



## Working with Public Officials

- Match volunteers and staff with each elected official. Pair them with elected officials by areas of educational interests/concerns or by legislative district constituency. (See The Handbook of New Hampshire Elected Officials for background information.)
- Refer to “The Handbook of N.H. Elected Officials” for information on state elected officials’ committee assignments, backgrounds and personal interests.
- Develop a strategic marketing action sheet for all elected officials. This could involve:
  - Coordinating communication
  - Providing recognition
  - Scheduling meetings
  - Preparing follow-up communication
- Summarize all communications with elected officials. Place a brief summary of meetings, copies of sent letters and other pertinent information in the elected official’s file.
- Send elected officials copies of county newsletters, educational impact sheets, staff rosters and other informational pieces to support and reinforce staff and volunteer efforts.
- During pre-election periods, provide each candidate with a packet of information about UNH Cooperative Extension. Include copies of the county brochure, newsletter and a selection of impact statements that relate to UNH Cooperative Extension work in your county.
- Communicate with newly elected officials following each election, congratulating them and invite them for a visit to the Extension office.
- Invite elected officials to UNH Cooperative Extension educational programs and events. Give them a visible and active role, such as keynote speaker or panel member, at your workshop or meeting. When they visit, make sure you give them proper recognition and if possible, provide media coverage.
- Occasionally, include information about elected officials in your newsletters.
- Collect news clippings of county UNH Cooperative Extension programs, photocopy them and send them to elected officials periodically. If you have a feature article, a personal delivery is often effective.

- Seek advice year-round from elected officials. Ask elected officials if they or a staff member can serve on appropriate committees that match their responsibilities. This makes the communication two-way.
- Invite elected officials or their aides to board meetings, program committees and advisory committees.
- Build networks with other community leaders through participation in boards, attendance at appropriate events, and co-sponsorship of programs. Publicize these cooperative efforts to elected officials.
- Share positive letters with elected officials so they know clientele are supportive of program efforts.
- An effective method of educating decision makers is breakfast or dinner forums. These forums can feature short reports outlining Extension's program areas, achievements and future direction, a meal and informal conversation and feedback between decision makers, staff and key clientele. Make meetings short - no longer than one hour - and lively.
- Deliver what you promise - on time and in a visible fashion.
- The most important thing to remember in communicating with elected officials is to keep the communication constant and consistent. Use a blend of written and oral communication.

### **Maintaining the Relationship**

- Avoid duplication of efforts and maximize the impact of UNH Cooperative Extension's educational messages.
- Prior to visits with public officials, review background information and, if possible, attend a meeting in which the elected official participates. This "homework" helps identify and target critical issues in which the official is interested. Target the educational message to meet the official's interests.
- Develop a file of impact statements and success stories on significant program issues to share with elected officials.

### **Face-to-Face Visits**

- Make an appointment for a short, well-planned visit.
- Determine the most important issues for discussion purposes (not more than three).
- Facts, figures, and the impact of the programming can be convincing.
- Contact staff members regularly, on a year-round basis; don't wait until budget season.
- Get to know them, and give them a chance to know you.
- Be sure all of your information is factual and accurate. Brevity is most important.

### **Follow-up**

- Send a thank you letter.
- Reiterate the positive points made at the meeting.
- If you are unable to visit personally with your legislator, letters can be effective. Say what you want in your own words. Don't copy a form letter. Cover only a single issue in each letter.
- Copy the Assistant Director, County Operations on letters you send to public officials.
- Remember, one-shot and budget-time-only visits have little effect.