



# **A Political Action Guide for NFIB Members**

How to Win Elections and Influence Public Policy



# The Importance of Political Action

The voice of small business is not heard often enough in Congress and in state legislatures across the country. If it were, we would have fewer onerous regulations, less taxation, and more business-friendly policies.

We can do something to change that. Businessmen and women can make a difference. That's what this guide is all about. What follows are some simple tips and guidelines for how you, as a private citizen, can make a difference in the political system in your community.

It's been said, "All politics is local." It is an expression that has proven true time after time because elected officials do respond to the people they represent — the people who help them get elected and keep them in office.

In our system of government, legislators are constantly running for re-election. Because elections are always around the corner, they must constantly think about winning votes, forming coalitions, and raising the funds necessary to run a campaign. Despite what some of them say, legislators really enjoy being legislators. Anything you can do to help them to attain

that status or continue serving in office will be appreciated and remembered.

What if your legislator has been completely opposed to your interests and isn't the slightest bit cooperative? In America, you can always vote for the other person. This guide is equally applicable to your work with a challenger or an incumbent.

There are any number of ways you can have an impact on candidates or their campaigns; here are five relatively easy ways you can make a difference.



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**“H**elping to get pro-business candidates elected to office is an important responsibility. These individuals can be our voice in their capacity as elected officials and can promote legislation that helps employers who otherwise may not have the time to follow bills being discussed and voted on.”

Wendy, NFIB member  
Torrington, CT



# Things You Can Do

## **1. Demonstrate personal public support**

Start with simple things like wearing a campaign button to meetings or putting a sign in your yard. Anything to show the public, and the candidate, they have your support.

## **2. Raise campaign funds**

Will Rogers, American humorist and social commentator, once quipped that in today's politics you need a lot of money just to lose! He was making a joke, but the fact is political campaigns run on money – lots of it. Candidates by and large dislike raising money, so anything you can do to help will be appreciated.

## **3. Win votes**

A successful campaign appeals to a diverse array of voters and needs to build a coalition that can carry the campaign to victory on Election Day. Helping a candidate win over voters in your community is a major help to their campaign.

## **4. Locate volunteers**

Every political campaign is desperate for volunteers. There is simply too much to do and not enough people to do the work. Anything you can do will be appreciated. Look in the mirror... there's one. Can you find some others?

## **5. Help with transportation**

Really? Yes, really. It's important to get from point A to point B and maximize the candidate's time.

Now let's drill down on each of these topics. They are easy and will be much appreciated long after the election is over. Yes, you want to elect your candidate, but you also want them to know you helped so they'll take your phone call someday.

There isn't a candidate in America who doesn't appreciate a good word, especially in public. Signs and buttons are good, but you can do more. Submit a guest editorial to the local newspaper. Stand up at a public meeting and testify to the good job your candidate is doing for the community. If appropriate, serve as a surrogate speaker for your candidate at a public forum.

How about writing a letter to the editor of your local newspaper praising your candidate? Letters to the editor have a surprisingly large readership, and candidates always read them. Here are some guidelines to make sure your letter gets published.

Local newspapers and county weeklies like printing letters to the editor, but they get more than they can use. They look for letters that are factual, interesting, concise, and original. We can't all be original or interesting, but we can be factual and concise. Write about why you support your candidate and discuss an issue important to you with facts. Sometimes it helps if you contrast the virtues of your candidate with their opponent.

## Tips for Writing a Letter to the Editor

### 1. Be polite

Dignity goes a long way, though papers are relaxing this rule as civility seems to be going by the wayside these days.

### 2. Use facts to win the argument

A well-reasoned letter will be persuasive and, more importantly, has a better chance of getting printed.

### 3. Share your experience

If relevant, use your perspective to emphasize your point. "I'm a small business owner, and candidate X's policies will make it easier for me to hire new workers here in central Kentucky."

### 4. Be original

Reusing boilerplate campaign language will not get your letter published. Write in your own voice!

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**"M**y letters have been published in both local newspapers, and once in the Wall Street Journal. The second letter I wrote was about the lack of accountability in the public service sector, that you can't fire government employees. We've had that in spades in Connecticut. So, I wrote on that topic and they printed it. "

Kevin, NFIB member  
Windsor Locks, CT



### **5. Be concise**

Shorter letters are preferred by editors; long letters are hard to edit, so they either cut them down or pick a shorter letter for publication. Also, shorter letters pack more punch!

### **6. Submit your letter online**

Almost all newspapers have moved toward accepting only online format (emails, form submissions, etc.). An editor will not retype a mailed letter you submitted on a piece of paper, but an email is easy to copy and paste.

### **7. Let the editor know you are a real person**

That means including your name, phone number, address and whatever else the paper wants to know about you. Often, someone at the paper will call the phone number to ensure you aren't a shell for a political consultant or a paid operative.



# SAMPLE LETTER

Dear Editor,

With rampant unemployment and lost opportunity across our nation, why would incumbent Congressman Jones oppose building the Groundstone pipeline? Thankfully, challenger Thaddeus Dithers is fighting for pro-growth policies that create jobs and reduce our dependence on foreign oil. Mr. Dithers knows that two things our country desperately needs are jobs and energy independence. Because of his leadership, I will be encouraging my friends and family to support him for Congress this November.

Sincerely,

John Smith  
Kansas City, Missouri

Most candidates spend more than half their time raising money, so do something to help. Write a check -- the bigger, the better. If you want to be remembered, call the candidate and tell them you are writing the check rather than waiting for them to call you. You'll make their day. Better yet, raise some money from your colleagues, family, or friends and give your collection to them at an event or at their office.

Offer to serve on their finance steering committee. Serve on the host committee of a fundraising event. Assuming your candidate stands with NFIB on the key issues, work with them to procure a contribution for their campaign from NFIB's PAC. Remember, what you are doing here is raising money for your candidate to help them win, but you are also building a relationship.

Large donors are frankly not as important as most people think because a candidate for Congress will have hundreds of them. But very, very few people are willing to raise money for a candidate, and they know the name of every one of those that do. Which brings us to one of the best means of raising money and being remembered for doing so: hosting a fundraising event in your home.

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**"H**e (Senator Kit Bond) wanted to host a fundraising event with small businesses in Columbia, the center of the state. I got the phone call and I said, Absolutely, I'll do it. We had probably 75 to 100 people. I invited members of the Chamber of Commerce and other local businesses. All the local NFIB members got an invite. I probably had two people fuss at me demanding to know why I would do that for a Republican, but that's just the way it goes, but had many people say, gee that was a really great thing you did. I would absolutely encourage other NFIB members to do things like that."

David, NFIB member  
Columbus, MO

## Tips for Hosting a Fundraiser in Your Home

Most candidates will deeply appreciate (and won't forget) an offer to host a fundraiser in your home. Such a fundraiser allows you to meet with your candidate, raise funds for the campaign, and bring the candidate into contact with two things all candidates for public office need – votes and money.

While the campaign you are working with may have developed a very specific package of materials for home fundraisers, here are some tips to keep in mind as you are planning your own fundraising event.

### 1. Schedule the fundraising event.

Contact the campaign scheduler and finance director to schedule an event date. Try to have at least thirty days lead time to put together your event.

### 2. Set goals

The campaign may have a specific fundraising goal it would like you to reach. Work with the campaign to determine a reasonable fundraising goal for you, which will also dictate how much money each guest should be asked to contribute in order to attend. Do this before developing an invitation list — there may be people you would be more comfortable asking for a contribution of \$30 as opposed to \$300.

### 3. Develop an invitation list

Be creative when you develop your list. Good sources for ideas may be your holiday card list, Facebook friends, neighbors, colleagues, employees (where appropriate) and membership lists from groups you belong to. Remember not everyone wants to meet a candidate, so plan on sending a lot of invitations. As a rule of thumb, you can count roughly 10% will accept your invite. Also, while some will want to attend, other would prefer to just send a check.

### 4. Coordinate with the campaign on mailing invitations

The campaign may take responsibility for sending the invitations in which case, you are off the hook. If you are responsible, make sure that someone in the campaign approves your invitation. It must contain a disclaimer (usually in the form of "Paid for by \_\_\_\_") in order to conform to federal and most state election laws. Make sure that it clearly indicates the date, time, location of the event and where to RSVP. Most campaigns can provide a response card you can also enclose for those who wish to mail checks, but cannot attend. Also, keep track of all expenditures, such as printing and postage. Either the campaign will consider these expenditures an in-kind contribution to the campaign from you or will reimburse you for them. Many invitations are sent out via e-mail these days, but that will work only if you have lists of e-mail addresses.

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**"T**here is never enough time and money in a campaign... candidates I have helped have been very, very thankful. A little time and a little money from folks can make a big difference."

Jerry, NFIB member  
Duluth, MN



## 5. Send invitations well in advance

Mail and/or email invitations at least three weeks prior to the event. Plan on following up the invitation with phone calls to those from whom you haven't received an RSVP. Personal appeals from you will both boost attendance at the event and encourage those who can't attend to send a check.

## 6. Be creative

Choose a style of event that meshes well with your personality, your home, and the themes of the campaign. A home fundraiser can be as simple as an ice cream social or it can be a catered cocktail party. Thematic events such as an "Old Time BBQ" or a Halloween Party can spark added interest and attendance. Remember that the main object, though, is to raise funds. Try to keep expenses down. Also, while state laws vary, federal election law limits individual contributions to \$2,700 for the primary and \$2,700 for the general election. Each individual can also spend an additional \$1,000 to host

an in-home event. Any money spent over these limits must be reimbursed by the campaign. Work closely with the campaign and their legal counsel to insure you're in compliance with election law requirements.

## 7. Keep track of attendees

Set up a registration table in the hallway or at the entrance to your home. The campaign may be able to help supply a volunteer to assist with this. Check off the names of attendees as they arrive and if possible, issue name tags. This will make it easier for the legislator/candidate to mingle with guests and not have to face that embarrassing faux pas of forgetting a name.

## 8. Prepare an event schedule

While your event may last two or more hours, the candidate may not be at the event the entire time. Work with the campaign to develop a realistic time frame of when you should expect them to be present. Decide whether you, as the host, want to address the group. Keep remarks to a minimum – incorporate a

short narrative biography, but also try to personalize your comments. The candidate will usually want to make a few remarks as well. Again, coordinate with the campaign scheduler ahead of time so you don't have the situation of the candidates expecting to just mingle while your guests are expecting a speech.

## 9. Follow up with attendees

Make sure the campaign has a complete list of attendees and their addresses so it can comply with election law requirements. The campaign will generally take the responsibility of sending out "thank you" notes to all those who made campaign contributions, but you may want to send a short note as well since they came to your home.

Finally, a note on fundraisers and the press: generally, candidates prefer not to have reporters present at fundraisers. Unless the campaign indicates otherwise, don't initiate press contact concerning a fundraiser. If you receive any press inquiries (which you probably won't), refer them to the campaign.



# Win Votes

Winning votes for your candidate is not as hard as it might seem. Political campaigns spend enormous funds communicating with voters trying to win their votes. A candidate for Congress might need to win 200,000 votes to win; even a state senate race might involve winning 100,000 votes. The sheer scale of the task is daunting.

Studies show the most effective vote getter is a friend, family member, or someone you know. Political campaigns don't have the time or manpower to talk with each voter individually, so they use TV, radio, mail and internet to stand in for that best friend (That's using high tech to communicate).

What you can do is better than high tech; it's called **high touch**. Talk to your friends and neighbors about your candidate. Make a list and call through it. Tell your relatives and friends why you support this person. You will win votes for your candidate.

**"Y**ou bet your bippy we talk to our employees about the importance of voting. I try to talk to them about casting their votes for candidates who are pro-business. Sometimes that works and sometimes it doesn't, but we have good discussions and I think it helps.

Kevin, NFIB Member  
Windsor Locks, CT

Want to do more? Write a letter to everyone in your neighborhood, your church, or your civic club – people who know you, or at least know of you. Why will they read your letter? Because a hand-addressed letter from someone you know is always opened. Always. Make the letter short and sweet, telling your neighbors why you support your candidate and why they should join you in voting for him or her. Hand sign the letter to make it personal.

Another thing you can do is talk with the people who work for you. Let them know what you think and why. Let them know that your candidate will be better to your business, and how that is to their advantage – (better policies bring better wages, benefits, etc.). Keep it low key and you will win votes.

Better yet, if your business employs more than a handful of people, ask your candidate to tour your plant/facility/office.

## Conducting Business Tours

A tour of your business can be an effective means of winning votes, as well as building a bond of communication with your candidate. A good tour will make your candidate familiar with what you do and the problems you face. Spending quality time with them will help build a deeper and stronger relationship than you'll ever achieve through the mail or over the telephone.

Even if your candidate opposes your positions on key issues, he/she will be more receptive to your point of view — it's hard to stay mad at someone you've broken bread with!

In order to make the visit a success, you have two broad tasks. First, you must handle the mechanics of setting up the visit correctly with the campaign and second, you must work to make the most of the visit.

**“W**e’ve had both campaign announcements and meet and greets at the store. If there’s a candidate that I really support, I make the offer and say we’d love to host this. We’ve got a well-known, highly marketed small business with 16 employees and a 22,000-foot warehouse. So, if they want to see a forklift in action or a large carpet-cutting machine at work, we’ve got great visual for TV or print media. It’s really amazing the political connections and long-term relations you can build with people with this sort of event.”

Dave, NFIB member  
Columbia, MO

## Here’s how to set one up:

### 1. Identify the campaign’s scheduler

It’s a fact of political life that no Congressman or Senator and very few state elected officials make their own appointments and manage their own schedules. Once you find out who handles scheduling, you can direct your communications to the person’s attention.

### 2. Send a written invitation

Schedulers love paper trails, and your invitation will be less likely to be lost if it is in writing. If you issued your invitation on the telephone, via email, or in person, send a written follow-up. Failure to do so will almost always guarantee a “no-show.” While maintaining flexibility on the dates, include as much information as possible concerning the length of the tour, the location, and the number of voters the candidate might meet.

### 3. Be as flexible as possible

Propose a range of dates for the visit. Candidates are busy people, and their schedules can change with very little notice. Find out from the scheduler when your candidate will be in your area and try to dovetail your invitation with his/her existing schedule.

### 4. Make the office visit attractive to your candidate

Making a visit attractive doesn’t mean a new coat of paint. It does mean catering to the needs of your candidate. Elected representatives are always looking towards the next election, which means they’re always looking for votes and campaign dollars. The more constituents they can meet in one place, the happier they usually are. Make sure your candidate knows they’ll meet the people who work at your location in a congenial setting.

### 5. Offer travel arrangements

Your candidate may not know how to get to your location or may lack the means of getting there. At the minimum, you can offer to drive them from your office to the nearest airport. Don’t offer to pay for transportation unless you can afford to (they may be traveling with aides). Also, there may be legal prohibitions against cash reimbursements, so check with your legal counsel before paying expenses.

## **6. Be persistent**

Don't give up if you're unable to work out a visit on the first try. Time pressures often force changes in the schedule, and even with the best of intentions, cancellations occur. Be gracious and understanding, and don't be afraid to call and write again. Political and grassroots lobbying are not for the faint of heart.

Once you're on a campaign's schedule for a certain date, you're ready to plan the successful and productive visit. Here's a short checklist of things you may want to keep in mind:

### **1. Prepare a fact sheet about your business**

Include important information such as number of personnel, size of payroll, amount of taxes paid, other locations, community services and awards, information about key people, and interesting facts about the products or services you provide. This will give your candidate a thumbnail sketch of what to expect.

### **2. Arrange for a photographer**

You'll want photos of the visit and your guest may want them as well.

### **3. If appropriate, notify local media**

Check with the campaign's press secretary and see if there are any objections to notifying the press. If you notify the press, they might show up, so be sure you can handle the spotlight of publicity.

### **4. Notify your employees of the tour's date and time**

Everyone wants to put their best foot forward when meeting important people, and you should allow your employees some time to prepare for the visit.

### **5. Prepare a holding room for your visitor(s)**

Set aside a place for your guests to make phone calls, rest and relax. In all probability, your candidate just came from one meeting, and will go to another after your tour. Providing a little hospitality will make their day easier, and make you a friend.

## **6. Set aside time for discussion**

Either at the end of or at the beginning of the tour, set aside some time for you and, possibly, other key people to sit down for some frank face-to-face dialogue. The only way you'll get your points across during a tour is if you have your candidate's full attention; it's hard to concentrate over the hustle and bustle of a busy showroom, office or factory.

## **7. Pick your tour guide carefully**

If you conduct the tour yourself, make sure you know the people you'll be seeing, because your candidate will expect to be introduced. If you rely on others to lead the tour, make sure they understand the purpose of the visit.

## **8. Know your message**

Make sure you know what you want to say to the candidate. Identify key talking points and what you want the candidate to have as a takeaway. Is there something you want them to learn, such as what issues help or hurt your business?

## **9. Send follow-up letters**

Send a letter thanking the candidate for making the visit and use the opportunity to reinforce whatever points you made during the tour. Because of the vast array of information competing for the candidate's attention, you can't emphasize your positions too much. Also, if a key staff person oversees your issues participate in the tour, then a follow-up note to that person is always a clever idea.

Every campaign, no matter how sophisticated, must rely on people power. All campaigns need volunteers to stuff envelopes, draft news releases, deliver literature door-to-door, and conduct any number of small, but important, campaign tasks. There are never enough people to do this work, so volunteers are appreciated and remembered. Therefore, anyone who can deliver some volunteers to the campaign will also be appreciated and remembered.

So where do you find volunteers? Start with the person in the mirror. Yes, you may be a highly educated successful businessperson, but there is no reason you can't pitch in just like anyone else. You will find the other volunteers at the campaign HQ are often highly motivated, successful people, like yourself.

The great thing about political campaigns is you can do as little or as much as you want. If working the line at a football game or walking door-to-door one Saturday a month is what you want to do, that's great. Or you may want to assume a leadership position in your local party or serve as a precinct chair. There is always more work to be done in a campaign than there are people to do it, so pitch in.

How about your family? Your children and their friends, if they are not too young, make great volunteers. They may enjoy distributing campaign literature or participating in parades, and in most cases, they will catch the political bug and want to come back for more. You can facilitate by providing rides and food.

If you can recruit volunteers for the campaign — even your kids or siblings might enjoy the experience and it will build an important relationship between you and your candidate.

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“ I hosted phone banks with volunteers at my office prior to ever thinking of running for office. It was fun and very appreciated. ”

Kat, NFIB member  
Rocheport, MO



# Help with Transportation

This is not as goofy as it sounds. Candidates must travel a lot. Back and forth to the capitol, from one campaign event to another, from home to the office, they are always on the go. Major political campaigns have paid drivers and advance staff. Many candidates end up leaning on family members to drive because they would rather not drive themselves. Why? Because driving is wasted time and a candidate would rather be making fundraising calls, reading about issues, catching up on emails, writing thank-you notes or even resting for the next event.

Even with the nearly universal application of GPS, the candidate needs to put his brainpower on something else (like what he or she is going to say) besides finding the event location. And if a driver gets a speeding ticket, it's not news, but if the candidate does.....well, it's not pretty.

Depending upon state law, state legislators often do not have sufficient official or campaign funds for travel. Members of Congress must pay for non-official travel out of their campaign funds. Even official travel is problematic because there are no official drivers for Members of Congress, so a staffer will have to be pressed into service, often on weekends and evenings.

You can solve some of these problems. Offering to pick up a legislator and drive them to an event not only provides a real service to the candidate and the campaign, it gives you some quality time with the candidate.

On the federal level, while there are restrictions on what services you can provide members of Congress, and to a somewhat lesser extent, staff, there are ways you can legally assist with transportation challenges in and out of the district. Check with an attorney before you spend any money.

## **Tips for candidate transportation:**

### **1. Show up early**

This will get you bonus points with both staff and candidate because what frustrates them is starting late.

### **2. Dress to impress**

Dress a little better than you think the crowd will be dressed. You are traveling with the candidate, which makes you an important person, so dress like one.

### **3. Stock the car**

Bring along things your candidate might need like snacks, water, notepads, pens, cellphone charger, hand sanitizer, tissues, a comb, first aid kit, etc. And, don't forget to fill up your car with a full tank of gas.

### **4. Be ready to navigate**

Make sure your GPS is working and if you have time before the day of the event, drive the route to make sure you know what to expect and where to park.

### **5. Bring cash for emergencies**

### **6. Be prepared to speak with the candidate**

Get them to talk about themselves, but also be prepared to be helpfully quiet when necessary.

### **7. See the campaign manager for campaign materials**

If appropriate, have a supply of signs, buttons, lapel stickers, brochures, etc.

### **8. Talk with your candidate in advance to see if they need help leaving the event**

It is very hard for a candidate to politely withdraw from an event, so be prepared to be the "heavy" if needed and forcefully announce that it is time to go to the next meeting, tugging on the candidate's sleeve if necessary.



Good small business policy starts with electing good small business candidates. So, anything you do to help elect pro-small business candidates will benefit the entire business community.

Thank you for your efforts and please feel free to share your experiences with NFIB's Political Team.

For more information, please email NFIB Political at [political@NFIB.org](mailto:political@NFIB.org)

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Brian, NFIB member  
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