



# *Advocacy* and *Government Affairs*

**YOUR GUIDEBOOK TO ADVOCACY**

AMERICAN PUBLIC WORKS ASSOCIATION





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## Introduction

**P**ublic policy affects what we do as public works professionals in our day-to-day jobs in important ways. Often, we are the first to see the outcomes of policies on public infrastructure and local communities. That is why APWA members are important stakeholders in legislative issues related to transportation, environment, emergency management, water, sustainability and other areas.

At APWA, advocacy means taking an active role in supporting the inclusion of public works perspectives in legislation and rulemaking at the local, state and federal levels. From transportation funding to security regulations, public works advocacy is a vital component of public policy. Government officials need to hear from qualified experts like you in order to make informed policy decisions, and APWA Advocacy provides opportunities to stay informed about legislative and regulatory issues and to take action in making public policy recommendations.

This handbook describes how you can be an effective public works advocate, from staying informed to meeting with elected officials. This handbook focuses mostly on federal advocacy, but the concepts and tips can be applied to advocacy at any level of government.



—George R. Crombie, 2010–2011, President, APWA

### Quick and Easy Ways to Take Action

- **Visit the APWA Advocacy Web Page – [www.apwa.net/advocacy](http://www.apwa.net/advocacy)**  
*Explore current issues, catch up on recent advocacy efforts, learn more about APWA positions, and research bills and rules.*
- **Join the Government Affairs InfoNOW Community**  
*Get up-to-the-minute bulletins on public works issues, communicate with other APWA advocates and be the first to hear when APWA needs your help taking action on a bill or rule. Connect by asking questions and responding to postings and passing messages and action alerts on to other interested colleagues.*
- **Respond to APWA Action Alerts**  
*Watch for APWA e-mail alerts and click the link to take immediate action on a bill. Personalize your message and input your address to send an e-mail to your elected officials.*
- **Use the Legislative Action Center**  
*Lend your support to APWA's long-term advocacy efforts by writing to your Member of Congress. Research your elected officials, review their previous votes and watch legislation gain support in Congress.*

## Stay Informed – Take Action

APWA's Advocacy Web Page – [www.apwa.net/advocacy](http://www.apwa.net/advocacy)

**Y**ou are an expert on public works, but how do you translate that expertise into recommendations that will resonate with decision makers? The APWA Advocacy web page helps you stay up to speed on policy issues by featuring real-time updates on APWA advocacy activities and other legislative and regulatory news.

There are also resources to conduct in-depth research on specific bills and rules APWA has targeted for action. The web page will provide quick links to the APWA Legislative Action Center and action alerts, so you can send targeted messages to your congressional representatives instantly on urgent legislative matters.

### What you will find on APWA's Advocacy Web page

- **Federal Legislation:** *Policy makers look to APWA for member expertise on the merits and drawbacks of legislation related to public works. You can view the bills APWA is monitoring and shaping, along with any materials APWA has issued on the subject. Then, take action with APWA's Legislative Action Center to write your congressional representatives.*
- **Federal Regulations:** *After a bill becomes a law, federal executive agencies like the Department of Transportation, Department of Homeland Security and the Environmental Protection Agency "flesh out" the law with specific regulations. Departments and agencies must provide the public with the opportunity to comment on new regulations, and APWA technical committees and members often comment on the merits of proposed rules. You can find information on relevant regulations, along with documents APWA has submitted and guidelines for submitting comments in this section of the web page.*
- **Take Action:** *Visit the Legislative Action Center to write your elected officials, join the Government Affairs infoNOW community and learn how to get involved in your own community.*
- **State and Provincial Advocacy:** *find links to statewide and provincial elected officials, state legislatures, state agencies, provincial governments and local advocacy resources. Contact the APWA Washington Office for assistance with advocacy efforts in your state, province or chapter.*
- **APWA Positions:** *APWA takes a member-based approach to advocacy to ensure federal policy is created with the input and perspective of local public works officials. Each year, the board of directors sets forth Public Policy Advocacy Priorities that guide advocacy efforts and are implemented by APWA members. Members are encouraged to submit ideas for new positions or amendments to existing positions. Find out more about APWA positions in the next section, "Developing the APWA Message."*
- **Resources:** *Find key advocacy links, APWA testimony, presentations and research aids along with helpful links to research transportation, environment and emergency management issues.*

Be sure to bookmark the APWA Advocacy web page, [www.apwa.net/advocacy](http://www.apwa.net/advocacy).

## APWA's Legislative Action Center

APWA's Legislative Action Center (available at [www.capwiz.com/apwa/home](http://www.capwiz.com/apwa/home)) is a gateway to communicating with your elected officials. Contact your members of Congress with messages APWA has prepared, or write your own letter on an issue of importance to you and your community. Other tools are also available:

- Research your elected official, including biographical and contact information, key staff contacts and PAC contributors.
- Monitor current legislation, including key votes on public works issues, and get daily updates via e-mail with "MegaVote."
- Reach out to local media to educate your community on public works issues.
- Tell your colleagues about the Legislative Action Center so they can take action too!



The screenshot shows the APWA website's advocacy page. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the APWA logo and the text 'AMERICAN PUBLIC WORKS ASSOCIATION'. Below this is a secondary navigation bar with links: Home, About Us, Advocacy, Members Only, Events, Education, Chapters, Reports, Resource Center, and Jobs. A search bar is located on the left side. The main content area features a large banner with the text 'Advocacy Get Involved!' and a photograph of several men in suits engaged in a discussion. Below the banner, there is a section titled 'Visit the Legislative Action Center' with a brief description of the center's purpose. Further down, there is a section for 'Join the Government Affairs infoNOW community!' with a logo for 'infoNOW' and a sub-tagline 'INFORMATION AND NETWORKING ON THE GO'. The final section is titled 'Advocacy Starts in Your Hometown!' and encourages local participation.

Wednesday, October 15

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# Advocacy Get Involved!

Visit the [Legislative Action Center](#)

APWA's Legislative Action Center is a gateway to communicating with your elected officials. You can contact your Members of Congress with messages APWA has written about current issues, or write your own letter on an issue of importance to you and your community. You also can track which bills APWA has identified as important public works legislation and see how your elected officials voted.

Join the Government Affairs **infoNOW** community!  
INFORMATION AND NETWORKING ON THE GO

Get up-to-the-minute reports about advocacy efforts and be the first to respond to urgent action alerts. APWA staff will alert the Government Affairs infoNOW team when APWA members need to weigh in on upcoming legislation and rulemaking, from maintaining local control over rights-of-way to securing transportation funding. Government Affairs team members also get updates on federal executive issues, notices of calls for proposals, and have the opportunity to discuss government affairs topics with other members of the community and APWA advocacy staff through the listserv.

**Advocacy Starts in Your Hometown!**

Get involved. Local groups and associations are a great place to offer a public works perspective. Get involved in your local APWA chapter and make sure to stay active! Work with your Chapter to appoint members to a Government Affairs

## Developing the APWA Public Works Message

**P**osition statements form the basis of APWA's advocacy efforts. From these positions, the Government Affairs Committee recommends policy priorities for the year. Advocacy positions are developed in areas where public works employees and issues are most affected by public policy decisions.

For example, public works officials are on the front lines of emergency response: public works is involved in debris removal, infrastructure repair and delivery of critical services to local citizens. However, federal legislation authorizing grants, training and supplies for first responders might not always include public works.

In this case, APWA developed a position regarding the inclusion of public works officials as first responders, which argues that public works should be given a "seat at the table" in national discussions about emergency management and access to the benefits and resources for first responders. Through the Emergency Management Committee, the Government Affairs Committee and the APWA Board of Directors, the position was refined into a cohesive, carefully crafted argument that APWA advocates took to elected officials—who responded by including public works in subsequent bills.

### **Our Priorities**

*APWA advocates policies that sustain infrastructure and performance on behalf of all levels of government. APWA's public policy objectives are guided by these principles:*

- *Support for adequate investment in public infrastructure*
- *Respect for local authority*
- *Reasonable regulations and protection from unfunded mandates*
- *Support for streamlining government oversight*
- *Support for sustainability and environmental stewardship*

Due to the effort spent developing a high-impact, well-reasoned position, the "first responders" position allowed APWA advocates to ask for specific legislation and language to achieve policy goals, along with some key points in support of the idea.

Any APWA member can offer suggestions for new positions or changes to existing positions, which will be reviewed by one or more committees. These submissions ensure that APWA's positions represent the broad universe of public works and every suggestion further refines our message. To view current APWA positions go to [www.apwa.net/Advocacy/positions.asp](http://www.apwa.net/Advocacy/positions.asp).

## Delivering the APWA Public Works Message

**A**s an APWA advocate, you are delivering an important message about the public works community and its recommendations for public policy action. APWA has tools that enable you to send a carefully crafted letter or prepare for a meeting.

Elected officials are very busy and their offices communicate with hundreds of people each week. That is why it is important you know exactly what you are going to say to an elected official to make the most of your letter, phone call or meeting. As an advocate, always know the message, get comfortable with the specifics, and be ready to make the ask.

### **Making the Ask**

*When you tell an elected official exactly what you want him or her to do, it is called making the ask. The ask is the most important part of your meeting.*

#### **■ What do you want?**

*Do you want your elected official to sponsor, cosponsor or vote for or against legislation? Do you want a specific exemption? Should he or she introduce an amendment?*

*An ask can be as simple as “support increased funding for surface transportation,” or as technical-sounding as “support Congressman Smith’s amendment to H.R. 123 exempting water facilities from regulation.”*

It is also important to have talking points, persuasive reasons why your representative should take action. APWA positions may provide broader, policy-oriented talking points, but it is extremely convincing if you have an example from your own experience—in your elected official’s district—that relates to the issue.

Remember, talking points are quick and punchy, not story-length. Think about your situation and try to condense it into the most relevant, applicable details. It should be your unique story, packaged into a sentence or two.

Once you are comfortable with the message, choose the best way to get it across: generally, the type of “ask” you are making can help you decide how you will deliver it.

## Meetings

Meetings are effective for requesting broad support for an array of public works priorities. Meeting requests should be made in writing, and faxing the request is recommended. About a week after you send your written request, call your elected official's office and ask to speak with the scheduler to set up a meeting with the staff person who covers your issue.

Once you are able to arrange a meeting, be sure you adequately prepare ahead of time to maximize your impact. Here are tips to make the most out of your meeting:

- **Be On Time:** Elected officials have very tight schedules. If you arrive late, you may miss your chance to meet—but do not be discouraged if you are kept waiting. Remember, your voice as a constituent matters to your elected officials, even if they are temporarily delayed by other affairs. Be sure to review the key congressional staff roles in the event that you meet with the elected official's staff. (See next page.)
- **Know Your Audience:** Take the time to research your elected official's position on the subject you are discussing by exploring his or her key votes on APWA's Legislative Action Center. You can also find out what committees he or she sits on. If she has already introduced supportive bills, be sure to thank her. If he is opposed to the position you are advocating, be sure you have a strong argument with which to persuade him, but always be polite. Doing your homework on a legislator before you arrive will pay off in the meeting.
- **Leave Something Behind:** Always offer to be a resource for future questions. Be sure the person you meet with has one of your business cards, along with any supporting materials you think might help make your case (e.g., APWA's advocacy priorities). When a staff member does her research to determine how your Congressman will vote on a bill, your leaflet or handout might be what she grabs for background.
- **Follow Through:** After your meeting, send a thank you letter re-stating your main point and be sure to keep any promises you made during the meeting (for example, if you told a staff member you would e-mail him a report you referenced, make sure you do so). If you asked for something specific, check back after a few months to see if your elected official was able to do it. If so, send another thank you. If not, consider following up with a call or a letter reminding him or her of your discussion—and be sure to ask for a response.

## Phone Calls

Phone calls work best when you have a short or urgent message you want to convey, such as support for a specific bill coming to the floor. The staff assistant who answers the phone can log your comment, or you can ask to speak to the staff member who works in an appropriate policy area (usually, a staff member will have responsibility for broad issues like transportation, environment or emergency management, so think about what area your concern might fall under). Prepare for a phone call by writing down two or three talking points, the main messages you want to convey. These should only be a sentence or two, so be sure your message is clear, concise and makes a good argument.

## Key Congressional Staff Titles

If you are meeting with a staff member, know his or her role in the office.

- **Chief of Staff:** The key administrative official in each congressional office. He or she runs the office on a day-to-day basis.
- **Legislative Director:** Responsible for determining the senator or congressman's official position on legislation. This person may be responsible for specific areas, particularly issues in the jurisdiction of a member's committees.
- **Scheduler:** Manages the member's schedule. This person will often determine whether or not the member is able to meet with a constituent and may determine which staff member takes the meeting if the member is unavailable.
- **Legislative Assistant:** Staff members who concentrate on one or more issue area. Public works issues such as transportation, water, rights-of-way and emergency management may be covered by a single legislative assistant, or an office may have a different staff person for each issue.
- **Legislative Aide:** Staff members (primarily in the Senate) who assist Legislative assistants or take responsibility for some smaller issue areas.
- **Legislative Correspondent:** Staffers responsible for responding to constituent inquiries, primarily via mail. In the Senate, legislative correspondents may also have some issue areas and work closely with legislative assistants by attending meetings and briefings on their behalf.
- **Staff Assistant:** The receptionist, who will route your calls to the appropriate person.

**Quick tip:** Develop relationships with the staff assistants and schedulers in your member's offices, including the local district office. It's equally effective to be an advocate in your local or district office.

## Letters

Send a letter when you want to educate your elected official about a topic that might not be on his or her radar, to go in-depth about a specific issue or to stress long-term goals. Letters go through a lengthy security inspection process and take several weeks to reach a congressional office. The Legislative Action Center on APWA's Advocacy web page is the fastest and most reliable way to get your message to your elected official. Sending a fax is also a quick way to get your letter to the right person. However you decide to send your letter, make sure you are clear about what you want your congressman to do.

*Below is an example of a standard letter on chapter or organization letterhead you might send:*

January 20, 2010

The Honorable James Johnson  
United States House of Representatives  
2365 Russell House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20215

Dear Representative Johnson:

*I am writing to you as Director of Public Works for the City of Middletown and as a member of the American Public Works Association. I encourage you to support H.R. 89, the Invest in Public Infrastructure Act, when the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure considers it this month.*

*H.R. 89 would authorize \$14 million in much-needed infrastructure improvements that are otherwise ineligible for federal grants. Without adequate federal funding, cities and towns cannot meet the needs of their transportation and water systems. At the same time, public support for infrastructure investment has never been higher. I urge you to continue your support for infrastructure improvement by voting yes on H.R. 89 and by urging your colleagues to support it and other public infrastructure legislation.*

*In closing, let me thank you for your years of service to the State of Maine and your work on the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee. As a constituent, I appreciate your leadership on this and other issues.*

Sincerely,

Joe Brown, Director of Public Works  
City of Middletown Department of Public Works  
10 Maple Road  
Middletown, ME 12345

## What to Expect – The Policy Process

It is important to be realistic when making demands of your elected officials. If your representative was just elected, she probably is not ready to introduce a major bill. And if he is in the minority, he might be fighting as hard as he can for an issue that will never be considered by a committee. Know these basic concepts:

- **The Legislative Agenda:** *The agenda is set by the majority in Congress. If the majority does not like a bill or an idea, it's unlikely to be voted on. In committees, the agenda will be set by the chairman and will include specific items over which the committee has jurisdiction.*
- **Committees:** *Know the committees and subcommittees on which your elected official serves. If she is on the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works, she is likely to have a lot more expertise in stormwater regulations than someone who sits on the Budget Committee. Remember the Appropriations Committee members as well! They hold the key to providing funding for legislative priorities and often need the most education about the importance of projects and technical issues. On page 10, find a select list of committees and their jurisdictions that deal with public works issues.*
- **How a Bill Becomes a Law:** *You already know that bills get introduced, voted on and signed by the president in order to become law. But it is important to know also about a bill's momentum. When a bill is first introduced, it is sent to a committee that will either hold hearings, discuss it, mark it up (i.e., amend) and send it to the floor for a vote. Many more bills are introduced in a session of Congress than the committees have time to consider, and many bills are said to die in committee.*

*While a bill is in committee or waiting for a floor vote, elected officials can add their names to the bill as a cosponsor, showing support for the bill. Adding cosponsors gives the bill momentum, especially if the cosponsors are from both parties. If a bill is moving, it will start gaining amendments and cosponsors. When a bill passes both the House and Senate, it is sent to a conference committee to be finalized. This is often the time when the final details are decided and represents the last and most urgent opportunity to make sure public works needs are met in the bill.*

- **Bills, Provisions & Amendments:** *If a bill is likely to become a law, policymakers will add provisions and amendments that otherwise might not pass. For example, a single bill might provide funding for a federal agency and a million dollar provision for an unrelated program. It is important to know if you support a bill but not a provision, or vice versa. Your congressman may be able to introduce an amendment that strikes or adds an individual provision without affecting the viability of the bill.*

## Relevant Committees and Jurisdictions

### ▸ Senate Committees

#### *Environment and Public Works*

- *The Committee on Environment and Public Works has jurisdiction over matters related to the environment and infrastructure, including environmental policy, research and development, flood control and improvements of rivers and harbors, public buildings, water and air pollution, water resources, solid waste, construction and maintenance of highways, regional economic development, public works, bridges and dams. The committee is also the lead on anticipated Climate Change legislation.*

#### *Homeland Security & Governmental Affairs*

- *The Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs has jurisdiction over matters related to the Department of Homeland Security and other homeland security concerns, as well as the functioning of the government itself, including the National Archives, budget and accounting measures other than appropriations.*

#### *Banking Housing & Urban Affairs*

- *The Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs has jurisdiction over matters related to banks and banking, urban mass transit and urban development, and federal monetary policy.*

#### *Energy & Natural Resources*

- *The Committee on Energy and Natural Resources has jurisdiction over matters related to national energy policy, including international energy affairs and emergency preparedness, nuclear waste policy and territorial policy.*

#### *Commerce, Science & Transportation*

- *The Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation has jurisdiction over matters related to the regulation of interstate common carriers, including railroads, buses, trucks, vessels, pipelines, and civil aviation, as well as highway safety, inland waterways and coastal zone management.*

#### *Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry*

- *The Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry has jurisdiction over matters related to federal agriculture policy, extension of farm credit and farm security, rural development (water, wastewater and solid waste) and water conservation.*

## ▸ House Committees

### *Transportation & Infrastructure*

- *The Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure has jurisdiction over matters related to transportation including civil aviation, railroads, water transportation and transportation infrastructure, construction and maintenance of roads, bridges and dams, road safety, flood control and improvements of rivers and harbors, oil and other pollution of navigable waters, public buildings, inland waterways, wastewater infrastructure and policy and federal management of emergencies and natural disasters.*

### *Natural Resources*

- *The Committee on Natural Resources has jurisdiction over matters related to fisheries and wildlife, forest reserves and national parks, mining interests generally and irrigation and reclamation.*

### *Homeland Security*

- *The Committee on Homeland Security has jurisdiction over matters related to U.S. security legislation and oversight of the Department of Homeland Security. The committee conducts oversight and handles legislation and resolutions related to the security of the United States.*

### *Energy & Commerce*

- *The Committee on Energy and Commerce has jurisdiction over matters related to air quality and environmental health and drinking water, the supply and delivery of energy, telecommunications, general management of the Department of Energy and management and all functions of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission and exploration, production, storage, supply, marketing, pricing, and regulation of energy resources, including all fossil fuels, solar energy, and other unconventional or renewable energy resources. The committee is also the lead on anticipated Climate Change legislation.*

### *Agriculture*

- *The Committee on Agriculture has jurisdiction over matters related to federal agriculture policy, extension of farm credit and farm security, rural development (water, wastewater and solid waste) and water conservation.*

## Advocacy Starts in Your Hometown!

**Take Action:** Local groups and associations are great places to offer a public works perspective. Get involved in your local APWA chapter and make sure to stay active! Work with your chapter to appoint members to a Government Affairs Committee for your chapter, or to set up meetings with other local associations to discuss joint efforts and partnerships to advance common goals. Reach out to other groups by inviting the president or executive director of your state's municipal league or association of counties to speak at chapter meetings. Also, ask that a chapter representative serve as liaison to the municipal league, association of counties or any other local organization related to public works issues. Coalitions show broad support for an issue and can be very powerful in accomplishing public policy goals.

For more information on chapter advocacy, including a toolkit with guidance and recommendations, go to <http://www.apwa.net/Documents/Advocacy/AdvocacyTools.pdf>.

**Public Education & Outreach:** Send a letter to the editor of your local paper discussing the importance of public works and investment in infrastructure. Many people are unaware of the role public works plays in their everyday lives, so this is a great opportunity to educate your neighbors—and public officials—about public works and infrastructure before there is a problem or emergency. Remember, the public supports infrastructure investment when it knows it is necessary, so include specific examples where infrastructure is decaying or public works needs are not being met.

**Reach Out:** Invite your state and congressional leaders to tour your public works facility. This is a great opportunity for them to see firsthand how these facilities and operations work and for you to explain how they are financed, operate day-to-day and meet the challenges of the local area. If officials cannot come to you, look for a “town hall” meeting in your district. Elected officials will often use these events to talk about their achievements and hear from their constituents. These meetings are an ideal forum for you to ask them to state their position on infrastructure investment.

**Honor, Award and Recognize:** Show your appreciation for an elected official or government appointee who has supported public works by bestowing awards, inviting them to ceremonies and ribbon cuttings where they will receive public recognition or asking them to speak at events.

**Ask for Assistance:** APWA can help you with legislative issues in your state or province. Contact the APWA Washington Office by calling 202-408-9541, and staff will work with you to address the issue using our Local Advocacy Action Guidelines:

1. Define the problem: Is this an issue properly solved by policy action?
2. Determine the message and APWA position.
3. Develop and execute an action strategy.

## Contact Us

**T**he APWA Washington Office is available to assist you and answer any questions you may have about public works legislation, regulations and advocacy. Please do not hesitate to contact the Government Affairs department at 202-408-9541. Visit the APWA Advocacy web page at [www.apwa.net/advocacy](http://www.apwa.net/advocacy).

**“APWA Advocacy provides you with the tools you need to put public works priorities on the policy agenda. APWA makes it possible for you to reach out and make it happen!”**

—Shelby P. LaSalle, Jr., *Chairman, 2010-2011 APWA Government Affairs Committee*



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Peter B. King, Executive Director