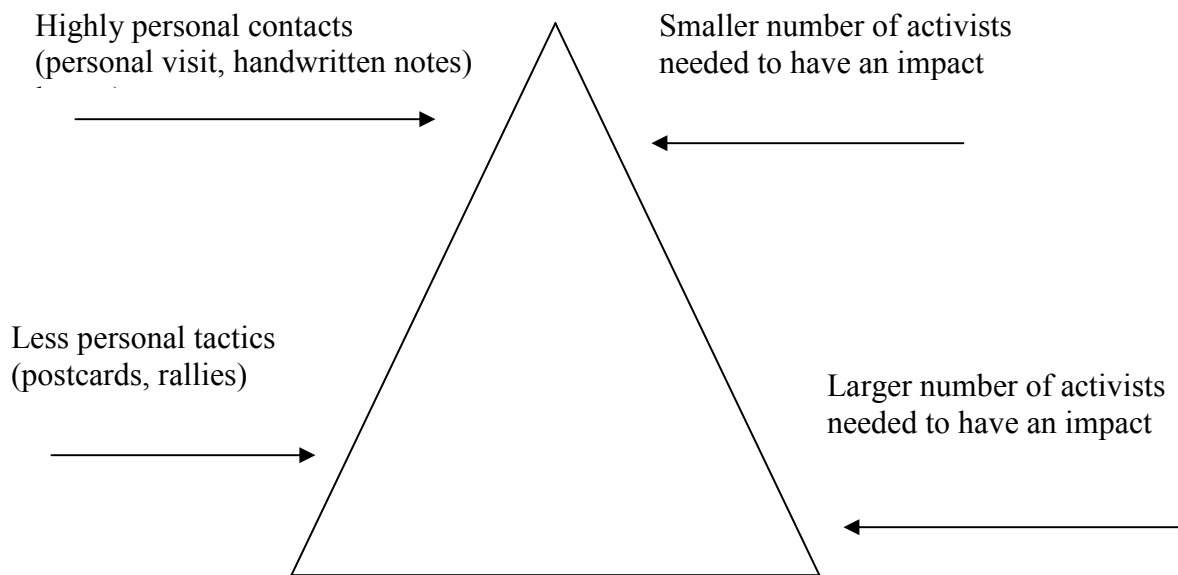


# Best Practices For Engaging Elected Officials et al

**More difficult tactics are worth the effort.** The more personal an action and the more effort it takes to complete it, the more impact it is likely to have. The less personal and the less effort it takes, the less effective it is likely to be. For example, it takes many, many signatures on a petition to make an impact on an elected official, while a few handwritten letters or an in-person visit may make a larger impression.



**What method you choose will depend on what you want to accomplish, what resources you have and what you know about the legislators you are targeting.**

**Email.** While email is a fairly easy way to generate lots of contacts, office holders and their staff members realize that it is easy. Like letters or post cards, personalized emails have far greater impact than generically generated ones. This differs by office holder. Some office holders at the local level personally read and sometimes respond to emails; others rarely use it at all. The best way to find out if your legislator uses email is to call their assistant and ask.

**Letters to the Editor.** Although letters to the editor may seem to be a roundabout approach compared to direct engagement with officials, office holders and their staff members do pay attention to letters to the editor. This is an effective way to communicate with all of the elected officials or a specific one in a *loud* way.

The most effective letters to the editor respond to local events in a way that ties in the topic. For example, if there is a story in the paper or news about employee benefits in general, respond with a letter to the editor and mention the importance of civil unions and how it corresponds to the benefits. Newspapers seem to be more likely to print letters to the editor when they respond to a specific article. Also, the more letters on a topic they see, the more likely they are to print some of them.

**Post Card Campaigns.** This is a generic form of contact but can have an impact if done in large numbers. It is also one that requires a limited amount of commitment of your resources. It restricts the resource of capital rather than time. It can be cost effective but not as cheap as asking someone to write a personal letter and mail it to their legislator or friend on their own dime. As mentioned above, the most effective contacts are going to be personal, direct communication whether it is to a legislator or trying to recruit more supporters to your cause. The wider the net you cast with this type of communication the higher the yield you'll get. Two good things about having someone fill out a post card and hand it back to you is that you know the action was actually taken and you have another point of reference to talk about with your new activist in the future!

**Face to Face Visits.** *Did you know that the more personal the contact the more impact it will have?* That's right sitting down with someone, whether it be a legislator or an activist, will yield better results. It creates an open dialogue and gives you necessary information as to what your next step should be. For example, if you are talking to a legislator about the current civil union legislation and he/she wants to know what organizations in his/her district support it; your next step should be to find that information. This type of intelligence often times is only gained face to face. People tend to open up in person more freely than they would via letter or email. In person visits show commitment and pairs an issue with a name and face. It shows particular commitment if someone has gone to great lengths for a 5 minute conversation (e.g. visiting your legislator down in Springfield or Washington D.C.) If someone has gone to great trouble of traveling miles or hours away from home for *just an issue* it is no longer *just an issue*. Also, often times it is easier to recall a face and a conversation than it is to recall a well written letter or post card.