



10 Steps to Engaging Residents in the Protection of Local Self-Government

Before you can ask your constituents to advocate on any issue, you must understand the issue yourself and be able to discuss it in simple terms. Sharing information about a city's constitutional right to self-govern and then asking residents to take a stand to support that right may not resonate with residents, unless you can succinctly describe what it means *for them*. Giving residents an example of how the state's interference in local matters affects them personally gives them a reason to become a passionate advocate for the cause.

These 10 steps will help you identify and engage residents on a local level for the #LetCitiesWork campaign and help prepare them for advocacy.

1. **Develop local examples.** What issues has your council successfully addressed in the recent past? What solutions are you working on now that residents care about? How is your community unique compared to a neighboring community? How will proposed efforts by the Florida Legislature impact your city's ability to self-govern? Be specific but be succinct.
2. **Teach residents the process.** Often, residents do not know how to get involved in advocacy at the state level, because the process is different from what they've experienced at city hall. Share resources on how the legislative process works and describe the recent climate at the Florida Capitol to restrict local government authority. Explain to residents that they have an opportunity – and a responsibility – to express their views through direct communication with state lawmakers via letters, emails, phone calls, meetings and public testimony.
3. **Identify opportunities to share your message.** Relying on your city's website or digital communications is not enough. Meet your residents in person at chambers of commerce meetings, civic group events like Kiwanis or Rotary, faith-based organizations, HOAs, neighborhood organizations and senior centers. Holding events like "Coffee with a Commissioner" is a great way to connect with residents on issues that celebrate your city's ability to solve local problems and spur innovation.
4. **Identify influencers.** When recruiting residents to get involved with any advocacy campaign, reach out to key decision makers and leaders in your community. Messengers matter. If you can engage the right business, civic and religious leaders and community activists, the message of protecting home rule will resonate throughout your community.
5. **Start small.** One of the easiest ways to overwhelm a future advocate is demand too much action too early. While you want to engage residents and quantify the magnitude of the issue, start by asking them to sign-up for more information. Create a simple webpage to direct residents to visit that includes an online sign-up form. Make hard copies of the sign-up form available for residents who aren't tech savvy.
6. **Take inventory.** If getting residents to sign-up was the first step, the second step is immediate follow-up. A simple reply acknowledging their commitment to get engaged, coupled with a short – no more than three question – survey works well. Consider questions such as "what do you like most about our city?" or "what are the most pressing issues facing residents in our town today?" or "are you comfortable with public speaking?" These questions will help residents identify what they care about most, while helping you determine who might be your best advocate on a specific legislative issue that may arise.
7. **Be strategic.** When the time comes to ask residents to take action, evaluate your advocates and be selective on who you engage based on the issue, their passion and their expertise. If you send every call

to action to all individuals who have signed up, they are less likely to respond. However, if you communicate too little, residents are likely to miss important messages.

8. **Provide sample talking points.** One of the best ways to turn a commitment to advocate into actual advocacy is by providing residents with sample talking points. Do not just recycle points provided by your lobbyist or the League. Reflect on the local impact of an issue and put yourself in the shoes of a business owner, civic leader, religious leader, homeowner or parent – not an elected official. Write from that perspective.
9. **Remind residents to make the ask.** A common mistake is forgetting to “make the ask.” In addition to providing education on an issue, we must tell a legislator what action we want to see happen. Are you looking for a vote in favor or against a particular bill? Are you seeking an amendment or a question to be raised during a debate? Be clear in your desired outcome and remind your team of advocates to make the ask.
10. **Give public thanks.** Just as you would thank a legislator or congressman for meeting with you or responding to a particular concern, do not forget to thank your advocates. They are taking time out of their schedules to act on behalf of the city. Provide them with much deserved recognition and be public about it. Highlight their efforts in your digital communications, via social media, and during council meetings.

If you have questions or need assistance implementing these steps, please contact Allison Payne at the Florida League of Cities at 850-222-9684 or apayne@flcities.com.

