

# How-to-Guide:Engaging Your Elected Officials

## Introduction

Properly engaging with your local elected officials is one of the most powerful and effective ways to shape community inclusion in decisions that directly impact your everyday life. Whether you're an advocate of housing rights, public safety, education, economic development, or infrastructure, your insight and voice is valued.

This guide provides a step-by-step walk-through of how to professionally and effectively engage your local elected officials/representatives.

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## Step 1: Get to Know Who Represents You

Start by identifying your elected officials at the local, county, state, and federal levels.

Depending on your city's governmental structure, your elected officials may include:

- Mayor
- City Council Member
- County Commissioner
- School Board Member
- State Representative
- State Senator
- Members of Congress

Georgia residents can find their state officials through the [Georgia General Assembly](#) website. You can also find your local officials through your city or county government website.

## Step 2: Understanding Elected Officials Role

Before reaching out, understand the following:

- What level of government handles your issue?
- Whether your official has authority over the matter.

For example:

- **Zoning issues** → City Council or County Commission
- **School Curriculum** → School Board

- **State laws** → State Legislature

This ensures your request goes to the right person and increases the likelihood of action.

### **Step 3: Be Clear on Your Purpose**

Ask yourself:

- What specific issue am I addressing?
- What outcome am I seeking?
- Am I informing, requesting action, or asking for clarification?

Prepare:

- A short summary of the issue (2–3 sentences) that is concise and straightforward.
- Data, personal stories, or examples
- A clear “ask” (example: “Will you support SB-34”)

### **Step 4: Establish the Right Method of Engagement**

Different situations call for different approaches. These approaches essentially each serve the same purpose of engaging messaging while providing others may be more extensive

#### **Email**

Best for:

- Introducing yourself
- Submitting formal concerns
- Requesting meetings

- Professional approach

## **Phone Call**

Best for:

- Time-sensitive issues
- Showing urgency
- Following up
- More personable conversations

Ask to speak with staff if the official is unavailable.

## **Public Meetings**

Attend:

- City Council meetings
- County Commission sessions
- School Board meetings

Many governments publish agendas in advance. For state issues in Georgia, you can monitor committee hearings through the Georgia House of Representatives and Georgia State Senate websites. Public comment periods allow residents to speak directly to decision-makers.

## **In-Person Meetings**

Request a meeting if:

- The issue is complex
- You represent a group
- You want to build a long-term relationship

Come prepared with:

- A one-page summary
- Clear requests
- Follow-up information

## **Step 5: Be Professional and Respectful**

Effective civic engagement is rooted in professionalism.

- Stay calm and solution-oriented
- Stick to facts and lived experiences
- Avoid personal attacks
- Thank them for their time

Remember: Staff members often serve as key advisors. Treat them with respect as they could be your strongest allies.

## **Step 6: Follow Up**

Accountability grows through consistent engagement. Following up to ensure

After:

- A meeting
- A phone call
- Public testimony

Send a short follow-up email:

- Thank them for their time
- Restate your key request
- Offer to provide additional information

## **Step 7: Build Sustainable Relationships**

Civic engagement is not a one-time action. Building long term relationships can serve beneficial toward continued involvement and promotes overall community inclusion of decisions impacting residence everyday lives.

Ways to stay involved:

- Attend town halls/board meeting
- Join advisory boards or committees
- Invite officials to community events
- Collaborate on educational forums
- Schedule one-on-one meetings with city officials and organization leaders.

The most effective advocates become trusted community voices through continuous engagement and civic duties.

## **Step 8: Give Grace and Understanding**

Remember, our elected officials are human as well. Effective engagement with elected officials requires both strategic communication and thoughtful awareness of their existing responsibilities, priorities, and public context. By understanding these factors, community members can tailor their messaging, anticipate concerns, and identify points of alignment, ultimately fostering more constructive dialogue and increasing the likelihood of meaningful collaboration and impact.

## Conclusion

Community engagement with elected officials is essential to a healthy and responsive democracy. When residents actively communicate with their representatives, they ensure that the concerns, experiences, and priorities of the community are reflected in public decision-making. Building sustainable relationships with elected officials also fosters accountability, trust, and collaboration, allowing community members to not only raise concerns but also work alongside leaders to develop solutions that strengthen and uplift their neighborhoods.



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