

#COMMON # GROUNDS

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Advocacy Toolkit

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Greetings, fellow municipal officials!

This past year I believe we achieved great successes. Through your advocacy efforts and our fantastic team, we worked with our legislators to make bills that would have negatively impacted our cities into better versions that now aid our communities. Working together to improve legislation for cities strengthens our state.

To achieve this, we must also do our part. This year, we will focus on building bridges with legislators by collectively choosing people over politics, access over agendas and success over shouting.

To help us foster and build these relationships, I am excited to announce that this year's focus will be themed around my way of breaking the ice: coffee and conversation, or what we will call **#commongrounds**.

These face-to-face meetings in a low-stress environment can accomplish a lot in a short amount of time. I also encourage you not to talk shop but to get to know your legislator. This fall, lawmakers will be back in their districts. And after the election, we will undoubtedly welcome newly elected legislators. This situation presents a perfect opportunity to connect or reconnect with your state leaders. Learn what is important to them, and ask them what we can do to help them have a successful upcoming session.

Let's bring home a strategic partnership that will benefit all of Florida and all we serve because Floridians deserve leadership that works for them. We can collectively work on the critical issues that unite our cities and state, like fostering a stable economy, prioritizing safe communities, supporting quality of life amenities, and so much more! We can do these things together to make our cities more robust and make for a stronger Florida.

While it's up to the individual to find the right coffee shop, this toolkit provides some tips and information that will lay the foundation for a good start. I hope each of you finds something helpful or motivational within the **#commongrounds** toolkit of resources.

I cannot help but share my heart and love for this opportunity to grow our relationship with legislators over **#commongrounds**.

Jolien Caraballo

OVERVIEW

Brew Up Stronger Relationships with Your Legislators!

When state and local officials work together, Floridians benefit. We must collaborate to solve problems and improve Florida. By finding **#commongrounds**, we put people over politics, access over agendas and success over shouting. Let's strengthen our relationships with state lawmakers by inviting them to coffee and connecting on issues that unite us. Issues like fostering a strong economy, prioritizing safe communities and supporting quality-of-life amenities.

These face-to-face meetings in a low-stress environment can accomplish a lot in a short amount of time. Speaking of timing, it couldn't be better. This fall, lawmakers will be back in their districts. And after the election, we will undoubtedly welcome newly elected legislators. This time presents a perfect opportunity to connect or reconnect with your state leaders. Let's find **#commongrounds**.



RELATIONSHIP TYPES

What kind of relationship do you have with legislators?

One of the essential elements of serving as an effective advocate for your municipality is building constructive relationships with your legislators. Various factors will influence the kind of relationship you can have with them. It is important to clarify the type of relationship you are forging or maintaining. Here are some possibilities:

True Friends

You and your legislator may find that you have a personal affinity for each other that emerges reasonably easily and quickly. We all know this experience – You meet someone, and your relationship is warm and comfortable after a relatively short time. Usually, such friendships form around personal commonalities or shared interests. Whether it's similar upbringings, a shared alma mater or life experience, the hobbies you have or even your shared passion for public service, there's something personal and powerful that helps to forge a bond between you. That bond is more important than any specific policy concern and can weather disagreements without damage as long as it is cared for and remembered.

Allies

You and your legislator may find that you share a commitment to achieving particular policy or political objectives. The resulting relationship may be personally warm or more a matter of being on the same team, but the bond is about things you both want to see accomplished. As long as you continue to have common goals, you'll be able to work together, at least on those shared priorities.

Just Doing Business

You may find that the relationship with your legislator is strained and you rarely see eye to eye on anything. There remains an opportunity to develop a strong relationship with your legislator. Your legislator has things you value (ability to introduce legislation, support, oppose or abstain from action on a piece of legislation, secure earmarked funding for local projects, access to other influential people). It is also likely that you have things the legislator will value, although they may not be aware of them initially. These things could include:

- A finger on the pulse of the voters in a part of their district
- Practical knowledge about issues and the impact of policies on the ground
- Access to local groups and individuals that could help the legislator in future races
- Your endorsement or express opposition to their future political ambitions.

With persistence and clarity about the relationship, it may be possible to create specific opportunities to work together, with each of you willing to give something to get something out of the relationship.

FINDING COMMON GROUND | OVERCOMING POLITICAL DIVIDE

Constructive conversations about government and policy in the present divisive climate require clarity of purpose and a disciplined approach to achieving it. Here are some tips to help you discover common ground and avoid bitterness in your conversations with legislators and others:

Listen and Learn

Persuading another person begins with understanding where they stand and what they see. However, the current state of polarization and isolation often means that when someone presents an opinion contrary to our own, we disagree with them and are dumbfounded that they can believe what they believe. Our reaction reveals our lack of understanding of the other person. If we would build constructive relationships with our legislators (and others), we must begin by taking their perspectives seriously, by asking questions, listening and learning. Only when we understand another's perspective can we hope to influence their thoughts and opinions.

Affirm Points of Agreement

Even where there is deep-seated disagreement, there are almost always points of agreement. Our cultural focus on division obscures the wide range of trivial and important things on which most Americans agree. Enter into the conversation expecting to find such commonalities. Look for them and, when you see them, affirm them. Demonstrate

that, while there is much about which we may disagree, we have things in common. It is such commonalities that create opportunities for collaboration.

Quit Taking It Personally

Even when we don't value someone's opinion on most things, when they heap verbal abuse on us (at meetings, in conversations, on social media), we often act as though we take their accusations seriously. It's as if their insults override our sense of who we are. Yet the truth is that abusive behavior tells us much more about the person heaping abuse than it does about us. So why take it personally? We can accept that the spoken words come from the speaker's internal store of pain, frustration or resentment, not from anything we have said or done. We might even muster up some sympathy for someone so full of venom that it spills out in such public ways. But there is no reason to forget who we are because someone, reflecting on their own limitations, condemns us. Remember who you are. Quit taking it personally.

Make the Relationship the Priority

A relationship, whether personal, professional, political or social, doesn't persist because we never have disagreements. It survives the ups and downs that characterize all relationships. Because we decide, over and over again, to value the relationship for its own sake. Our ability to maintain relationships

with other officeholders, whether our municipal colleagues, state legislators or others, ultimately depends on our priorities. Relationships create opportunities to learn, educate, work toward common causes and debate different approaches. And let's face it: Relationships, even tricky ones, make our lives fuller. So, make the relationship the priority.



QUICK BREW: THREE-STEP PROCESS

STEP 1. INVITE

When your legislators are at home this fall, invite them individually to join you for coffee. In preparation, research your lawmaker to become acquainted with their public service. **Tip:** The [House](#) and [Senate](#) websites have a bio page for each legislator.

STEP 2. SHARE

Sharing, by nature, is a two-way endeavor. Ask your lawmakers what they're focused on. As you get acquainted, share a little of what excites you about your work as an elected municipal official. **Tip:** Consider sharing answers to questions such as: What do you love about your city? What are you working on locally?

STEP 3. OFFER

Ask, "How can I help you?" You can fill in with some examples: providing information on how specific policy interests of the legislator play out in your city; connecting the legislator to community members; being a sounding board. "Social capital" – the relationships we develop with others – is a critical factor in our success in all aspects of life. For elected leaders, that social capital is critically important to our ability to influence policy, attract resources and mobilize community support for the excellent work we are trying to do in our municipalities. A cup of coffee and a little time is a small investment to make to gain the return of enhanced capacity to serve our residents, businesses and visitors.



TO MAKE THE MOST OF THIS START, FOLLOW UP:

Thank. Send a thank-you note, card, email or message within 24 hours of your first coffee. Thank the legislator for their time and their public service.

Deliver. If your "offer" produced a request, fulfill it. Even if there wasn't a formal request, if the legislator showed interest in something you discussed, follow up with some digestible information or an invitation to some related future event.

Invite again. That first coffee should be followed by a second, and more after that. Be realistic; the legislator, like you, has many demands on their time. But an invitation for coffee in two or three months is reasonable and shows ongoing interest in the relationship.

Once the relationship is established, your concerns about pending legislation and requests for assistance and support are more likely to be heard.



HOW TO LOCALIZE ISSUES

When sharing information about local issues, use these prompts to prepare:

- What issues has your council successfully addressed recently?
- What future solutions are you working on that are best suited to be solved by your council?
- How is your community unique?
- If applicable, how will the proposed legislation impact your community?
- Is there anything your lawmaker can help with?

Properly frame issues for shared constituents:

- Be solution-oriented (not us versus them – we are playing for the same team: our shared constituents)
- Recognize that compromise is key
- Work in first-order values + armoring steps.

POSITIVE OPPORTUNITIES FOR JOINT LOCAL APPEARANCES

Extend an invitation or share information about specific upcoming events, such as:

- Commission meetings
- Ribbon-cutting events
- Local festivals
- Town halls
- Community service/volunteer opportunities and events
- Local/Regional Municipal League meetings.

HOW TO HOST ROUNDTABLES WITH LOCAL LAWMAKERS

Scheduling a roundtable discussion with a legislator is a great opportunity to strengthen partnerships between city and state leaders and have a meaningful conversation on a small set of issues. Below are some best practices for an effective meeting:

- Keep participants limited to a small group of city officials from different cities. Coordinate with your local/regional league.
- Include a City Manager who can provide technical expertise for a deeper dive into the issue(s)
- Be mindful of the legislator's time, and keep the roundtable brief and concise
- Set expectations and provide relevant background information in advance
- Engage in a constructive dialogue to get to the heart of the issue, and be open to alternative solutions to address the problem or need
- Use your knowledge and experience to provide a better understanding of municipal government
- Recognize and praise legislators that take the time to participate.





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