

## STRATEGIES FOR COMMUNICATING WITH LEGISLATORS

### KANSAS STATE SENATORS AND REPRESENTATIVES – Initial Contact

- Contacting your state senator or representative:
  - To identify your state representative or senator based on your legal residence, go to [www.openstates.org](http://www.openstates.org). Do not enter the name of the state, but scroll down until you can put in your address. This will bring up the names of your state senator and representative and their districts and district maps.
  - For more information, go to the Kansas Legislature website ([www.kslegislature.org](http://www.kslegislature.org)). Click on House Roster or Senate Roster and then select the name of your legislator. A page opens with the legislator's picture, contact information, and website, if available.
- When the Legislature is in session, call the office at the State Capitol and ask the office assistant (legislators may be sharing an office assistant); you can ask to schedule a meeting over the phone or ask for an e-mail address to send a written request with the details.
  - State your name, your purpose and describe why you and your colleagues would like to meet with the legislator. See sample message script with this handout. If KSAND has had any contact or working relationship with the legislator, be sure to mention it during the conversation or in the email. If you are a constituent (or one of the group making the visit is a constituent), be sure to mention in the introduction.
  - State that you are requesting a 15-20 minute meeting or “brief meeting”. State that you will be bringing a group of registered dietitian nutritionists and/or nutrition and dietetics technicians, registered from the state/district with you to the meeting. You may be asked for the names of the individuals attending the meeting. There is strength in numbers; having more than one for the visit provides emphasis to the meeting and importance to the issues.
  - The office assistant may ask for additional information, so be prepared. You may need to follow up via e-mail, with any requested materials on the issues. You may be sending the email directly to the senator or representative (office assistant may also receive/screen the email).
- *When requesting a meeting by email*, remember to be concise and to the point; legislators and staff read many e-mails and receive numerous requests so you want to make sure and entice them with to-the-point messaging.
- Always make your messaging relevant to the district, if at all possible. Legislators put priority on serving their constituents and fixing problems in the district.

### KANSAS MEMBERS OF CONGRESS – Initial Contact

- Contacting your federal senator or representative (i.e., Members of Congress):
  - Find your Representative or Senator using the links below. Once you find the Member of Congress, the link will take you to their home page where you will find the phone number to their Washington, D.C. office and the district office that is closest to you.
    - House of Representatives: <http://www.house.gov/representatives/>
    - Senate: [http://www.senate.gov/general/contact\\_information/senators\\_cfm.cfm](http://www.senate.gov/general/contact_information/senators_cfm.cfm)
- Call the office according to location of meeting, i.e., Washington, D.C. or local district office. Ask for the scheduler to schedule a meeting over the phone or to ask for an e-mail address to send a written request with the details.

## Kansas Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (KSAND)

- State your name, your purpose and describe why you and your colleagues would like to meet with the member. See sample message script with this handout. If KSAND has had any contact or working relationship with the member of Congress, be sure to mention it during the conversation or in the email. If you are a constituent (or one of the group making the visit is a constituent), be sure to mention in the introduction.
- Make sure to request a meeting with the member of Congress as well as his/her staff member (if the member is in Washington, a district meeting may be scheduled with a staff member). The scheduler may not be able to guarantee that both will be in attendance; that is okay. Depending on timing of the visit, you may be meeting with the staff member.
- State that you are requesting a 15-20 minute meeting or “brief meeting”. State that you will be bringing a group of registered dietitian nutritionists and/or nutrition and dietetics technicians, registered from the state/district with you to the meeting. Many offices will ask for the names of the individuals planning to attend the meeting. There is strength in numbers; having more than one for the visit provides emphasis to the meeting and importance to the issues.
- The scheduler may ask for additional information, so be prepared. You may need to follow up with the scheduler via e-mail, with any requested materials on the issues.
- Ask the scheduler for the member of Congress for his/her name and e-mail address and for any key staff members who may be attending the meeting. The scheduler may ask you to follow up with each staff member in addition to setting up the meeting.
- *When requesting a meeting by email*, remember to be concise and to the point; members and staff read many e-mails and receive numerous requests so you want to make sure and entice them with to-the-point messaging.
- Always make your messaging relevant to the district and/or state, if at all possible. Legislators put priority on serving their constituents and fixing problems in their state (senator) and district (representative).

### Time to Meet

- *What to bring to the meeting*
  - Leave-behind material for when the meeting/visit is finished.
  - Talking points with relevant statistics or data points on issues, and any additional information you feel you many need to support your message.
  - Positive attitude and passion for what you do – this is what you want your legislator to see.
- *What to say at the meeting*
  - Familiarize yourself with the talking points as guided by the KSAND Advocacy Team. Always relate the issues back to you or the State of Kansas and what you do.
  - Have a personal and/or professional story ready to tell, preferably one that relates to one of the specific pieces of legislation or issues for discussion. Personal stories from the workplace always resonate more deeply than facts or figures. These legislators care about the people they represent and so by telling a story about one of their constituents (your patient/client) you will be able to make a stronger connection from the legislator’s understanding of the issue to the actual policy, legislation, or practice (e.g., insurance coverage for nutrition services).
  - Do not be afraid to say “I don’t know” (avoid “no comment”). Nothing is worse than providing false information to a legislator or staff member. Remember you want to be viewed as a reliable source. Simply say “I’m not quite sure about that, but I can get you the answer/more information later” and then be timely is providing the information.

### Follow-up contact

- Always follow-up 1-2 days later with a thank-you email to the legislator and/or staff member and possibly one to the office assistant or the scheduler as well (if you have his or her email address).
- Reiterate your messaging on the things that were discussed in the meeting/visit.

## Kansas Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (KSAND)

- You may be communicating directly with a state legislator so follow the process the legislator would prefer for follow-up communications.
  - For the member of Congress, you may be reaching out to the relevant staff member to answer any question the member may have had or to provide any supporting materials that were requested.
  - Report back to the KSAND Advocacy Team. Use [advocacyteam@eatrightks.org](mailto:advocacyteam@eatrightks.org)
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## DEVELOPING AND PRESENTING MESSAGE/TALKING POINTS

### Develop messages that resonate with consumers and legislators

- Define the issue
- What is the central idea to communicate?
- What do you hope to occur as a result of the communication?
- How can you motivate the audience to adopt central idea?
- Use language that empowers audience to want to adopt the central idea.

### Most persuasive words

- you                safety
- money            love
- save                discovery
- new                proven
- easy                health
- results            guarantee

### Developing Key Messages

- Rules of three
- Meaningful, motivating, consistent with audience needs
- Address consumer/legislator perceptions
- Simple, clear
- Compelling
- Action, specific, manageable
- Raise awareness
- Research says...
- Targeted messages on how
- Motivational messages that target attitudes
- How to overcome barriers and reduce obstacles

### Legislators want

- To know registered dietitian nutritionists are the food and nutrition experts
- To know we can make a difference in the health of the citizens of the State of Kansas
- Want registered dietitian nutritionists to provide a reliable service
- Want simple answers to questions
- Want us to help meet the needs of their constituents

### Legislators don't want

- Lots of details and facts
- Too much scientific or technical jargon
- Defensive attitudes

### **Delivering messages to legislators**

- Be prepared - know your legislator – learn about them through their website and social media sources; learn what issues are important to them
- Consumer-friendly message
- Natural, conversational delivery
- Be yourself, be confident
- Enthusiastic and passionate when appropriate
- Don't speculate: stick to science
- Use anecdotes and personal stories
- Bring materials to leave behind; make sure it includes contact information for KSAND and yourself.
  
- Transitioning to key points
  - That is an interesting question.... Let me remind you...
  - Before I forget, I want to tell you...
  - Let me put that in perspective...
  - What's important to remember is...
  - Before we get off the subject, let me add...
  - That's not my area of expertise, what I can tell you is...
  - What I am here to talk about is...
  - That reminds me...
  - Let's take a closer look at...

### **Look the part! Appearance is important**

- **Professional Image Tips**
  - Body language: hands, legs
  - Eye contact
  - Nodding – engaged listening
  - Simple language
  - Lean forward
  - Listen
  - Look confident
  
- **Dress for success**
  - Professional image- good first impression
  - Make-up: simple
  - Hair: simple and controlled
  - Jewelry: avoid large
  - Shoes: no sandals or flip flops
  - Clothing: wear something that makes you feel sharp. Ladies avoid high slits and colored hose. Men wear shirt and tie. Minimum is business attire.

## **Words of experience from Teresa Nece, Director of Grassroots Advocacy, Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics shared in the Tuesday Public Policy News**

### **November 11, 2014 – New Congress, New Relationships**

Now that the elections are over and the dust is settling, it's time to begin thinking about making new connections or reconnecting with your members of Congress. In today's world, there are many options for reaching out to your elected officials. Traditionally, the recommended order has been write (via email or a web-submission), call and then meet. Depending on the issue, you may need to communicate "out of order." Social media can be an effective way to reach members of Congress and to connect with legislative staff members who are tech savvy. Find your member of Congress on Facebook or Twitter in order to share information.

It can seem daunting to find the right person to speak with about an issue, but in reality it only takes a few steps. Call the elected officials office and ask the receptionist for the name of the legislative assistant (LA) who handles your issue. Later you can call and ask to speak directly with that person. Be sure to let them know you are a constituent and your role with your affiliate or employer. In some situations meeting with the member of Congress is not possible, but don't be discouraged. The legislative staff is a great place to start the conversation and relationship. If you want to meet with your member of Congress personally, consider attending a fundraising event sponsored by ANDPAC and tell your story. After the event, reach out again to the legislative staff to complete the circle of communication.

It only takes a few conversations to establish trust and respect with elected officials and the payoff is more credibility for the profession and nutrition policy issues. Keep us posted on your progress!

### **December 2, 2014 – How to Have More Meaningful Conversations with Elected Officials**

Flattery gets you everywhere. Its human nature to be impressed when someone you meet has done his or her homework and knows your background or highlights of your career. Members of Congress are no different! Last week we gave you tips for making a connection – this week we want you to consider taking it a step further.

The easiest way to learn more about your elected officials is to visit their websites and read their biographies. Look for things that would provide a natural connection between you and the official. Did you go to the same school? Do you live in the same geographical area? Is there an issue on which you share similar philosophy? Think about the way that you gather information about a new client or patient (or even a new boss) and the manner in which you use that "intel" to develop rapport. Transfer that skill to policy and advocacy!

Similarly, if a member of Congress is a health care professional, you may be able to build upon their commitment to health and wellness. These members are often the "champions" of nutrition issues regardless of party lines. Your communication with these fellow health care professionals can strengthen the Academy's relationship and just as important, brings credibility to the profession of dietetics across all disciplines. A little research on the front end can make the difference between good and great communication with your members of Congress.

Give it a try!

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## **Tools – Sample Phone and E-mail Scripts** (adapted from Academy materials)

### **Phone Call - Member of Congress:**

Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I'm a (*insert registered dietitian nutritionist or nutrition and dietetics technician, registered*) from the Senator/Representative's state (*for in-district meetings "from Kansas" or "from the Representative's district in Kansas"*). I would like to schedule a meeting with the Senator/Representative in (*include when, e.g., in August or within the next X weeks*). I would also like to meet his/her district staff at that meeting (*for in-district meeting versus in Washington office*). I'm a member of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, the largest food and nutrition professional association in the country – with over 75,000 members working to improve the health of Americans through food and nutrition. I am also a member of the Kansas Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, a state affiliate of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics with more than 600 members (*check for current information*).

Attending the meeting with me would be (number) registered dietitian nutritionists (*and, if applicable, nutrition and dietetic technicians, registered*) from Kansas (*or "Legislator's home district in Kansas"*). We would like to talk about food and nutrition-related policy (or whatever the purpose of the visit).

Would we be able to schedule a meeting with the Senator/Representative for (give time frame)?

Thank you.

### **Phone Call - State Senator/Representative**

Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I'm a (*insert registered dietitian nutritionist or nutrition and dietetics technician, registered*) from the Senator/Representative's district (*"from Kansas", if not from the district – indicate if someone coming with you is from the district*). I would like to schedule a meeting with the Senator/Representative in (*include when, e.g., in August or within the next X weeks*). I am representing (or "a member of") the Kansas Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, a state affiliate of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics with more than 600 members (*check for current information*).

Attending the meeting with me would be (number) registered dietitian nutritionists (*and, if applicable, nutrition and dietetic technicians, registered*) from Kansas (*or "the Senator's/Legislator's district"*). We would like to talk about food and nutrition-related policy (or whatever the purpose of the visit).

Would we be able to schedule a meeting with the Senator/Representative for (give time frame)?

Thank you.

### **E-mail – Member of Congress**

The scheduler may ask you to put your request in writing to him/her or one of the district staff and include the names of the individuals who will be attending the meeting (you can indicate you will provide the names prior to the meeting). The following is a sample message:

Dear XXX,

My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I am a (*insert, e.g., registered dietitian nutritionist*) from Kansas (*or for Representative "home district in Kansas", if applicable*). I am a member of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, the largest food and nutrition professional association in the country – with over 75,000 members working to improve the health of Americans through food and nutrition. I am also a member of the Kansas Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, a state affiliate of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics with more than 600 members (check for current information).

## Kansas Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (KSAND)

I would like to schedule a brief meeting with Senator/Representative and the district staff. Accompanying me will be (number) registered dietitian nutritionists (describe the group). Our goal will be to discuss our legislative priorities which aim to reduce healthcare costs and improve the health of American's through food and nutrition (*relate purpose of meeting following directions provided by the Academy*).

I know that the Senator/Representative cares deeply about improving the health of our country while lowering costs to the system. We agree and so we would greatly appreciate the Senator's/ Representative's time to discuss how we as dietitians are working to accomplish these same goals every day. Please let me know when (*describe time frame, e.g., "August" or "next several weeks" based on when the Senator/Representative will be back in Kansas, otherwise you will be speaking with a member of the district staff*) would work best for the Senator/Representatives and staff to meet with us. If you have any additional questions, please let me know.

Thank you.

Respectfully,

Insert your name, credentials

Insert affiliate position (if applicable)

Insert affiliate name (if applicable)

Personal address and contact information.

## **E-mail – State Representative or Senator** (you may be sending e-mail directly to legislator)

Dear XXX,

My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I am a (*insert, e.g., registered dietitian nutritionist*) from the Senator/Representative's district in Kansas. I am a member of the Kansas Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, a state affiliate of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics with more than 600 members living and working throughout Kansas (check for current information).

I would like to schedule a brief meeting with Senator/Representative \_\_\_\_\_. Accompanying me will be (number) registered dietitian nutritionists (*describe the group*). We would like to discuss our legislative priorities which aim to reduce healthcare costs and improve the health of Kansans through food and nutrition (*Relate purpose of meeting; if representing KSAND, follow directions provided by the KSAND Advocacy Team*).

I know that the Senator/Representative cares deeply about improving the health of Kansans (*investigate legislator's interests/priorities related to topics for discussion*) while lowering costs to the system. We agree and so we would greatly appreciate the Senator's/ Representative's time to discuss how we as dietitians are working to accomplish these same goals every day. Please let me know when (*describe time frame, e.g., "next several weeks"; could be time- dependent if you are seeking support of a Kansas bill being discussed during the legislative session*) would work best for the Senator/Representative. If you have any additional questions, please let me know.

Thank you.

Respectfully,

Insert your name, credentials

Insert affiliate position (if applicable)

Insert affiliate name (if applicable)

Personal address and contact information.