

## E-ADVOCACY: USING THE INTERNET

The internet can be a powerful tool in your advocacy work. Not only can the internet be used to send emails to legislators on important issues, but the internet can assist you in getting your message out to volunteers, as well as communicate with decision makers and their staff.

When using email to write to legislators, many of the same rules for letter writing will apply. Email allows advocates to communicate with decision makers from home, work or even while on vacation – wherever the internet can be accessed. It allows for immediate and timely action across geographic areas.

Washington, D.C. - “Hill” staffers and system administrators, continually emphasize that their primary concern is addressing and responding to electronic mail from constituents, and effectively weeding out mail from their non-constituents, including spam, and routing that to the appropriate member. An additional problem is meeting the expectations of people who send electronic mail. Frequently the expectation of the sender is an immediate reply. Staffers have consistently asked that if you are not a constituent, and if you do not provide contact information, including address and phone number, then your email will not be answered.

While email is convenient to advocates, it may not necessarily be the best way to communicate with legislators. It is much more effective to do so by phone, written letter, or in person. However, if you as an advocate choose to use email to communicate with legislators and their staff, here are a few tips to increase the effectiveness of your email.

- Identify the subject of your message in the “Subject” line. Do not use vague description lines such as “Info”, rather specific words about your message, such as “House Bill 000”, or “Support for Disability Funding.”
- Print copies of your messages and use them to document the documentation.
- Do not use email to overwhelm a legislator’s inbox. If advocates “stuff” the legislator’s inbox, chances are the communications will be ignored.

Action Alerts are another use for the internet. These are calls to action to advocates on a certain issue. They can be sent via regular mail, communicated to advocates over the telephone, or sent via email and website postings. Like any form of communication, there are pros and cons of each.

Action Alerts are frequently used to generate action by advocates when a decision maker is set to make a decision on a key issue, and can be a lucrative tool for advocates when immediate action is required to impact policy. A sample action alert follows.

**See Sample Action Alert.**

**QUICK TIPS:**

- When is email appropriate?
- When time is of the essence and you are requesting action on a particular bill or issue.
- When sending a short, simple message.
- When you want to reach a larger audience at once and volume counts.