of Cable Television (OCT), <http://oct.dc.gov/main.shtm>
- Office of Cable Television (OCT), Channel 13, <http://oct.dc.gov/services/channel13/menu.shtm>
- Office of Cable Television (OCT), Channel 16, <http://oct.dc.gov/services/channel16/menu.shtm>
- Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired's Advocacy and Fact Sheets: Guidelines and Tips, <http://tsbvi.edu/how-do-i-become-a-vi-professional/3190-advocacy-and-fact-sheets-guidelines-and-tips>
- Volunteers of America, <http://www.voa.org/Get-Involved/Advocate/Tips-Tools>

Extras:

Information about the Council of the District of Columbia

- Location of the John A. Wilson Building (JAWB, Wilson Building): 1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW. The mailing address is
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20004
- Council offices are located on the ground, first, fourth, and fifth floors.
- Access to the Wilson Building: There are four public entrances to the JAWB. The main entrance is on Pennsylvania Avenue in the center of the building. A second entrance is on D Street, NW at the rear of the building between the JAWB and the Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center.

There are two entrances that will accommodate individuals in wheelchairs: The ramp on Pennsylvania Avenue, NW (facing the front of the Wilson Building, to the left of the staircase to the main entrance) and the lift on D Street, NW (facing the rear of the Wilson Building, to the right of the entrance).

- Accommodations: There are two entrances that will accommodate individuals in wheelchairs: The ramp on Pennsylvania Avenue, NW (facing the front of the Wilson Building, to the left of the staircase to the main entrance) and the lift on D Street, NW (facing the rear of the Wilson Building, to the right of the entrance). There are three elevator banks in the building; all are wheelchair fitted as well as retrofitted for the visually impaired. All entrances to council hearing rooms are wheelchair accessible.

The DC Council reports it is working toward implementing Language Access mandates. This means that with adequate notice, they will ensure translators are on-site for LEP or NEP speakers.

- The John A. Wilson Building, along with all other DC government buildings, has a 100% ID check policy. This means that all visitors must have a photo ID—either a driver’s license or government-issued ID card.

It is possible for those without a photo ID to enter DC government buildings. A government worker, someone from the office or agency with which you are meeting, must sign these individuals into the building. When an individual without ID arrives at a government building, call up to the office they are visiting; the staffer must come down and sign the person in.

-
- Not sure what ward you live in? Find this and more in [Citizen Atlas](#), a terrific search tool operated by the DC government. The primary results have a link to your ward DC Council representative.
 - Each Council committee has purview over numerous agencies; the council rules outline agency assignments.
 - The rules are the first legislative action of the Council Period (CP) performed by the DC Council each year. The rules can be found in the Legislative Information Management System (LIMS) and take the number PR (CP number)-0001.
 - The difference between a public hearing and public roundtable: The sole difference is the notice required. Public hearings require 15 days notice while roundtables require significantly less. Among other notice locations and mechanisms, notice may be given by publication in the [DC Register](#), a general circulation newspaper, and posting on the DC Council's website. There is a good cause exception to the notice requirement. When good cause is found, an abbreviated notice is published.
 - Hearing and other notices are published in the [DC Register](#).
 - Follow and engage elected and appointed officials and staff using social media. There is not one place where you can find Twitter handles, Facebook pages, etc. so you will have to look around.
 - The email system for the DC Council is [firstinitiallastname@dccouncil.us](#). Example: John Smith's email would be [jsmith@dccouncil.us](#). There are some exceptions.
 - DC Council hearings, roundtables and other activities that are taped are shown on [Channel 13](#), one of two government channels operated by the Office of Cable Television. Hearings and events are streamed live and are also available on demand.

Information about the executive branch

- Location of the John A. Wilson Building (JAWB, Wilson Building): 1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW. The mailing address is
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20004
- The executive branch has offices on the ground, second, third, fourth, fifth, and sixth floors.

-
- Access to the Wilson Building: There are four public entrances to the JAWB. The main entrance is on Pennsylvania Avenue in the center of the building. A second entrance is on D Street, NW at the rear of the building between the JAWB and the Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center. There are two entrances that will accommodate individuals in wheelchairs: The ramp on Pennsylvania Avenue, NW (facing the front of the Wilson Building, to the left of the staircase to the main entrance) and the lift on D Street, NW (facing the rear of the Wilson Building, to the right of the entrance).
 - The John A. Wilson Building, along with all other DC government buildings, has a 100% ID check policy. This means that all visitors must have a photo ID—either a driver’s license or government-issued ID card.

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- Hearing and other notices are published in the [DC Register](#).
- Follow and engage elected and appointed officials and staff using social media. There is not one place where you can find Twitter handles, Facebook pages, etc. so you will have to look around.
- The email system for the executive branch is [firstname.lastname@dc.gov](#). Example: John Smith’s email would be [john.smith@dc.gov](#). There are some exceptions.
- Mayoral and other executive branch events—press conferences, speaking engagements, announcements—that are taped are shown on [Channel 16](#), one of two government channels operated by the Office of Cable Television. Select events are streamed live, scheduled and available on demand.

Advisory Neighborhood Commissions

- Advisory Neighborhood Commissions are an important component of the District's political and community structure. From the [ANC website](#),

The Advisory Neighborhood Commissions consider a wide range of policies and programs affecting their neighborhoods, including traffic, parking, recreation, street improvements, liquor licenses, zoning, economic development, police protection, sanitation and trash collection, and the District's annual budget.

In each of these areas, the intent of the ANC legislation is to ensure input from an advisory board that is made up of the residents of the neighborhoods that are directly affected by government action. The ANCs are the body of government with the closest official ties to the people in a neighborhood.

The ANCs present their positions and recommendations on issues to various District government agencies, the Executive Branch, and the Council. They also present testimony to independent agencies, boards, and commissions, usually under the rules of procedure specific to those entities. By law, the ANCs may also present their positions to Federal agencies.

- Not sure what ANC you live in? Find this and more in [Citizen Atlas](#), a terrific search tool operated by the DC government. The primary results have a link to your Single Member District (SMD) ANC representative. The SMD is an area encompassing about 2,000 residents.
- The email system for ANCs is [SMDnumber@anc.dc.gov](#). Example: ANC 1A01's email would be [1A01@anc.dc.gov](#). Some ANCs choose to use other email addresses but there is not a list of those. There is a list of ANC emails using the system [online as a Google doc](#).

Other

- Boards and commissions perform important and essential work in the District. Some provide community and expert perspectives while others are responsible for professional licensing. From the [website](#):

The District of Columbia has more than 150 different boards and commissions. These boards or commissions are independent bodies that provide important advisory, regulatory, policy-making services as part of the Government of the District of Columbia. Members of boards and commissions provide an invaluable service to the District by advising the Mayor, the Council of the District of Columbia and the Citizens of the District on a variety of significant matters. Members are appointed to boards and commissions by the Mayor, and generally serve without compensation. Members may be appointed to a board or commission by a direct appointment, or appointed through the nominations process whereby an appointment is confirmed by the Council of the District of Columbia.
- Event planning is common and often nonprofits do not have professional or dedicated event planners. A [free guide](#) is available online (Word, .doc). A room set-up guide, from Fine Speakers Bureau, is [here](#).

**John A. Wilson Building
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW**



13 1/2 Street, NW and entrance to Ronald Reagan Building parking garage and D Street, NW entrance to JAWB

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