

PARTNERING WITH CANDIDATES AND ELECTED OFFICIALS

Approach candidates and elected officials as a potential ally, not as a supplicant. While you are certainly asking for something, you also have something to offer: **Votes**. Your group represents a certain number of voters—the larger that number, the more powerful an ally you can be for candidates. Some other tips to keep in mind:

Know what you offer, and who you represent.

- ✓ Through your membership, your group represents visibility, publicity, and votes.
- ✓ Keep track of your membership, the size of your mailing list, the number of people who come to your events, and any other mechanisms you have for reaching out to a large number of community members.
- ✓ You can thank officials publicly in your newsletter and at events, letting your members know who supports them.

Develop a polite working relationship.

- ✓ Remember, political advocacy doesn't end with the election.
- ✓ You want the candidate who supports your cause to win—but you want him/her to continue to work with you for the duration of his/her term.
- ✓ After the election is over, continue to build your relationship with the winner.

Look professional.

- ✓ Make sure the official knows that you represent a larger constituency.
- ✓ Give your organization a name, print up official letterhead, type your letters, and keep a membership roster.
- ✓ But don't bring your whole group to the meeting; you don't want to make the official feel he or she is being attacked.

Be prepared.

- ✓ Research the official's voting record on the issues you are concerned with.
- ✓ Bring materials from your group to show that you are serious and committed.

Know the details.

- ✓ Know specifically what you want and specifically why you think it's worth doing.
- ✓ If you are asked a question you don't know the answer to, say you will get the information after the meeting—don't make something up.

Give the official a script—talking points, facts and figures.

- ✓ You want to make her job easy. And you also want to pin her down to specifics so that she can be held accountable later.

Focus on common goals.

- ✓ Whether you voted for the official or not, highlight similar interests that relate to the park.

If the official is unavailable, meet with a senior staff member.

- ✓ Elected officials' staff can often have a great deal of influence.

Give thanks and acknowledgment.

- ✓ Publicly thank elected officials for their support—with press releases, events, signs, etc.
- ✓ Not only does this gratify the official who has supported you, it can also help you garner more support, by showing that you work well with others.

WHAT WORKS, WHAT DOESN'T

A good rule of thumb is that candidates and officials pay attention to communication from voters in proportion to the amount of work the communication requires. For example, a signature on an e-mail petition requires almost no work, and politicians pay very little attention to those. Below is a list of effective ways to draw attention to your campaign.

Letters

- ✓ An incredibly effective tool. Even five letters from five different people on the same issue create a feeling among candidates and officials that there is a groundswell of support for that issue.
- ✓ Form letters **do not work**; the letters must each be different.

Press

- ✓ Can help alert candidates and officials to the presence of your group and your issue.
- ✓ You don't have to be written up in *The New York Times* to achieve results; candidates and Councilmembers read the local borough papers.
- ✓ These papers are always looking for copy and will publish letters to the editor and Op-Ed opinion pieces as well. (See enclosed information on writing a press release for more tips on getting your group in the news.)

Rallies

- ✓ Can be a great way to show that a large number of people care about an issue enough to stand outside (sometimes in bad weather!) and protest about it.
- ✓ Rallies make great press.
- ✓ Rallies can also give candidates and elected officials an opportunity to show their support for your issue—a great publicity tool for them, too, and a way to help them in return for their support.

Petitions

- ✓ While petitions don't carry as much weight with politicians as letters, they can be a very powerful tool for your own organization.
- ✓ Every person who signs a petition (and gives you their address) can be added to your group's mailing list, increasing the numbers of people your group represents.

Ribbon-cuttings,

- ✓ These official openings of projects your group has raised money for are great opportunities for press coverage and for thanking your sponsors and supporters, including elected officials and candidates.
- ✓ A well-publicized ribbon-cutting shows people that you are an active group that makes a difference and can increase support for your group among the community.