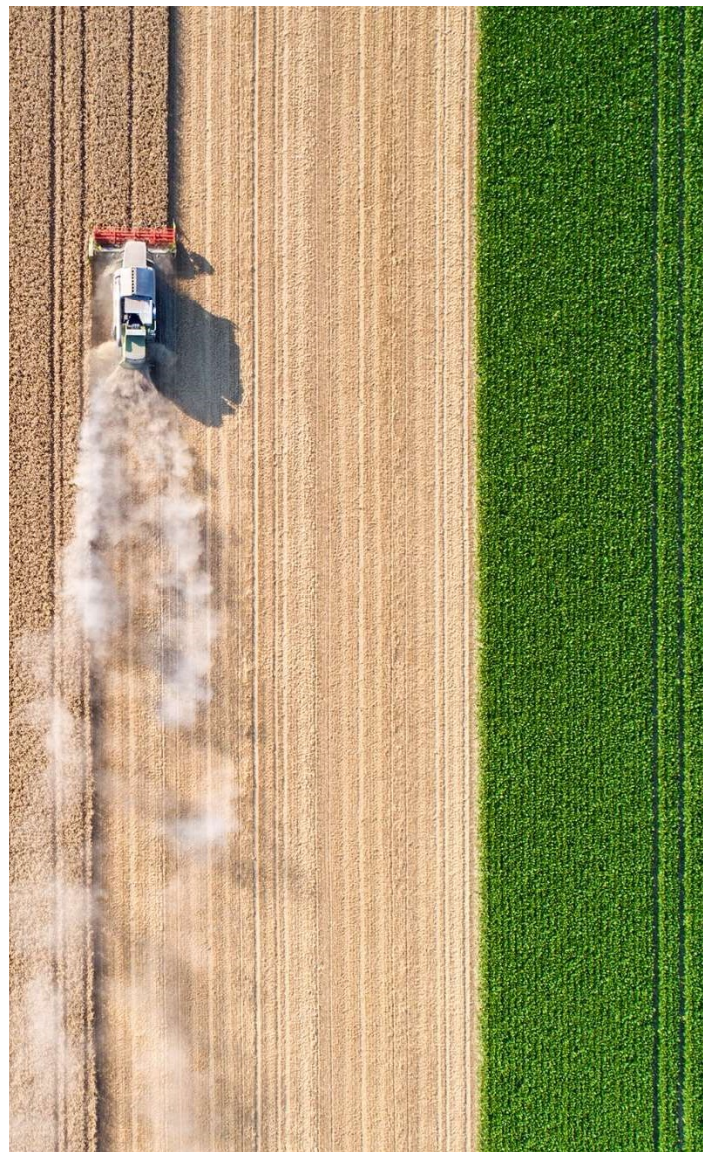

Grow Montana: *Advocacy 101*

July 2024

PREPARED BY:



Advocacy 101

Effective advocacy – educating and championing for a cause or issue – can be a critical component of a comprehensive political strategy. While politics can be divisive and polarizing, Montana is still a handshake state where relationships matter. In order to execute a successful policy effort, it is important for constituents, businesses, and coalition groups to develop strong relationships within the legislative body.

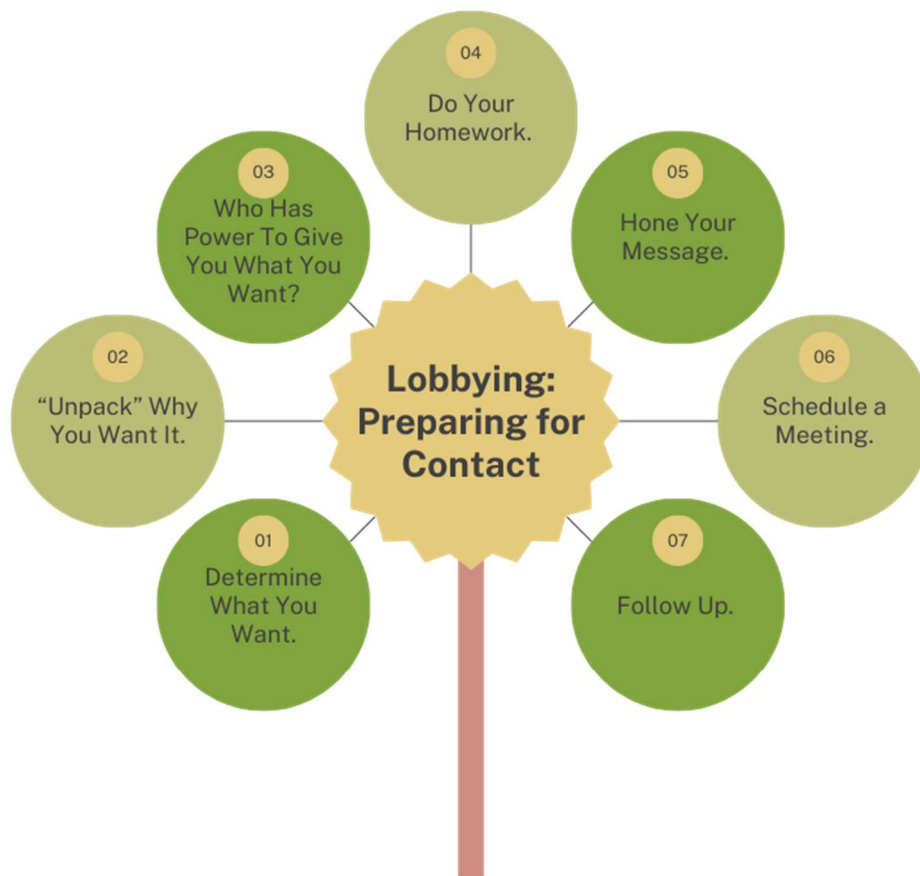
Montana's Legislature: Background

Montana's legislature meets for up to 90 days every other year (odd years). Montana has what is referred to as a "Citizen Legislature". This means that although there is limited compensation for their services, most members of the body have a full-time occupation outside of their legislative work. It also means that legislators have little or no dedicated staff to work on issues, although they do work with nonpartisan legislative staff on things like bill drafting and interim committee research.

Getting Started: Your Issue and Why It's Important

Time is always limited and attention spans are short. In order to prepare for an advocacy contact, you should develop a clear understanding of what you want to communicate, why it is important, and what you hope to accomplish. Before setting a meeting, make sure you have clearly identified your issue, your "ask", and be ready to speak on it in a succinct manner. Remember to avoid or explain any "industry lingo" or terminology that is not widely known.

- **Prepare a short "elevator speech"** – 30 seconds or less – on your entity. This should include who you are, what you do, and why it's important.
- **Identify your issue and develop three key talking points.** While you may have a lot to say, is important not to overwhelm your legislator and keep things simple. It is important to frame your issue in a way that relates to your target. For example, you may want to include economic and constituent impacts in your talking points. Personal stories can be helpful – but make sure they are relevant and relatable (and short!).
- **Determine the "ask".** You should always have an "ask" when meeting with a legislator. It can be as simple as, "Can I keep you updated on this issue as it evolves?"
- **Anticipate questions and prepare answers.** What would a layperson ask you about this topic or issue? If you are asking for a yes or no vote on a specific topic, know who the support/opposition is and be familiar with the pro/con arguments.
- **Develop a One-Pager or Leave Behind Doc.** This will serve as a reference point for the legislator and allow them to take notes on it if needed. You should also have contact information on this sheet.



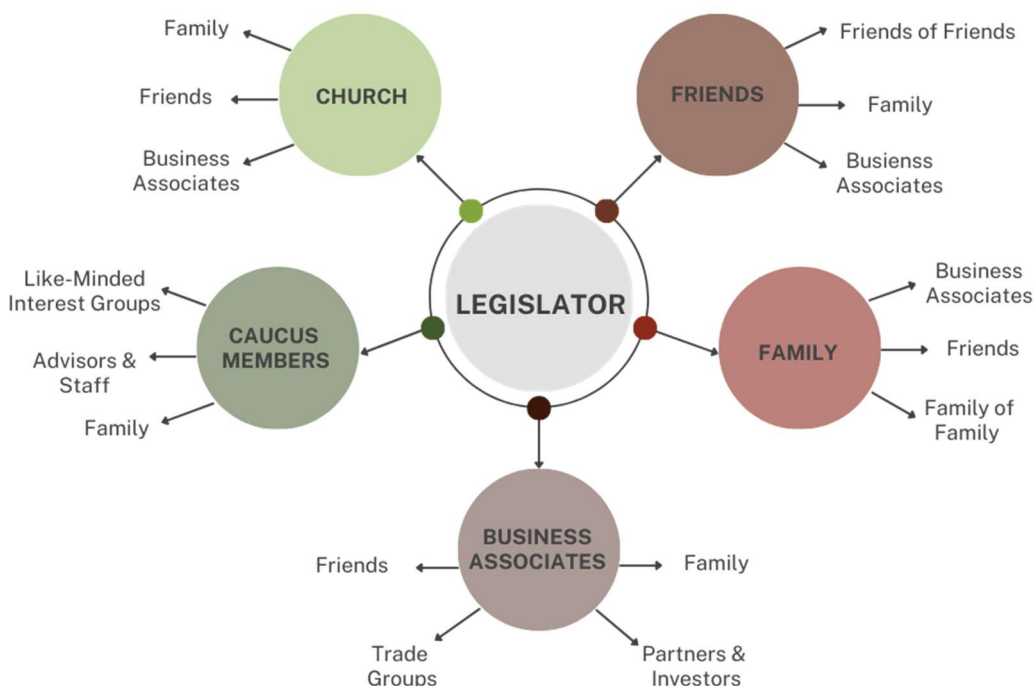
Selecting Your Target Audience: Who Can Give You What You Want

Depending on your specific policy issue, there may be a variety of targets that you would like to meet with to achieve your goal. You may select the Chair of a specific committee, an Agency Director or Governor's Policy Advisor, the Budget Director, or simply your local Senator or Representative. It is important to be strategic in your outreach, as time and resources are limited. For example, a bill needs to make it out of committee before moving to the floor for a vote, so it is more important to meet with relevant committee members before contacting legislators for a floor vote. It is often a good idea to consult a professional to help you craft a strategic outreach plan.

Preparation: Doing Your Homework

It is important to lay the groundwork for a meaningful connection during your meeting. In order to ensure a good impression, you will need to do research to learn more about your legislator or advocacy target.

- **Research their background.** Do a quick google search and look at the [Copper Book](#) (if your target is a sitting legislator). Spend some time on their website or Facebook page learning where they are from, what they do for a living, if they have a family, what groups or volunteer activities they enjoy and if they have any hobbies (fishing, hiking, etc.).
- **Determine their policy priorities and standing.** Campaign websites, news articles, and social media sites are a great way to determine your target's top policy priorities. You can also you may also wish to check the [Montana Session](#) page and [Interim Committee](#) lists to determine leadership positions and session and interim committee assignments. You should also find out when the legislator is up for re-election and when they will be [termed out](#).



- **Put together a “Power Map”.** Power mapping is the process of identifying people and groups with influence and determining how to use those relationships to achieve a goal. Power mapping can be helpful to determine if you and your target share any mutual connections or commonalities. For example, did you go to the same college or high

school? Do you both volunteer with a local food share? Are you both members of the same religious community or faith group?

- **Refine your policy talking points and message.** Based on the information you gather on your target, you may want to refine your message and talking points. For example, you may tweak your key messaging points to align with your target's politics, interests, and background or district/county. Frame the issue in a way that makes sense to the legislator.

Making Contact: Choose Your Venue

While in-person meetings are often the most effective, they are not always possible for a number of reasons. No matter what venue you choose to make contact, make sure to make the most of it.

- **In person.** You make the effort – meet them in their home district if at all possible. Try out a local coffee shop or restaurant. Show up 10 minutes early and put your phone away. Do engage in small talk. Look for commonalities or shared interests. Reach to set the meeting at least two weeks in advance and make sure to send a reminder e-mail to text prior to the meeting. Do offer to pay for coffee or a meal if you are able (be mindful of the \$50 gift limit and any related regulations). Do make a plan to circle back with additional info and always send a thank-you email or card.
- **Zoom.** Make sure to look directly into the camera and spend time on small talk. It may be helpful to read your legislator's local paper to come up with a few non-controversial topics to chat about before getting to the substance of your meeting.
- **E-mail.** Legislators get a lot of e-mail. Any contact via this medium should be short, sweet, and to the point. E-mail is best used when reaching out to set an in-person or zoom meeting, when you have a very specific ask, "Please vote no on X because of Y," or when you would like to send a large volume of documents electronically.
- **Snail Mail.** Snail mail is a great way to follow up – especially with a thank-you note or holiday card. Snail mail should still be short and to the point, and you may want to include a promo sticker, hard copy one-pager, or photo of a recent event where your legislator attended.

Going Above and Beyond: More Ways to Connect

- **Host an event.** Invite your legislator to an event you are hosting or a tour of your facility, farm, office, etc. This can be a great and memorable way for your legislator to interact with your organization.

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- **Generate Positive Media.** If your legislator does attend an event you are hosting, generate a press release with quotes and photos and send it to local media. This is always appreciated.
 - **Show up.** Attend important meetings and events in the legislative district. Talk to your legislator at the event – or- if they aren’t in attendance, call them and ask their opinion or get specific guidance on an issue that was discussed.
 - **Contribute.** Donate to their campaign as a private citizen if you feel comfortable doing so and have the means.
 - **Follow on Social Media.** Follow your legislator on social media – but only engage on positive posts and in positive ways. Avoid conflict of any kind.

Key Tips

Positive interactions lead to positive outcomes. Always remember these key guidelines when acting on behalf of your organization.

- **Always be courteous and professional.** This can be tough, as some political conversations can be heated and emotional. It is important to keep things in perspective and remember you are building a relationship for the long-term.
- **Be respectful of people’s time.** Always arrive early and keep the meeting to the timelines set. Work around their schedule. Remember – most legislators have day jobs!
- **Be honest.** It is fine to say, “I don’t know, but I will do some research and get back to you.” The most important part of a legislative relationship is trust – don’t start things off on the wrong foot with misinformation. Plus – this gives you an opportunity to circle back to the legislator with more information!
- **Make it easy.** Do the legwork so it is easy for your legislator to help you. Prepare the strategy. Draft the bill. Meet with the partner entities to gather support for your position. Keep them apprised of progress – but do the work for them.

Addendum A:

Sample Elevator Speech

The goal of an “Elevator Speech” is to get your listener’s attention and interest - and prompt them into taking some action - whether that is asking for more information, setting up a meeting, or agreeing to support your policy.

An elevator speech should be short - approximately 30 seconds or less. It should include who you are, what you do, and why it’s important. Depending on the time available and the issue, you may also wish to include a specific ask or further detail to establish connection and commonalities.

Sample I

Hi! My name is Jane Doe. I am with (Entity Name) and we are a member of the Grow Montana Coalition. The Coalition works to advocate for food and agriculture policies focusing on economic development and education to support sustainable Montana-owned food production, processing and distribution. In a nutshell, we think that local food, local processing, and local distribution is good for Montana’s economy and good for Montana’s people. This session, we are working on X.

Follow with...

“Would it be ok if I keep you in the loop on the work we are doing?”

“We have a number of producers in your district. Can we find a time to grab coffee or dinner and talk more about how X will impact people in (Town/County, etc.).

“Can we count on you for support?”

Sample II

Hi! My name is John Doe. I’m from (Montana Town) and work for (Entity Name). I am a member of the Grow Montana Coalition and in a nutshell, we work on policies that support local food, local processing, and local distribution to support Montana’s ag economy. We know Montanans want to know where their food comes from and want local options in their supermarkets. That’s why we are working on X.

Follow with...

“I know you are pretty slammed, but it would be great to find a time to give you more detail on our bill and how it would affect your constituents before the hearing. Can I text you to set up a time?”

“I have this one-pager on the policy specifics I can leave you with, but would be happy to sit down and walk through it with you if you have time today.”

“Our bill is going to be in your committee on Wednesday. Can we count on you to vote yes?”

If you have time - find ways to build connections and be memorable.

For Example:

“You are from Havre, right? Have you ever had jerky from Havre Meats Inc.? They are one of our top local producers. They are one of the reasons we are working on this policy....”

“Do you ever go to the Farmer’s Market in Columbia Falls? They have the best produce stand in the far corner with great salsa. Anyway, we have actually been working with them on fixing some outdated language in the statute on Farmers Markets...”

“You are from Whitehall, yes? Maybe you know my grandparents, XYZ. They told me they voted for you!”

Addendum B:

Sample Talking Points

Talking points are key, succinct, informative and/or persuasive statements tailored to an event or audience. They can be adjusted and updated depending on a particular issue, but serve to reinforce important messages. Depending on the focus of a meeting, coalition members can pick and choose talking points to include in important meetings and speaking engagements.

Overarching Messages

- Grow Montana is a broad-based food policy coalition whose goal is to promote community economic development and education policies that support sustainable Montana-owned food production, processing and distribution.
- Local production, processing and distribution are important both to Montana's economy and our citizens' health.
- Local production, processing and distribution is good for Montana's economy and good for Montana's people.

Economy

- Montana family farms and ranches and Montana businesses are the backbone of our economy. Grow Montana's work aims to increase our economic value and drive the positive impacts local foods have in our communities.
- Local food sales in Montana generate approximately \$158 million in revenue. Of that figure, \$118 million comes from sales at stores, restaurants, and processors. Direct to consumer sales (farmer's markets, farm stands, etc.) account for about \$40 million.
- Local food production accounts for more than 1,110 jobs in Montana and supports \$31.9 million in labor income.
- Over the past hundred years, Montana farms and ranches have lost 44% of the food dollar spent by consumers (60% to only 16%). Our state was built on agriculture, and we must pursue smart economic policies to keep our family farms and ranches in production.
- Local foods often garner a more premium price due to their freshness and quality. This means local producers, processors, and distributors generally retain a larger share of profits, enabling them to continue and expand their Montana business.

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- Strong local production, processing and distribution systems help retain Montana's agricultural lands. Across the nation, Montana has one of the highest ratios of quality farmland that ends up being developed. Montana must actively play a role in preserving farmland and farm family's way of life.

Supply Chain

- During the COVID-19 pandemic, we learned that local sources of food, processing and distribution are key elements in reducing supply chain shortages and making sure Montana consumers have access to local food.
- Montanans deserve fresh, local meat choices. Montana needs to decrease reliance on outside production, processing and distribution, particularly in meat processing. Montana is known for its world class meat - yet most of the meat consumed in our state is imported (or re-imported) after it is finished and processed elsewhere.
- Extreme weather events, war (Ukraine), and other additional world stressors are having too much of an impact on our food supply chains creating bottlenecks and disruptions in delivery. Montana must pursue smart food policy to ensure a robust ag economy with access to fresh, local food choices.

Transparency & Consumer Choice

- Montanans deserve transparency and choice when making decisions about the food on their table.
- Food labeling helps consumers determine quality, freshness, nutritional value, and origin.
- When Montanans are aware of where their food is grown, processed and distributed by other Montanans, 9 times out of 10 they will make the choice to buy local.

Farmers Markets

- The local food movement, along with the popularity of Farmers Markets, has grown by over 500% since the 1990's.
- Consumers choose local foods for a variety of reasons, including supporting the local economy and a preference for freshness and quality of local produce.
- Farmers Markets often create a "spillover effect" - where local food events attract buyers into an area they may not otherwise visit, resulting in additional money spent in the local area.

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- Farmers Markets are an increasingly important part of local and regional economies, often adding valuable dollars to agricultural and tourism economies.

Health & Nutrition

- Local food production, processing and distribution has many health benefits including providing fresher foods that retain more nutrients and increasing consumption of healthy foods, such as fruit and veggies, by providing more appealing and high-quality options.
- Consumers choose local foods for a variety of reasons, including supporting the local economy, less environmental impact, more nutritious value and quality taste.
- Access to local, fresh foods often results in consumers eating more fresh healthy foods, which is associated with better health outcomes.
- Food Insecurity - Low access to affordable, healthy foods - has long reaching impacts on physical and mental health, which can include economic impacts in the form of preventable healthcare costs, lower educational attainment, and lost productivity in the workforce. Increasing the availability of local foods can help combat food insecurity.

Food Insecurity

- Food Insecurity - Low access to affordable, healthy foods - has long reaching impacts on physical and mental health, which can include economic impacts in the form of preventable healthcare costs, lower educational attainment, and lost productivity in the workforce. Increasing the availability of local foods can help combat food insecurity.
- The U.S. Department of Agriculture estimates that about 1/3 of Montana's population is at risk of hunger (1 in 10 adults; 1 in 6 children).
- In Montana, 30 of 56 counties are considered a "food desert," meaning individuals living here have limited access to a grocery store or supermarket.
- Montana should make sound policy to increase the local foods market - including production, processing, and distribution - a priority to combat food insecurity and increase economic growth in our state.

Addendum C:

Sample Outreach Email

The goal of a legislator outreach email is to schedule time to meet on a particular issue or topic.

Sample

Subject Line: Grow MT - Legislative Meeting

Hi Rep./Sen. X -

My name is Jane Doe. I am with (Entity Name) and am a member of the Grow Montana Coalition. The Coalition works to advocate for food and agriculture policies focusing on economic development and education to support sustainable Montana-owned food production, processing and distribution.

I am going to be in your area during the week of X and was wondering if you might be available for coffee? I would specifically like to review our legislative agenda and get your advice and perspectives on a few key issues.

Do you have any of the following times open?

Monday, DATE - TIMES
Tuesday, DATE - TIMES
ETC

If you have any questions, feel free to give me a call at NUMBER. You can also check out our website [here](#).

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

NAME

Addendum D:

Sample Follow-up Email

The goal of a legislator follow-up email is to thank the legislator for their time and provide additional information relevant to your meeting.

Sample

Subject Line: Circling Back - Grow MT Meeting

Hi Rep./Sen. X -

Thanks again for meeting with me last week. I appreciate your time and enjoyed getting to know you. Thank you as well for your great questions. I would like to provide some additional information.

- ANSWER Qs
- ANSWER Qs

I have also attached a few electronic documents on X, Y, and Z that may be beneficial.

If you have any questions, feel free to reach out!

Thank you again for your time and I look forward to catching up soon -

Sincerely

NAME

Addendum E:

Sample Member Call to Action Email

The goal of a “call to action” email is to inform members and encourage them to take a specific action. The email should clearly and concisely instruct the member on what to do next in order to keep them engaged.

Sample

Subject Line: Grow Montana Needs You to Tell Sen. Y No!

Hi Name -

Funding for local, fresh foods in Montana schools is under attack and Grow Montana needs your help. SBX, carried by Sen. Y, would completely eliminate funding for local food programs in rural schools - which is bad for our local producers, processors, and distributors and bad for the health of our children. SBX will be heard in the House Ag committee on DATE.

Take action today!

- Call 555-5555 and leave a message for (Sen. Y, Members of the Ag Committee) telling them to **Vote No on SBX.**
- E-mail the Members of the Ag Committee and tell them to **Vote No on SBX.**

Your voice is critical in helping us defeat SBX. Take action today!

Sincerely,
Grow MT Team

Need help? E-mail us at email address.

Want to learn more about this issue? See our attached talking points.