

## Government Relations for Friends of National Parks

### COMMUNICATING WITH ELECTED OFFICIALS TO SUPPORT YOUR PARKS

Effectively conveying the importance of parks to policymakers is one of the most important roles of philanthropic park partners. While 501(c)(3) status limits partners' ability to lobby for specific legislation, there is still an important responsibility to educate elected officials about what works well for parks and areas that need improvement. Whether you are talking to a municipal office or a Member of Congress, the work of your organization provides an important local perspective that cannot be duplicated by organizations in Washington.

#### **Building Relationships**

Getting to know policymakers and their staffs can be highly beneficial for your organization and park. A strong relationship built over time is likely to produce better outcomes in situations that require government involvement than if you wait until those moments to connect with policymakers. Do not worry if you do not get a response or that you have inundated their offices with information – consistent outreach is the key. One of the best ways to engage policymakers upfront is to invite them and their staff to your parks. Give them a tour of the facilities, introduce them to the Superintendent, and detail the positive impact your organization and park have on local communities. These visits can create a lasting impression that will serve as a reminder of the importance of parks for a long time to come.

#### **Parks as Economic Drivers**

Regardless of party affiliation, elected officials usually have a positive view of parks in/around their district and you play a major role in confirming that impression. [Parks are an economic driver to communities throughout the country](#) and, as supporters of parks, your ability to garner additional financial output to/from parks is critical. Be sure to reference any programs that increase park visitation, improve infrastructure, and engage diverse communities. It can also be beneficial to mention projects done in collaboration with other community-based organizations and local businesses that benefit from park visitation. The more you can identify a wide array of stakeholders that have a vested interest in your park, it becomes clear that constituents find the park a valuable community/district resource.

#### **Saying Thank You**

Highlighting any projects funded by governmental dollars in your park is especially important. Whether your park got local funding to support the building of a visitor's center, is receiving federal funds to conduct research projects, or participates in *Every Kid in a Park*, thanking policymakers for appropriating funds is just as critical as asking for future support.

#### **Sharing Your Park's Stories with Lawmakers and the Surrounding Community**

In discussing areas where there is need for support on a specific project, be sure to share anecdotes that articulate why and where further help is needed. Providing context by telling stories can be incredibly helpful in securing financial and political support, especially when you are talking about the experiences of constituents in their communities. Just remember that there is nobody better suited to advocate for your parks than you!

*For ideas about how to best use tools like these to support the work of your organization, contact the Community Partnerships team at NPF directly.*