

# Working with Local Government

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## Consider the Problem

- You have a finite number of decision-makers on any given issue
- There is an infinite number of issues which they are being asked to consider
- You have an ever expanding number of people trying to reach them

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How do I get my issues heard above the noise and clutter of other people trying to reach the same group of decision-makers?



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**Local Level**

- The local level of government and society is where most of the world's people live and work. It can be where decision making has the most impact on day-to-day lives
- The local level is where citizenship most gets to express itself

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**You Have an Advantage**

- Many public transportation agencies are part of nonprofit organizations
- Nonprofits have been and continue to be the primary vehicle of civic involvement in the U.S.
- They are generally known to have the public's best interest at heart

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**Advocacy**

Focuses on the ability to:

- Educate
- Negotiate
- Influence



Advocating starts by building relationships.

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**Action Steps**

- Identifying your issue
- Building a cross-sectional network of support
- Developing a "campaign"
- Know your opposition
- Researching your "targets"
- Communicate effectively

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**Action Steps**

- Research and support your issue
- Be absolutely accurate
- Know the impact of the problems you are discussing
- Become the "go to" person that is called upon for advice when it comes to transportation issues in your area

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**Plan, Plan, Plan**

- Pick clear, specific goals
- Short-term goals should be logical steps to your ultimate end goal
- Know the final outcome you want
- Write down the incremental steps it takes to get there
- Know the decision-making processes that apply

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### Articulate Your Goal

- Include specific recommendations for change or action
- Provide exact language for any proposal you want a decision-maker to support
- Be prepared with alternative recommendations as a basis for negotiation

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### Gaining Influence

Consumers and people you are trying to influence, place more weight on the "word-of-mouth" insights of their more influential neighbors, than on what they hear on TV or read in the newspaper.

*The Influentials, Ed Keller and Jon Berry*

**WHY?**  
**How do we reach them?**

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### The Circle of Influence

Solicit support from community groups

- Chamber of Commerce
- Employers
- Neighborhood Associations
- Professional Groups
- League of Women Voters
- AARP
- RSVP



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**Friends of Transit**

- Riders
- Adult children of passengers
- Parents of children who ride the bus
- Dialysis unit employees
- Cancer treatment centers
- Clinics
- Hairdressers
- Pharmacies

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**Build a Wave**

- Everyone knows someone
- Ask around for ideas
- When you find someone to help, ask that person to recommend others
- Building layers of support creates a "domino effect"



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**Use the Media**

- Keep local media informed
- Know how to do a press release
- Get scheduled on local radio talk shows
- Submit guest editorials to local papers
- Set up public meetings with community leaders and the public and publicize these through the media (PSAs)

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### Developing a Campaign

- Choose a message
- Coordinate your delivery
- Pick the appropriate venue to make your point



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### Ride a Bus!

How many local decision-makers have ever taken public transportation to get to work...  
to go to a social event...  
to get to church...

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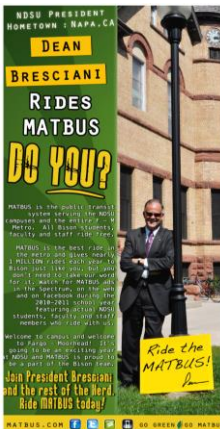
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### Know Your Targets

- There are a handful of people who usually control the fate of any decision or legislation
- Find out who they are
- Focus your attention on them



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### Know Your Targets

Research your "targets"

- Where did they grow up?
- Where do they work?
- Who are their current and former colleagues?
- Where do they gather?

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### Know Your Targets

Research your "targets"

- Do they have aging parents?
- Do they have school-age children?
- What social organizations/clubs do they belong to?

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### Know Your Targets

Research your "targets"

- Whom do your targets turn to for political and policy advice?
  - Whom do they trust on your issue?
- (NOTE – Major campaign contributors are always good messengers)

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### Know Your Opposition

- Determine who disagrees with your position
- Know their arguments against your proposal
- Know what they will say about you
- Know what they will say about themselves
- Craft your approach with the opposition in mind

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### Know Your Opposition

- Treat those who disagree with you with respect
- Be honest in your responses to their criticisms
- Don't be afraid to admit weaknesses in your position




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### Avoid Party Politics

- If it isn't a political party issue, don't make it one
- Transit has friends on both sides of the aisle
- You do not want to alienate anyone




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### Storytelling

- Advocating, like all persuasion, is story telling
- Develop a positive story
- Sympathetic characters
- Involve hope, tragedy, & triumph

“If a story is not about the hearer he will not listen. And here I make a rule — a great and interesting story is about everyone or it will not last.”

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### Storytelling

Tell how you are concerned about an issue and how it affects your agency, your passengers, the community ...




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### Storytelling

Who delivers your message is as important as what is said



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### Storytelling

- Relationships require trust
- Never lie or misrepresent the truth
- Don't exaggerate problems
- Just telling people our problems does not engage them
- Lay out why your solution is the key to solving the problem

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### Making Your Case

- Do not say, "We want you to support public transportation."
- Rather, request support for a specific action
- Bill, resolution, letter of support, etc.



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### Making Your Case

- Establish that the decision-makers clearly understand your objectives
- Make sure they know if you are asking for their support or opposition to the bill or issue being addressed in its current form

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### Making Your Case

- Once involved, stay current
- Check the progress of issues up for discussion or for a vote. Often action occurs quickly and with little notice



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### Keys to Success

- Be brief
- Be candid
  - The decision maker recognizes your self-interest
- Be prepared
  - Produce a one-page executive overview as a guide and as a handout
- Don't wander
  - Stay on topic

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### Keys to Success

- Always be on time and have all your materials organized and ready to go
- Be alert and interested in what is going on around you while you are waiting to speak  
(be an active listener)
- Be positive and have energy

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### Don't Be Intimidated



Remember, elected officials need to be responsive to constituent comments.

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### Elected Officials

- Legislators are interested in the opinions of their own constituents
- The most effective messages come from local mayors, city council members, county commissioners, and other municipal officials

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### Elected Officials

- Elected officials like their jobs, and work hard to keep them
- It is your job to make the decision to support you the politically expedient thing for them to do
- They know why it is good for you. Tell them why it is good for them and their constituents

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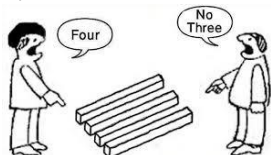
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### Elected Officials

- Don't try to get them to see the world your way
- Try to see it their way and figure out how your proposal/issue/bill fits in with that



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### Elected Officials

- Some individuals are much harder to influence than others
- While a few adopt a new idea quickly, others will take a "wait and see" approach and not do anything until everyone else has signed up
- Keep track of these decision-makers and keep them "in the loop" of who is supporting your issues

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### Elected Officials

- Remember, most people who have chosen to play a leadership role in the political process have good intentions
- Acknowledge differences and treat the person with respect. Argue the merits of your position, not the character of the decider

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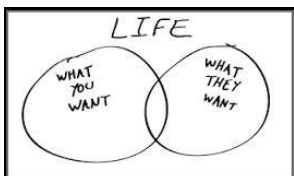
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### Be Flexible



Sometimes compromise is a must

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### Updates

- Update your supporters regularly throughout the year
- Make contact with your decision-makers on a regular basis, not just when you need them



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### Express Appreciation

- Remember to thank your elected officials in person and in writing for their support
- Don't forget to acknowledge them publicly as well



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### Pay Back and Pay Forward

- Offer to send letters to the editor applauding action taken on behalf of local projects (your own and others)
- Attend town hall meetings and publicly thank local and statewide officials for supporting public transit

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### Defining Success

The ability to make connections between you, your organization and decision-makers such that each can recognize the value in each other



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**Activity**

The Art of Persuasion

- Teams
- Discuss and develop points of persuasion
- Select a spokesperson(s)
- Present to the City Council



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