

Hearing from constituents, or the people for whom they are responsible, helps decision-makers take a position on an issue and prioritize which issues they will spend their time and energy on. An effective way for you and your allies or coalition members to make your voices heard is to directly **send letters to** decision-makers.

**Use this Tactic if:**

- You want a large number of people to contact your decision-maker
- You want to inform or educate a decision-maker or influencer – a letter is better than an email if you have a lot to say, a lot of people want to say it or just want to share information, otherwise, you should be sending an email

**Do Not Use this Tactic if:**

- Time is an issue
- You need a response or are trying to schedule a meeting

### Steps for Writing a Letter to a Decision-Maker

**Step 1:** Review your overall project goal(s) to adjust your ask to your target. Keep in mind your target's level of authority (state, city, local, school).

- Class Goal:
- Target for this Tactic:
- Ask:

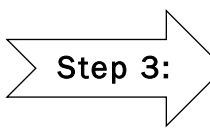
**Step 2:** Develop your letter script.

Create your script based on what you know about your decision-maker. (Ex: If you know your decision-maker sits on the Board of an Athletic Program at a different school and you want to create an athletic program in your school, it is important to make note of that fact and mention it in your letter)

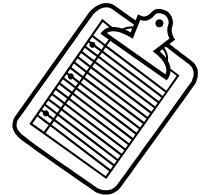
**An effective letter will include:**

- **Greeting:** Address your decision-maker with “Dear Mr./Ms./Dr./Councilman,”
- **Issue:** Explain the topic to be discussed.
- **Position:** Take a stand and make your “ask” – what you want your decision-maker to do and how they can do that.
  - Make sure your “ask” is specific. It is important to ask for a specific action. (Ex: “Please help us develop a mentorship program in our school by putting funding in next school year’s budget for a program.”)

- **Points:** Present your key points.
  - > Don't argue every point that comes to mind. Instead identify two to three key arguments and discuss those. Remember a short letter is more likely to be read than a long one.
  - > Make sure your claims are accurate and honest. Your decision-maker will find it difficult to support you if your claims seem exaggerated or false.
  - > Be personal: Why does this issue matter to you?
- **Conclusion:** Restate your position; thank the decision-maker for his/her time.
  - > By restating the important part of your message, you will remind the decision-maker what you are asking.
  - > Request a response. It lets your decision-maker know that you are serious about your request and require an answer.



**Step 3:** Go through the checklist to make sure you haven't forgotten anything.



- Did you include a full heading at the top of your letter so you can be contacted?

Your heading should include:

Your Name

Your Street Address

Your City/State/Zip Code

Your Email Address

Your Phone Number

Date

- Are you clearly stating your points?
- Are you specific about what you're concerned about and what you want done?
- Are you polite? Be respectful – you want your decision-maker to be on your side.
- Did you personalize the letter? The more genuine or "real" it is, the more seriously it will be taken.

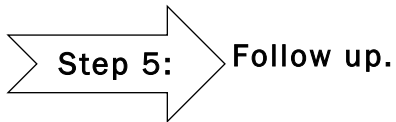
\* If you did not check all of the boxes, make edits and go through the checklist again.



**Step 4:** Create the final copy of your letter and mail it to your decision-maker OR If you are mobilizing others to contact your decision-maker, launch a campaign!

- Determine where and when you can get access to your target audience (school lunch, community event, sports game, outside of a grocery store, coalition meeting, etc.).
- Set up the location, date and time you will be holding your letter-writing or email campaign.

- Recruit a small team of your supporters to join you.
- Bring blank paper, pens, and your letter template. Consider bringing signs to attract the attention of potential supporters walking by.
- Recruit others to write their own letters to the decision-maker, utilizing your template as a guide. **However, all writers should personalize their letters slightly** so that they have an individual voice. Your decision-maker will not be impressed by “spam” that others simply copied and sent. A personalized letter conveys that the writer put effort into it and cares about the issue.
- Thank all writers for their support. If possible, give them information about your action plan and collect their contact information in order to get in touch with them about future efforts.
- Arrange appropriate postage and mail letters.



**Step 5: Follow up.**

- If you received a response, follow up with a thank you note.
- If you have not heard from your decision-maker within a week of your communication, follow up with them by calling or emailing.



Sample Letter Script

	Jameela Matheson 3515 Oak Drive Jackson, MS 01342 j.matheson@live.com (621) 453-2197	There is a heading with contact information.
	May 5, 2013	
<b>Greeting</b>	Dear Representative Roberts,	
<b>Issue</b>	I am writing to you about the importance of early childhood programs in our community.	The topic is clearly and immediately presented.
<b>Position: Your "Ask"</b>	As a constituent in your district, I ask that you support House Bill 383 to create the Mississippi Foundation for Early Childhood Development to deliver quality early care and education experiences and parent education for families whose children are at risk of being unprepared for school.	The "ask" is specific.
<b>Points</b>	<p>Those children who participate in high-quality early learning programs have better language, math, and social skills than their peers who missed this opportunity. They are also more likely to graduate from high school, less likely to become involved in crime, and more likely to become positive, productive citizens as adults.</p> <p>This issue matters to me because it is important for me to see my younger brother and sister have the opportunities I didn't have. In my neighborhood, many students do not even finish high school and I don't want that to happen to them. With a program like this, my brother and sister and many other kids will be excited to go to school. They will actually feel prepared.</p>	Key points are presented with a personal story.
<b>Conclusion</b>	<p>The Mississippi Foundation for Early Childhood Development will be able identify methods to increase student preparedness for kindergarten and to provide funding and support for early childhood programs throughout the state. Please vote in support of House Bill 383 so that all the children in our community will be prepared to enter school ready to learn.</p> <p>Thank you for your hard work.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Sincerely, Jameela Matheson</p>	The "ask" is repeated.

Adapted from "Early Childhood Advocacy Toolkit," Ounce of Prevention, accessed August 1, 2012, <http://www.ounceofprevention.org/advocacy/advocacy-tools.php>



### Draft Your Own Letter

<b>Greeting and Heading</b>	
<b>Issue</b>	
<b>Position: Your "Ask"</b>	
<b>Points</b>	
<b>Conclusion</b>	