



**NATIONAL  
DEMOCRATIC  
INSTITUTE**  
FOR INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS



# CONSTITUENT RELATIONS

**A GUIDE TO BEST PRACTICES**



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**The National Democratic Institute (NDI)** is a non-profit organization working to strengthen and expand democracy worldwide. Calling on a global network of volunteer experts, NDI provides practical assistance to civic and political leaders advancing democratic values, practices, and institutions. NDI works with democrats in every region of the world to build political and civic organizations, safeguard elections, and promote citizen participation, openness, and accountability in government.

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## PREFACE

This publication has been designed to assist elected representatives with practical approaches and concepts for organizing and conducting constituent relations work. It is based on the lessons learned from real-life experiences of legislators from all over the world, from Africa and Asia, to Latin America, the Middle East, North America and Europe. Although the guide is primarily targeted toward national-level legislators, the approaches and strategies described are likely to be relevant for sub-national legislators, as well as political parties, civil society organizations and citizens. An effective constituent relations strategy requires that all of these key actors be engaged in the process, and all of them can benefit.

The National Democratic Institute (NDI) has supported legislators, political parties, and civil society in more than 60 countries in the last 20 years as they have developed, adapted, and implemented strategies for building effective relationships between legislatures and constituents. *Constituent Relations: A Guide to Best Practices* draws on the broad institutional knowledge resulting from these programs, and brings together lessons learned, best practices and real examples that can be applied throughout the world regardless of legislative structure or electoral system. The underlying principle is a commitment to the democratic practices of participation, representation, accountability, and transparency.

In writing the guide, NDI has attempted to account for the variety of factors - electoral systems, governance systems, political party structures, openness of the political environment, and available human and budgetary resources - that can influence how legislators in different countries view and conduct constituent relations. Not all the approaches included are applicable (or possible) for all legislators, particularly where the concept of representation may be new, and/or where resources are especially limited. The guide is meant to be a resource from which legislators can draw ideas to adapt and apply as they deem appropriate.

The guide is divided into six chapters. Chapter I outlines a process for developing a constituent relations strategy; Chapter II describes tools and strategies for communicating with constituents; Chapter III discusses the importance of listening to one's constituents and a variety of mechanisms for doing so; Chapter IV addresses considerations for setting up a constituency office; Chapter V provides strategies for responding to the problems of individual constituents; and Chapter VI offers some final considerations.

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## INTRODUCTION: ENGAGING IN CONSTITUENT RELATIONS

In democratic societies, legislators are expected to represent citizens' interests. Legislators represent diversity, and are responsible for ensuring that the diverse interests in a country, whether based on political beliefs, religion, geographic locality, ethnicity, or other characteristics, are represented and accounted for in government decision-making. When carried out effectively, constituent relations can help legislators successfully fulfill their representation roles, as well as provide information that can help them better execute their oversight and lawmaking roles. The purpose of the Introduction is to describe what constituent relations is, and present several different considerations regarding the practice of constituent relations.

### What is Constituent Relations?



*Albania: Reaching Out Through Public Forums*

*In Albania, legislators use public forums to engage citizens in dialogue about a wide range of issues. In this photo citizens of the Albanian town Novosela query their elected representatives about budget priorities at a public meeting.*

The need to conduct constituent relations is based on the principle of public service. Constituents are citizens whom a legislator has been elected to represent. Part of a legislator's job in a democracy is to serve these constituents by representing their interests in the legislature and by providing a direct link to government. Citizens expect to have contact with their elected representative and recognize them as someone who can solve their problems and help him/her navigate the complex government bureaucracy.

The practice of constituent relations involves communicating with constituents, learning about their concerns and, as possible and where appropriate, helping to solve their problems. It encompasses a broad range of activities that can be adapted to fit a legislator's budget, time and level of experience. Everything from conducting public forums and issuing newsletters, to visiting with a constituent during a trip to the local market or café, to intervening on behalf of a constituent before a local government agency all represent effective constituent relations strategy. The specific methods a legislator uses will depend on a variety of factors described later in this section, but all legislators can engage constituents on some level.

1. For the sake of simplicity, and because the best practices discussed can be globally applicable no matter the legislative system, this guide uses the terms representative and legislator interchangeably to refer to Members of Parliament, legislators, deputies, members of Congress, etc. Similarly, the term legislature is used as a generic term covering any national representative institution, including parliaments, congresses, and assemblies, etc.

## ■ Why is Constituent Relations Important?

Constituent relations is often one of the most challenging aspects of a legislator's job, but it is important for many reasons and can provide benefits to constituents, legislators, political parties, and society as a whole. First, legislators who actively engage their constituents help to create a link between citizens and their government. By getting involved in local problems, legislators can demonstrate the government's ability to address real issues in people's lives and provide tangible benefits to communities they represent. By listening to public concerns and then conveying those concerns in the legislature and to their respective political parties, legislators are better equipped to design or amend policies that respond to real human needs. Political parties can use the information collected through active engagement with constituents to ensure that their platforms resonate with constituents and their policies reflect relevant concerns.

Second, active engagement in one's constituency gives a more human face to the legislator, the legislature and the



### Indonesia: Listening to Constituents

*Listening directly to constituent issues can lead to positive results, both for legislators and for their constituents. One legislator in Indonesia said the following when asked about her experiences listening to constituents:*

*"I [now know] the importance of listening more than speaking to my constituents. It can help me to communicate better with my supporters and explore their problems more deeply and specifically. Just by listening to someone recently, I have a better understanding of one specific problem facing traditional craft makers in my district. They told me about a specific problem with access to capital for marketing of their traditional products and I was able to categorize this problem and report it to the relevant commission in parliament."*

party. Although an elected representative cannot solve all of his or her constituents' problems, helping with some and at least trying with others can build public trust in the legislator and the legislature. Direct contact between legislators and citizens can build public trust in the legislator and the legislature. Citizens may better understand who their legislators are, what their roles are, and how they can help (as well as how they cannot help). Legislators who establish two-way communication with constituents may also be able to provide citizens a better sense of why they make certain decisions, as well as difficulties they face, such as insufficient financial and other resources. Citizens who have direct contact with an elected representative are also more likely to identify his or her party as an institution they support, which is especially important during election time.

Third, effective constituent relations work can help mobilize citizen participation in public affairs. When a legislator works with local officials, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and ordinary citizens to solve local problems, he or she empowers them to improve their lives and their communities. By widening the circle of citizens who involve themselves in public policies and public decisions, the representative fights apathy and helps to make democracy work through practical problem-solving. Parties and legislators who establish strong ties with constituents also develop a base of loyal political supporters and help to mobilize volunteers.

Finally, a legislator's constituent relations activities provide a much needed public benefit. Representatives are uniquely situated to help citizens connect with their government and untangle the bureaucratic maze they often face. Legislators have authority and resources to get answers and they enjoy access to information often unavailable to citizens, local elected officials or other community leaders.

For a democracy to function well, legislatures, political parties and citizens must all play an active role. Constituent relations is one area where this is especially true. The lens through which each of these actors views representation and constituent relations is different, but the roles they play are complementary. The next few paragraphs describe the importance of constituent relations from each of these three perspectives.

### Legislators

Political scientist Nelson Polsby calls legislatures the "nerve endings" of the polity<sup>2</sup>. They are the branch of government closest to people, and legislators, more than

2. Nelson W. Polsby, "Legislatures," in *Handbook of Political Science: Government Institutions and Processes*, eds., Fred Greenstein and Nelson Polsby (Reading, MA: Addison Wesley, 1975).

any other officials at the national level, need to be aware of the needs of constituents, and are expected to respond to those needs.

Throughout the world citizens tend to identify with legislators in more personal ways than they do other public officials. Constituents may talk of “my MP”, “my congressperson”, “my senator”, “my deputy”, or “my representative.” (One does not often hear people speak of “my president”, “my judge”, or “my bureaucrat.”) Unlike chief executives, who represent entire nations, or bureaucrats and judges, whose responsibility it is to carry out and interpret the law impartially toward all citizens, legislators are responsible for representing diversity in society, and for bringing that diversity into the policy-making arena. These differences may be rooted in geography, ethnicity, religion, political identification, gender, or other characteristics, but legislators are expected to represent them at the national level.

Representation involves more than simply living in a specific area in the country, or having characteristics in common with those one represents (e.g., gender, religion, political beliefs). It involves listening to constituents and groups and making decisions and exercising influence on their behalf. Constituency work – dealing with concerns and issues of individuals – can also be an important component of the legislator’s representative function, and one that voters remember at election time.

### Political Parties

Political parties are an essential component of democracy. By competing in elections, mobilizing citizens behind particular visions of society and through their performance in the legislature, political parties offer citizens meaningful choices in governance, avenues for political participation and opportunities to shape their country’s future. When functioning properly, political parties develop common ideas among a significant group in order to exert pressure upon the political system. Thus, they help place citizens’ local concerns in a national context and encourage active links between voters and those who represent them. When public confidence in political parties is compromised, the entire democratic process suffers.

Public perceptions of political parties are greatly influenced by the performance of their parliamentary groups and individual members of the legislature. In any country, voters assess a party’s performance not only by its ability to influence national issues but also by its relevance to their particular local concerns. As a former Speaker of the United States House of Representatives, Tip O’Neill, once observed, “All politics is local.” By effectively and consistently reaching out to the public through their elected



### Macedonia: Opening Constituency Offices

*In Macedonia, political parties, whose representatives in the legislature are elected through a party list proportional representation system, understand that constituent relations work is an important responsibility, and key to whether citizens have a positive perception of them. They opened some of the first constituency offices in 2002. By 2005, the number increased to 46 offices around the country. Here, a legislator cuts the ribbon on the door of his new constituency office during an opening ceremony.*

officials, political parties can demonstrate their relevance and their ability to address citizens’ concerns. A credible record of representing the electorate through effective constituency work helps political parties better play their mediation and aggregation function and builds public support for the party itself.

### Citizens

In a democracy, state institutions exist to serve the public. Politicians and public officials alike are answerable to citizens. This relationship reflects the primacy of the citizen and necessitates mechanisms that allow citizens to hold state institutions accountable. In any democratic system, lines of accountability are often complex with various levels and forms that exist horizontally between state institutions and vertically to citizens.

There exists a special accountability relationship between citizens and elected representatives. Representatives are obligated to work on behalf of citizens and to help improve the quality of life in the constituencies they represent. To be effective in this role, representatives need to understand the interests and issues of their constituents. Likewise citizens need the opportunity to express their views and discuss their issues with representatives.

Citizen ability to hold elected representative accountable is derived through the ballot box. From the citizen’s perspective, representatives that do not engage their constituents or



### *Mexico: Touring the District in a “Mobile Office”*

*Patricia Flores, former Federal legislator and current state legislator from the Mexican state of Mexico, uses a van as a “mobile office” to meet with constituents throughout her district. On market day, she parks the van next to the market area and meets with constituents at a table set up outside the back of the van. While there she collects constituent contact information for her monthly newsletter and records their concerns, interests, or demands. She usually finds that most requests do not pertain to her mandate, so she directs them to the appropriate government agency.*

make honest attempts to bring about desired community improvements, should not be considered for re-election.

## ■ How Does the Electoral System Impact Working With Constituents?

Legislators in democratic political systems must win elections to obtain, and to stay, in office, but the system by which they are elected will impact their methods for interacting with constituents. In plurality - majority (PM) electoral systems (which include single-member district, or “first-past-the-post”), legislators are usually elected to represent a delineated geographic district. These representatives are likely to feel directly accountable to their constituents and want to build a strong direct relationship with them through frequent contact. These legislators are likely to be freer to respond to constituent needs as a higher priority than responding to their party’s interests or priorities.

In a proportional representation (PR) system, candidates are placed on a list, and citizens choose a particular list. In open list systems, voters can influence the order of the list, but in closed list systems, they cannot. Individual legislators in a PR system tend to feel the need to be more responsive to their party leaders who determine whether and where as a candidate they will be placed on the party list in the

next election. Constituent relations in PR systems may be through the party, which might charge specific members with constituent responsibilities. At the same time, PR systems generally allow for a larger number of parties to be seated in the legislature, which means that the interests of diverse societies can find more ample representation than in PM systems.

Mixed representation electoral systems combine features from both PM and PR systems. Nations using mixed representation electoral systems attempt to combine positive elements of both PR and PM systems – maintaining representation by region and at the district level, and allowing greater representation among diverse groups that might otherwise not be represented in a PM system.

While PM systems typically provide greater incentives for legislators to interact directly with constituents than do PR systems, conducting constituent relations is a responsibility of all legislatures. Several examples included in this guide demonstrate how some legislators from PR systems have developed comprehensive and effective constituent relations strategies. Legislators who are elected as independent candidates will likely have an altogether different set of incentives to conduct constituent relations. The particular methods to use and how to carry them out will differ across different electoral system, but active participation with citizens is essential not only to building citizen trust in their legislator, his or her party, and the legislative institution itself, but also to helping make people’s lives better.

## ■ Addressing Common Challenges

Every legislator faces challenges in conducting constituent relations. NDI’s experience shows that many legislators have developed strategies to successfully manage many of these challenges. Three of the most common include the following:

**Limited Access to Resources:** Legislators have limited time, financial and staff resources for conducting constituent relations. It is obviously much easier to represent, assist, and look out for constituents when one is not working alone. Nonetheless, developing an active profile in the constituency does not necessarily require a lot of money or staff. Legislators can often take advantage of the support of their political parties, as well as local public administration and NGOs to communicate with citizens in a cost-effective manner. In many countries where legislators lack funds to hire staff, they are able to recruit volunteers to help. Over

## Strategies for Funding Constituency Work

- Kenya's parliament acquired and refurbished offices adjacent to parliament, occupying them in 2003. Every legislator now has an office in which to meet with constituents.
- In the 1990s Poland's parliament provided legislators office space in local party offices.
- Soon after democracy was re-established in Chile following the end of the Pinochet regime, parliament adjusted its calendar so that MPs could spend one week each month in their districts.
- South Africa's National Assembly grants funds to each represented party (the amount is based on the number of party members in the Parliament) to use at its own discretion for constituent services.
- In Slovakia, one day a week is allocated for legislators to conduct constituent outreach. Each legislator receives one sum to cover expenses for their offices in the Capital and in the constituency. Parliamentary party groups also receive a specified amount of funds for constituent outreach.
- In Mexico, legislators do not receive funding directly from the Congress to conduct constituent relations, but political parties have found a way to fund and organize constituency relations activities.
- After years of political turmoil during which Uganda's parliament was closed, Uganda's 6th Parliament began working immediately upon being convened in 1996 to upgrade, and then reoccupy parliamentary office space that government ministries had taken over. Members can now use these offices to meet with constituents.
- Lithuania's legislature revised its Rules of Procedure to allocate funding to each legislator to maintain a constituency office and pay for travel, telephone and other related expenses. Constituency offices are located in municipal buildings. Parties report to parliament on the use of these funds during the regular budget cycle.
- Constituency relations activities of legislators from Bulgaria are also governed by the legislature's Rules of Procedure. Each parliamentary group is provided with funding, which they may spend as they deem appropriate, to conduct constituency relations.

*Orientation Handbook for Members of Parliament, by John K. Johnson and Robert T. Nakamura. World Bank Institute (WBI), 2006*

*Representing Citizens: Comparative Methods of Funding, National Democratic Institute, 2008. (Unpublished Report)*

the long-term, representatives may be able to convince their party leaders or legislative leadership to allocate funds to conduct some constituent outreach activities, to travel to the district on a regular basis, to hire extra staff to help with casework, or to set up and staff a district office.

### **Lack of Incentives to Conduct Constituent Relations:**

In countries whose electoral systems encourage an emphasis on party profile, as opposed to individual identity, legislators may feel little urgency to interact with citizens. But parties benefit when legislators interact with citizens and are responsive to their concerns. In fact, constituent service provides a legislator with a chance to involve the party in

addressing local needs and problems. Thus, a legislator who is active at the local level can strengthen the party by keeping in touch with citizens. This may in turn help to enhance the legislator's profile within the party. And legislators can facilitate party branch leader involvement in the community. Some legislators have invited local party leaders to be part of a constituency relations working group – making them de-facto “board members” of the constituency program. In other places, legislators have invited the party leader's input on constituency relations activities, or explored ways to coordinate their constituent relations activities with their parties.

**Unrealistic Citizen Expectations:** Many representatives have expressed frustration that constituents have unrealistic expectations or misperceptions about what legislators do. They often ask for assistance that falls outside a legislator's responsibilities (e.g., request for employment or direct financial assistance), to the point that African legislators have commented that their constituents view them as a "walking ATM." In most countries, citizens have a limited understanding of the constraints placed on national policy

makers – relating to limited budget resources, competing priorities, or to constraints on policy-making owing to requirements by international financial institutions. While this perception gap is hard to close, legislators can best combat it by educating and communicating with their constituents. In other words, the most effective way to ensure that citizens understand what their legislator can do for them is for that legislator to conduct effective constituent relations. ■

# CHAPTER I. SETTING A STRATEGY FOR EFFECTIVE CONSTITUENT RELATIONS

**W**ith limited time, money and other resources, legislators need to be able to prioritize and plan their constituent relations work. This requires that legislators define their goals, establish objectives based on those goals, and determine priorities. This chapter outlines practical steps a legislator can take to develop a constituent relations strategy.

## 1.0 The Need to Plan

Legislators are often faced with challenging decisions regarding how to represent their constituents most effectively. Balancing the right amount of engagement with citizens against the need to spend time in the capital, and doing so within the legislator's available budget, often forces representatives to make strategic choices to maximize their effectiveness in both venues.

As any experienced representative will note, it is impossible to satisfy every specific need of every constituent. Even where a legislature has ample funding, such as the United States Congress, there is too little time and are too few resources to respond to every constituent request. Because time and money are precious resources, successful legislators develop strategies to determine priorities. Developing these strategies requires the following steps:

1. Defining Goals;
2. Establishing Objectives to Fit Goals;
3. Determining Priorities;
4. Developing Goal-Oriented Action Plans; and
5. Evaluating the Plan Regularly.

### Defining Goals

Legislators often set a limited number of specific, attainable goals for their work with constituents. These goals often encompass the major political and policy priorities, and specific activities are then planned based on these goals.

The goals should be challenging, but achievable. If the goals set are too easily reached, then the representative's time could be used more effectively on other goals. On the other hand, goals should not be unattainable; striking this balance is absolutely essential to achieving the broader political objectives of the legislator's term in office.

If the district is shared amongst many others (i.e. a regional list system), members may want to coordinate these goals with other elected officials within their own party in the region, or with other legislators more generally. This way,

### Example Goals for Constituent Work

- Working for the interests of underrepresented groups within the district
- Developing a relationship with potential voters or supporters
- Developing an ongoing relationship with local government officials
- Developing a relationship with specific interest groups
- Becoming a spokesperson on a specific issue that is important to constituents (e.g., land reform, HIV/AIDS, pension reform)
- Expediting the implementation of a specific law
- Working for the interests of the people who voted for you or the party

the collective district goals can be achieved by the various representatives.

## ■ Establishing Objectives to Fit Goals

In order to reach their constituency goals, legislators will need to conduct several different types of activities. To reach the goal of strengthening outreach to rural communities, a legislator could plan to hold public meetings in that district a defined number of times per year. In addition, a legislator may also determine that his or her office will communicate directly with the mayor of the region's major town once a month.

Strategic planners note that legislators should begin by listing all the activities that they might perform to move toward attaining their goals. The next step – determining priorities – helps narrow the activities to those that will best aid the representatives in reaching their key goals.

## ■ Determining Priorities

Strategic planning requires that legislators undertake the difficult task of listing activities in priority order, and then discarding some good activities that they would otherwise like to pursue. Legislators must at times abandon good ideas in order to focus on more pressing responsibilities. At other times, legislators must say “no” to people who think their meeting or activity is the most important request in the world.

The first step in determining priorities for constituent activities involves ranking the legislator's goals in order of importance. Suppose a legislator has established two primary constituency goals: 1) to improve his or her relationship with citizens in an isolated rural region; and 2) to improve relationships with small business people throughout the district. If the representative decides that the work on the small business issues should take precedence, she may need to cancel or postpone those activities in the isolated rural area. If a legislator had planned to visit the region once a month, she could reduce the frequency of visits to four times a year. She may, as a consequence, need to participate in multiple activities and reach as many people possible during those less frequent visits.

One political party in Canada advises legislators to consider the following guidelines when setting priorities<sup>3</sup>:

### Choosing Priorities Carefully

*A newly-elected U.S. Congressman tried to respond to all invitations personally. However, he quickly realized that even though he believed this generally served his goals, he was spending too much time on this activity, which produced too little impact. He is now more careful in selecting priorities.*

#### **How many constituents will be reached by the activity?**

Elected representatives may have the option of meeting with a single farmer to discuss a range of issues, or hosting a meeting with 40 farmers to discuss one issue. The larger meeting may not be as personal, but the benefits both for the representative and the constituents are greater, as it can positively affect the lives of many more people.

#### **How important is the activity to the community?**

Legislators often receive invitations from groups or individuals who would like the legislator to address issues and problems that fall far outside broader community concerns. While it is important to gain as many viewpoints as possible from constituents, the need to prioritize may require that legislators accept a larger proportion of invitations to meet with people and groups who represent the broader concerns of a majority of their constituents.

#### **How much work is involved? Are the resources available?**

When analyzing whether or not to organize an event, legislators should not be afraid to turn to others to help with the project. Legislators may be able to join or add to an event already being planned by an NGO or local party branch, or they may be able to solicit the assistance of these groups to plan and carry out one. If, for example, they want to meet with citizens from a specific region on a regular basis, perhaps local NGOs can organize a public forum. If a legislator from the same party is interested in working with a target group – such as senior citizens – cooperation by jointly performing some activities and sharing the workload might be worthwhile. Also consider conducting activities

3. New Democratic Party (NDP) Constituency Resource Manual for the Ontario Provincial Parliament (New Democratic Party: Toronto, Canada, 1990) pp. 17-18.

that require a limited amount of time and energy; generally, legislators should not get involved in overly difficult or complex efforts, unless they are of notable benefit.

### **Consider the negative ramifications of declining an invitation to an event.**

Legislators need to be aware of the ramifications of their actions. Will declining an invitation create irreparably bad relations? Will the absence of the legislator create damaging publicity? To gauge this, legislators and their staff might divide the audiences for potential activities into three types:

- **Friendly groups:** Elected representatives in many countries attempt to maintain regular communication with friendly groups to preserve that good relationship. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, members of parliament noted that their best relations in their districts were with mayors and councilors from their party. These relations with local elected officials are vital to an effective district communication strategy.
- **Unfriendly groups:** Legislators may want to limit extensive contact with clearly unfriendly groups. However, to truly represent the interests of all constituents, be sure to not avoid them all together. It is important to meet with such constituents at certain times to discuss differences of opinion openly and honestly as well as to seek consensus on mutually agreeable issues and concerns.
- **Potential supporters:** Many legislators believe it is most beneficial to spend time with potential supporters. For instance, one representative in Romania spent an entire afternoon at a large conference of tenants of nationalized housing. This official believed that this meeting was an effective use of his time because he was generally – although not completely – in agreement with their concerns.

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### **■ Developing Goal - Oriented Action Plans**

Writing down plans on a calendar will help a legislator and his or her staff perceive visually whether they are attempting to do too much and whether activities are adequately focused on the goals of the legislator. If the schedule seems too ambitious, it may be prudent to drop or postpone events.

Begin by recording on a calendar the scheduled activities to which firm commitments have been made. These would be events like local party events or key committee hearings in the capital. Once these dates and times of events are noted, legislative staff and legislators can begin to plan and organize their own activities. These activities should serve specific goals, and be put into the framework of a goal-oriented action plan. Action plans identify the specifics of who, what, where and when, and answer the strategic planning question of “who will do what by when?”

An action plan should list a general goal and the activities that will help achieve that goal. The action plan should specify activity deadlines and the persons responsible for implementing the activity. For example, if one goal is to produce a newsletter four times a year, staff should determine when the draft text must be completed, when the document must be ready to send to the printer, and when and how it will be distributed.

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### **■ Evaluating the Action Plan Regularly**

Every few months, legislators should assess whether their strategy is moving toward their goals. Have they implemented the planned activities? Have these activities helped achieve the goals? Perhaps, a legislator planned to reach out to the population of an isolated region by working with the mayor of the largest town in the area. The mayor turns out to be unreliable, or perhaps he is so unpopular that he actually hinders the legislator’s ability to communicate with citizens. In such a case, activities may need to change based on the circumstances.

Finally, be realistic. A particular region of the representative’s district may be so unfriendly to the party or the legislator that no amount of outreach is effective there. In such a case, legislators may be better served by focusing their energy on a group of citizens who are more receptive to the legislator’s positions and opinions. In other cases, legislators may realize they do not have the staff or funding to implement a project that has turned out to be more complicated than originally expected. A legislator may need to cut back his or her original plans in such a case, or consider turning to potential partners for cooperation, such as the local party branch, local interest group, or an NGO. In the continual process of evaluation, remember: It is better to have a small success than a large failure. So, legislators may consider strategically starting small to win big.

## 1.1 Knowledge is Power: Gathering Information About the Constituency

Knowledge about one's constituency is one of the most important tools in developing an effective constituent outreach strategy. The more a representative knows, the more effective he or she will be at identifying the most pressing issues for constituents and determining the outreach activities that deliver the best results. For example, if a legislator's district has a limited number of clinics, then he or she can be sure that access to health care is an important issue of concern to citizens. Similarly, when developing a communications strategy, knowing that illiteracy rates are high in the region is crucial because written materials will be ineffective. The following areas should be considered when creating a profile of the constituency:

- Demographic factors (size of population; ratios of young or elderly people; predominant ethnic, linguistic or religious groups; unemployment rates; literacy rates; etc.);
- Service delivery NGOs and charitable organizations;
- Local government offices;
- Organized interest groups in the constituency, such as labor unions, youth and student groups, environmental groups, or farmer and agricultural groups;
- Businesses and other sources of employment;
- Schools and universities;
- Major transportation or communications infrastructure;
- Media outlets;
- Natural resources; and
- Community hazards (such as waste dumps, sewage, factory emissions).

Some of the information will be readily accessible, and other information will not. Check with local and international NGOs, which may collect the information for their own purposes; government census data (if available); and local

administration officials, or other leaders within the district. Local party branches may also be able to help. When researching NGOs, local government, businesses and other important entities in your district, it is also a good idea to identify a main point of contact and save their contact information.

Surveying constituents about their opinions and concerns on an ongoing basis will also help a legislator to understand and prioritize the needs of the district. As described in Chapter III, Section 3.6, formal polling and surveys are one good way to do this. When speaking with constituents directly, some basic questions to ask include the following:

- What recent events or changes have had the greatest impact on local citizens? Has the impact been negative or positive?
- What government programs impact most directly on residents? How do they feel about how those programs are working?
- What about the quality of life most bothers people in this area? What is considered to be working well? What issues most excite or anger people?
- What goals do local leaders and citizens have for the coming year?
- What legislative or program initiatives have community residents, leaders and activists called for in the past?

Once this information is collected, it should be organized so that it can be accessed easily and updated when necessary. This can be done electronically or using a paper filing system organized by region, date, issue or other pertinent categories. A short written summary of the information may also be valuable to have on hand. ■

## CONSTITUENCY PROFILE WORKSHEET

### I. BASIC INFORMATION

Total Population: _____ % Male: _____ % Female: _____ Avg. Income: _____ Number Employed: _____ % Voting in National Elections: _____ % Voting in Local Elections: _____	Age Demographics (in %): <18: _____ 18-30: _____ 30-60: _____ >60: _____	Languages Spoken (% if possible): _____ Sesotho _____ Sepedi _____ Setswana _____ Afrikaans _____ English _____ isiXhosa _____ isi Swatsi _____ Tshivenda _____ isiNdebele _____ isiZulu
---	--	---

### II. LABOUR/EMPLOYMENT

Primary Modes of Employment (by %): 1. _____ % 2. _____ % 3. _____ % 4. _____ % 5. _____ % 6. _____ %	<b>Gather the following contact information:</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Labour Unions, Local and National <input type="checkbox"/> Local Businesses  <b>Check when completed and enclosed.</b>
--	--

### III. LOCAL POLITICIANS / SERVICES

<u>Politicians</u> <b>Gather contact information for the following in the constituency:</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Local Government Councils <input type="checkbox"/> Local Government Councilors (get biographical data / profiles as well) <input type="checkbox"/> ANC Branches <input type="checkbox"/> ANC MPs or MPLs (get biographical data / profiles as well) <input type="checkbox"/> Other political parties or politicians with offices in the constituency <input type="checkbox"/> Traditional Leaders in the constituency  Check when completed and enclosed.	<u>Services</u> <b>List address and phone number for:</b> <b>Police Station(s)</b> Address: _____ Phone: _____ Address: _____ Phone: _____  <b>Hospital(s)</b> Address: _____ Phone: _____ Address: _____ Phone: _____  <input type="checkbox"/> Check here if more are enclosed.
---	---

### IV. SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

**Gather contact information for the following in the constituency:**

Schools and Universities

Religious Organizations (churches, synagogues, mosques, etc.)

Local Sporting Clubs

Check when completed and enclosed.

### V. MEDIA RELATIONS

**Top three modes of media:**

\_\_\_\_\_ %

\_\_\_\_\_ %

\_\_\_\_\_ %

**Gather the contact information for local media sources, keeping in mind the following:**

Type of Media Source (e.g. entertainment, sport, political, etc.)

Advertising Rate

Size of Audience

Check when completed and enclosed.

### VI. DEVELOPMENT STATUS OF CONSTITUENCY

Develop a list of NGOs active in the constituency, including physical address, mailing address, phone and fax numbers. Is this a branch office? If so, gather similar information for the head office.

Collect names of NGO leadership, as well as a contact working at the local level of a list of staff assignments.

Develop a list of current programs as well within the constituency, as well as length of term, and funder (if applicable).

### Constituency Profile Worksheet

*This Constituency Profile Worksheet, developed for members of South Africa's Parliament, demonstrates the various types of information a legislator should have on hand. Keep this information in a paper filing system, place it in a notebook about the constituency, or input the information into a computer program, all of which will allow for periodic updating when necessary.*



## CHAPTER II. COMMUNICATING WITH CONSTITUENTS

Communicating effectively with constituents demonstrates a legislator's responsiveness and commitment to a community, while enhancing his or her public image, both of which are critical to winning office and continuing to serve as elected representatives. This chapter considers a variety of methods elected representatives use to communicate with constituents on a broad scale, primarily through print and broadcast (TV, radio, electronic) media.

### 2.0 News Releases and News Conferences

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Ms. K. Tlebwe, MP

#### MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT SUPPORTS WOMEN'S BUSINESSES

It has only been six months since Member of Parliament for Bryanja West, Ms. K. Tlebwe, helped a group of women secure a loan from the National Association of Business Women (NABW), but in that short time, small business ventures in the constituency have flourished. A group of women, who have different backgrounds and support different political parties, approached Ms. Tlebwe late last year after all efforts to find affordable credit had failed. Ms. Tlebwe helped the women fill out forms and contact NABW, and soon they had the capital to start the businesses they had always dreamed of running.

"The women of Bryanja West have always been hard working. They just needed a little capital to get their businesses going. Now the women are earning money, providing services and creating employment in our constituency. Ultimately it is the whole community that benefits, not just the women running the businesses," said Ms. Tlebwe.

The women who received loans have started businesses ranging from tobacco farming to retail trade to handicraft making. There is even an all-women fishing crew that used a loan to buy a boat and nets to catch and sell fish. Many women have already begun to pay back their loans and are earning good profits.

Ms. N. S. Dranika, the captain of the first all-woman fishing boat in the area, praised the loan programme. "When the women of my village first came up with the idea of going in to the fishing business, everyone laughed. Boats and nets are very expensive, and fishing is usually done by men, but Ms. Tlebwe listened to us and helped us secure money from NABW. Now the members of my crew are able to pay school fees for their children and buy food for their families. Even our husbands are proud of our accomplishments. Without NABW and Ms. Tlebwe, we would not have been able to accomplish our dreams," said Ms. Dranika.

Ms. Tlebwe praised the NABW and pledged to help ensure that the recipients of loans pay back their money on time. "Others in Bryanja West have seen the success of the women and want to borrow money to start their own businesses," she said. "By paying back loans on time, we want to prove that the people of our constituency are trustworthy and encourage lending institutions to continue providing loans to members of our community."

The news release has become a standard feature in political life and a significant number of elected representatives issue news releases on either an occasional or regular basis. Although most offices are familiar with news releases as a means of informing the public about an official's view on a particular matter, there are some important things to keep in mind when drafting a news release:

- A news release should "say something to the public." Legislators should issue a news release whenever they accomplish a major goal, initiate a large scale project, do something interesting or unusual in their constituency, or strongly oppose something.
- The substance of a news release should be short, to the point, relate to a timely event, and be of interest to the media. Limit the size of news releases to one page – additional information can be provided to reporters in a separate document. Make sure all the key points are easily found and readily discernable. The news release should answer the basic news elements of who, what, where, when, why and how.
- Try to get coverage of truly newsworthy events. A quality news release should emphasize the types of things that would

#### Sample News Release

*This sample news release is a good example of focusing on a specific issue, targeted toward a specific population in the constituency (in this, case women). It demonstrates the legislator's achievement on behalf of her constituents, spreads her message about the importance of promoting women in business, and highlights her cooperation with a national NGO. It is also concise, kept to one page, and provides a call back number for journalists to follow up if desired.*

Legislative Public Outreach on Poverty Issues: Strengthening Parliamentary Involvement in the Millennium Development Goals and the Poverty Reduction Strategy Process, Toolkit No. 4, National Democratic Institute, 2004.

## 7 Tips for Working With the Media

- *Keep yourself accessible. Make sure the media knows how to get in touch with you. Always call a journalist back as soon as possible – it helps maintain a good relationship.*
- *When there is bad news, don't hide. If you don't have the answers, make a statement explaining why you don't know. Get back to the media as soon as possible.*
- *If you are misquoted or a journalist gets the facts wrong, contact them immediately and ask for subsequent correction. But don't burn bridges with reporters – sometimes their editors will not allow a change in a story and you will probably need to continue working with the reporter.*
- *Be honest. Don't create unrealistic expectations and be brave enough to publicly admit mistakes. Remember that "no comment" is usually understood to mean you are guilty as charged. We all make mistakes and the public admire people who own up instead of denying them or running away.*
- *Don't rely entirely on the media to communicate with the public. Produce print and/or electronic newsletters for your constituency telling them what you are doing in Parliament.*
- *Remember that journalists are not always your enemies or your allies. The role of media in a liberal democracy is to foster the exchange of ideas and free-flow of information.*
- *Monitor all print and electronic media, especially when you have been interviewed and after you have conducted an earned media event.*

Service and Accountability, NDI-Macedonia Constituent Relations Handbook, 2007

find their way into a news article or TV report. Remember that news outlets love photos and videos. A picture speaks a thousand words. If reporters become too accustomed to receiving news releases that are not newsworthy, or that detail mundane activities, the reporters may dismiss all future news releases without bothering to read them.

- Remember to include quotes in news releases. Feel free to quote legislators or other important individuals involved in the event. Use vivid language and the type of prose reporters can easily quote. The media appreciates quotations and action oriented sentences. Avoid bureaucratic jargon.
- Call reporters and editors to follow up and make sure they received the fax or e-mail. If the event is scheduled to occur at a future date, inquire whether someone from the news organization will be able to attend. After the event, be sure to contact those media representatives who attended and answer any questions or clarify any points they might have.

- In all news releases, be sure to list a contact name and number where a reporter can call and follow-up with questions about the story. Many reporters are under tight deadlines and appreciate a story that is already written for them. A call back number allows them to ask the quick follow-up questions before sending the story to the editor's desk.
- Create a news distribution list. Identify those news organizations that are preferred locally and compile the addresses, telephone numbers, fax and names of the appropriate personnel including assignment editors and reporters likely to cover political stories. Good relations with the media are critical to getting stories out to the public. Several news distribution lists may be advantageous as well when sending out targeted newsworthy events and activities based upon specific policy issues. Newspapers may prefer longer news releases while radio, TV and other electronic media may prefer shorter news releases.

## 2.1 Office/Party Newsletters

Newsletters from an elected representative and/or party are a great way to communicate directly with constituents, get a message out and reinforce the projects and priorities the legislator has for his or her district. A newsletter does not have to be expensive, nor does it require specific expertise to produce, but it should look professional. Where computers are readily available, most standard word processing programs can be used. It is much better to produce a simple publication once a year than to publish no activity report at all.

A newsletter should describe the legislator's or party's activities and promote issues that they care about. It is also a forum to present views and opinions that have been expressed by constituents. To make the newsletter informative, a legislator should think about what he or she has been doing in the legislature, around the country, in the district, and conversations he or she has had with constituents. A good newsletter can demonstrate to constituents that a legislator is accessible and responsive, and can help to heighten the legislator's profile in the community.

Generally there are two types of newsletters:

**Targeted Newsletters:** Targeted newsletters are a valuable way to save money and resources while getting specific messages across to key constituents. A short brochure updating the business community on efforts to improve industrial infrastructure, a letter to veterans letting them know their representative is in favor of a pension increase, or a newsletter to a neighborhood beset by utility problems is a way of demonstrating commitment to the district. Targeted newsletters should include quotes or pictures of individuals within the community who support the project or have been instrumental in advocating for the work the legislator is trying to accomplish.

**Joint Newsletters:** If costs are a problem and the issue is broad enough, never rule out doing a joint newsletter with

**INsession** Special Edition  
April 2003 YOUR SEAT IN PARLIAMENT

**Committee**  
**LEGISLATION NOT DISPOSED OF BY 17 APRIL 2003**  
NA (as second House) (72/06)  
NCOP (as second House) (7475/77)

1. Geoscience A/B [B 7 - 2002] (NA - 75) (Minerals & Energy)

**BILLS PASSED BY 1st HOUSE & before of 2nd House:**

1. Anti-personal Mines Prohibition Bill [B 44B - 2002] (NA - 75) (Defense)
2. Insurance A/B [B 52B - 2002] (NA - 75) (Finance)
3. Natural Scientific Professions Bill [B 56B - 2002] (NA - 75) (Arts & Culture)
4. Judicial Matters A/B [B 2D - 2003] (NA - 75) (Justice)

12-03-2003 to 27-04-2003	
Deadline for submission of legislation	20 March
Committee	11 - 23 May
Parliament	from 20 May
1st of House Committee meeting	22 May
Leave period	30 June - 11 July
Constitutional period	14 - 25 July

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email: [insession@parliament.gov.za](mailto:insession@parliament.gov.za)

<http://www.parliament.gov.za/legislation/legislation.asp>

### South Africa: Parliamentary Newsletter

*Individual legislator and party newsletters are one way of communicating with constituents; another is for the legislature to issue a regular newsletter. As seen in this periodic newsletter from the South African parliament, basic information about the parliament should be included, points of contact and information about the issues on which parliament has recently been working.*

the local party branch, with one or more of the local elected officials, or, where multi-member districts, with other elected representatives from the district. If several members of a party are working on a similar project (i.e. bringing job growth to the region, starting a local sports club, or conducting a major opinion poll of the district), a joint newsletter can help promote these activities.

## 2.2 Letters to the Editor

As news releases demonstrate, legislators have the ability to set the tone and control the timing of the news cycle. A letter to the editor of a newspaper, journal or periodical from a legislator commenting on an important issue or responding to a previous article can be extremely valuable in this regard. In many countries, more people read letters to the editor and opinion-editorials than any other part of

the newspaper. A well-drafted letter to the editor can help counter a lingering negative perception or help shift the public focus of the debate on an important topic. Letters to the editor can be used to protest an opponent's stance on an issue, protest negative media coverage, or describe why a legislator voted a certain way or supported a particular project.

## 2.3 Opinion Editorials



### *Indonesia: Creative Media Outreach*

*One legislator in Indonesia found it difficult to work with members of the media, in part because he was not able to send statements and releases to the journalists quickly enough. However, once he began to use SMS text messaging to communicate his messages to the journalists, he quickly solved this problem. Now, he sends a statement to a journalist by SMS, and it is usually published the very next day. This has helped him both to get out his message and build relationships with the journalists.*

Like a letter to the editor, an opinion editorial is a brief essay or thesis that expresses a point of view on an issue of importance. The views should be clearly articulated by the representative in the piece, and they may not necessarily be endorsed by the newspaper or periodical in which it is published. An opinion editorial is a statement drafted by the elected representative supporting the representative's position on an issue and explaining the reasoning behind that support. It is often used to motivate voters to understand why the legislator supports a particular activity, and encourage voters to view the issue similarly. It is a good idea to specifically reference interaction with constituents on the issue to demonstrate that the views expressed are those of not only the legislators but of his or her constituents as well.

## 2.4 Posting Flyers

Flyers are simply single or multi-sheet documents, usually printed in just two or three colors. Flyers are an inexpensive means used to update voters on a current issue or to keep constituents aware of recent developments in central government. Flyers can be delivered door-to-door or posted in public places. They can often prove critical to reaching any target audience. If activities are impacting a particular

neighborhood or a select area of the electoral district, be sure and concentrate the message and use door to door delivery to make sure everyone gets to understand why the local legislator supports or opposes a project. A good flyer might include a picture of the representative, his or her name in bold headlines, a set of bullet points urging action on the issue in question, and a reference point of contact.

## 2.5 Local Radio or TV Shows and Public Service Announcements

A good communication strategy should employ a variety of methods for speaking with and listening to constituents. Many elected officials spend long periods of time in the capital. Local radio and TV stations can help representatives remain in touch with their constituents back home.

Diversifying a communications strategy allows more citizens to learn about a legislator's activities. One way of

getting the message out on radio and TV is through a public service announcement. A public service announcement is a non-commercial advertisement given on radio or television, broadcast for the public good. The idea is to modify public attitudes by raising awareness about a specific issue impacting the community. Public service announcements are usually very brief, no more than a minute in duration. Various media entities have a variety of policies on what



### ***Sierra Leone: Reaching a Broader Audience Through Radio***

*Good communication strategies employ a variety of methods, and radio is a good one to include whenever a legislator needs to broaden his or her audience. In Sierra Leone, legislators combined a public meeting with a radio broadcast to reach as many constituents as possible. During the forum, they invited a local radio station to broadcast the proceedings. After the forum, they held a ninety-minute call-in radio show, during which they answered questions from constituents who were unable to attend the public forum. The radio shows were popular, and allowed the legislators to get their message out to and engage with a much broader audience than if they had conducted the public forums alone.*

Interviews on television and radio are also of critical importance. First, they build name recognition with the audience and voters. Moreover, they allow the representative to tell their story and expound on why they support or oppose an issue in their own words without the filter of the media. When conducting a television or radio interview, the following are a few suggestions to keep in mind:

- Be prepared. Legislators should do their homework. Talk to the journalist beforehand so that you understand what questions will be asked. This establishes a relaxed atmosphere.
- Know your message. Know the points you want to get across – and make sure you say them. Don't just respond to the interviewer's questions.
- Know who else will appear on the program with you. Make every effort to have viewed the program, and the host, at least once before appearing on the show. If you know you will appear with an opponent, have a sound bite ready.
- Ensure that the host has a simple biography. The audience's initial impression of you will be largely determined by how impressive your bio is.
- Be confident. Remind yourself of your own expertise, commitment and authority. ■

qualifies as a public service announcement. A well-made public service announcement can increase a legislator's profile and demonstrates commitment on issues affecting the community.



## CHAPTER III. CONDUCTING DIRECT PUBLIC OUTREACH

**D**irect public outreach activities are essential to any good constituent relations strategy. Legislators need to build the leverage needed to resolve local problems. By appearing before groups of citizens, representatives can demonstrate an interest in their constituents' circumstances and situations, and develop a two-way dialogue with constituents. This chapter examines some of the activities elected officials can use to communicate with a broader audience and improve their public profile.

### 3.0 Public Forums and Meetings

Public meetings are an important means of developing and maintaining a local identity in the district and getting the message out to constituents. Bringing a diverse audience together has its challenges. On the positive side, a public meeting affords a legislator occasion to speak with a very large group of citizens at once. This allows him or her an opportunity to gain a firsthand sense of the community's attitudes, problems and values. On the negative side, representatives will of course be fielding challenging (and probably unfriendly) questions, or bombarded with the type of requests that may be impossible to accomplish as a public servant.

When structuring a public forum, event planning becomes critical, and there are numerous ways to do it. Some legislators regularly travel to their districts over the legislative recess, while others hold weekly meetings at select locations. When planning any meeting schedule, here are some basic factors to consider:

**How many and where?** An active representative should develop some type of regular schedule for public meetings throughout the district. The size, the number of constituents they need to meet with, and the geographic features of the district will probably determine this schedule, as well as availability of resources. In many rural areas, the weather and seasonal influences will affect when and how one can travel. When planning these trips, legislators should sit down with staff and review those areas that might be a priority. Is there a place the legislator has never been, a place that is experiencing a great deal of sudden change, or a location that has a lingering condition which might be



*Liberia: Soliciting Support from Local Groups*

*Poor transportation infrastructure in Liberia creates challenges for legislators to remain connected to districts that are a great distance from the capital of Monrovia. Efforts to organize public meetings are difficult, and costs can be prohibitive to reach the more remote areas. Some legislators have found soliciting assistance from local NGOs to be essential. In Bassa County the Bassa Concerned Citizens Movement (BCCM) helped legislators to plan and implement a public forum. BCCM identified a venue, arranged logistics before, during and after the meeting, and advertised the event. With BCCM's help, the public forum was a success, with more than 100 constituents attending.*

eliminated with the right sort of effort? These locations should become primary targets on the legislator's tour.

**Issue focus or general topic?** Legislators will need to decide whether their public meetings should focus on a single issue (like pension questions or improving roads and sanitation systems) or whether their travels

will be entirely open to general discussion (such as reviewing the recent parliamentary session or listening to constituents talk about a range of local issues). Generally, discussions about specific issues will attract fewer people, but potentially produce a more serious audience. It will likewise draw the attention of the media in a larger locality, and limit the number of vexing comments on wholly unrelated issues to the representative's work as an elected official. However, in smaller towns and rural villages, an open forum may be more suitable if the representative rarely visits the area, or if it is the type of community that is wholly unused to receiving members of the "political class." In many towns and villages, ordinary citizens may welcome the chance to attend a meeting and speak about a variety of issues that impact their lives, while the local media may grant exceptional coverage of the event just because the legislator took the time to show up.

**Advertising the Meeting:** Be sure to advertise the time and place of the meeting well in advance of arrival, although not by more than two or three weeks. If it is feasible, staff or local volunteers should begin hanging posters in public spaces, on billboards, or place small

### Yemen: Announcing Public Meetings Over the Radio

*One legislator in Yemen combined his public speaking skills with his knowledge of radio media and started broadcasting a radio program a few weeks before every constituency visit. He shared details of the visit, including the dates, where he would be, and public events he planned to hold. As mentioned in Chapter II, the radio can be a very effective tool to reach a broad audience. Without staff in his district or the ability to travel there frequently, the Yemeni legislator had a double challenge of trying to advertise his visit on limited funds while needing to ensure he could reach as many people as possible during each visit. With his radio program, he solved both problems, and raised his public profile at the same time.*

advertisements in the local newspaper about eight to ten days before the event. Another idea is to go door-to-door with flyers. Often, just by informing the local newspaper about the purpose of a visit generates free media coverage. Be sure to inform the media about why this visit is important. Regardless of how a legislator ultimately

chooses to advertise the visit, it is important to promote the event and circulate the details. If the visit is a listening tour designed to get a better feel for the community's problems, be sure to inform the media of its purpose. After the distribution of a news release, staff should telephone local newspapers and reporters to remind them of the upcoming meeting. Even if the attendance at the meeting is small, a widely publicized notice highlights the fact that the meeting occurred and that the member took the time to visit the community. Remember to rely on the communications strategy developed in Chapter 2.

**Mobilizing Local Support:** Organizing meetings and event planning can be time consuming. Others should help with the task. Mayors, local councilmen, NGOs, and university faculty can usually bring citizens together with their representatives in a more organized and coherent way than someone trying to organize a meeting over a series of long distance phone calls. By having another organization sponsor an event, legislators immediately gain a level of local credibility. This can also give a better idea of the type of people who might show-up based on the affiliations of the local organizer. If visiting a group or a community that potentially disagrees strongly with the legislator's point of view, legislators should take certain measures to get to know the audience. Staff or local volunteers should acquire as much information as possible about the group. If this is a new city for the representative, do some research by telephoning select city officials from the legislator's party or local reporters in order to get a better understanding of the local political scene. Lastly, someone should arrive shortly before the meeting (usually half an hour before the representative speaks) and ask questions of the gathered participants to get a feel for the way the conversation is going. If the legislator is walking into a hostile crowd, it is best to have information beforehand to prepare and consider changing tactics.

**The Meeting and the Moderator:** A successful public meeting requires a moving and focused discussion facilitated by both the elected official and a moderator. Choosing the right moderator to guide the discussion is critically important to any visit. The moderator can be a local ally, a media figure, the leader of a local advocacy group or even a staff member. The moderator should introduce the topic of discussion, announce the rules for any questions and answers, and state the time the meeting is scheduled to end. Make sure the moderator can firmly control the proceedings and if necessary play the role of the "bad guy" should the discussion become unruly. A legislator should not be the individual who cuts a rude person off, or stops someone from asking too many questions. Leave that role to someone who is not an elected official and will not make the next day's newspapers if the proceedings turn hostile. A legislator

## Checklist for Organizing a Public Forum

### Before the Meeting

- Venue
  - Locate a suitable room
  - Make a reservation for the room
  - Visit the venue to make necessary arrangements
  - Do a seating arrangement (moderator, legislators, guest speakers, citizens, media).
- Announcements
  - Prepare an announcement stating the place, time and topic
  - Post the announcement in visible places
- Research
  - Learn about potential participants and problems in the area where the event will take place.
  - Call city officials, NGOs, and community leaders to enquire about current local issues.
- Media
  - Prepare a media advisory, inviting them to the public meeting.
  - Send the media advisory to all media (local, national).
  - Call the media to remind them of the event.
- Moderator
  - Identify a possible moderator who will run the meeting.
  - Explain to the moderator what is expected of him or her:
    - open the floor for questions, comments
    - facilitate the discussion
    - interrupt citizens when their speeches are too long or if their discussion is out of place

### During the Meeting

- Media
  - Develop a sign-in sheet for present reporters
  - Prepare a news release, summarizing the public meeting
  - Distribute the news release to all media representatives
- List of Attendees
  - Develop a sign-in sheet for attendees.
  - Circulate the sheet for attendees to fill out, including their contact information.
- Minutes
  - Have someone take notes during the meeting for future reference.
- Photos
  - Bring a camera to the meeting.
  - Have staff or volunteer take photos

### After the Meeting

- Media
  - Call the media representatives who attended to ask if they need additional information.
  - Provide them with photos of the meeting.
- Follow-up
  - If the legislator has agreed to provide information, write it down and send it directly to the citizen who has asked for it.

should appear to be diplomatic, tactful and graceful under fire. Finally, five to 10 minutes before closing the forum the moderator should remind the audience that the meeting will end. An open announcement by the moderator protects the legislator from the appearance of cutting someone off from speaking or refusing to take additional questions.

**Opening Presentation:** When giving an opening statement, one should briefly address the topic of the public forum. For example, if a legislator is there to provide an overview of the past session of parliament, he/she may want to limit the discussion to three key issues. This speech should also reflect a well-researched understanding of the topics being presented to the audience. Of course, the type of audience is the real key to the style of presentation. A legislator would not be well served if he/she gave remarks addressing a lawyers association in the same manner as to a group of elderly pensioners. Be prepared to discuss issues; do not simply recycle old campaign rhetoric. A legislator will be more appreciated as a speaker if he or she is clearly prepared to discuss the audience's concerns and speak in a style the audience can relate to and understand.



*Afghanistan: Discussing Development Needs*

*While holding public meetings, it is essential to develop a two-way dialogue with constituents. Public meetings are a good time to share information with constituents, but they will be much more productive if the legislator listens carefully and sincerely to citizens. In Afghanistan, Provincial Councilors are responsible for creating community development plans for their communities. In this photo, a councilor from Laghman province asks constituents to share their opinions about the province's biggest development needs. After meeting with the group, the legislator had a much better sense of constituent priorities, and was able to incorporate them into the plan he ultimately developed.*

**Logistics Responsibilities:** Before the opening address is given, have someone send a sign-up sheet throughout the audience or place a sign-in sheet on the table when people enter the room. Obviously not all cultures are equally comfortable giving personal names, addresses and phone numbers to politicians, and this is doubly true if they plan on asking tough questions during the event. Keep the registry more or less optional, but also remember that by having this information a legislator or his/her staff can write "thank you" letters to the attendees. In countries where most voters are still unaccustomed to receiving any communication from a member of the government, a quick note of appreciation for attending reinforces the message that legislators are concerned with constituent problems and have not forgotten them after moving on to the next community.

**Question & Answer Time:** Whether the trip is a traveling tour across a district or a single issue stop, try to consider a public meeting a form of dialogue with constituents. Sharing information about important issues and the legislature's activities can be useful, but a public meeting is not a debate and is not the appropriate place to lecture or teach an audience. Try and be a good listener. Seek to understand before being understood. Have staff or volunteers take notes at key intervals, and ask follow-up questions when important subjects are brought up.

### ■ Some Suggestions for Delivering a Winning Performance

**Encourage Reserved Participants to Speak:** When fielding questions, the moderator and the legislator should survey the audience and encourage people who clearly have inquiries to speak, but seem afraid to ask. In some public forums the meeting organizers provide citizens with pencils and small cards on which to write their questions. These cards are then collected and given directly to the official to answer. This practice does two important things: First, it encourages people who might otherwise be too nervous to speak in public to participate. Second, it allows the moderator another vehicle to steer the conversation if it is being monopolized by a particularly loud individual.

**Avoid Campaigning and Lecturing:** Any legislator should make it clear from the opening presentation that he/she is there as a public servant to listen to citizens, answer questions, and have a discussion. This is not a campaign stop. Be sure to avoid provocations, deliberate or accidental. If an individual has an actual grudge with regard to a policy issue or is simply causing a deliberate interruption

as a member of a rival party, try not to get angry or shout back. Answer the question, cut them off politely and have the moderator by-pass their subsequent questions. If an elected official silences them in a professional manner and the moderator is able to turn the conversation in a more appropriate direction, the audience may be just as relieved as the legislator.

**Encourage Brief Questions:** During introductory remarks, the moderator should clarify the rules for question time. Participants should be permitted to ask only one question at a time, and their questions should be brief and to the point. Some questioners may feel passionate about the issue they are raising and may speak at great length before getting to the actual question. Sometimes a question of general interest may be buried within a confusing, rambling statement. In such a case, it may be wise to interrupt the speaker and ask him or her to reformulate the question. Remember that if the questioner is hostile, be sure it is the

moderator that cuts off the questioner and forces him or her back on point, rather than the legislator.

**Accept Criticism from the Public:** Not everyone is going to like their legislator, their legislator's party or his/her stance on the issues. At any public forum, this is virtually guaranteed. If a representative believes some critical comments have merit, he/she may wish to admit them and hope the audience will appreciate the display of honesty. Always try to turn a critique into an opportunity for constructive problem solving. If someone complains a legislator has been ineffective at helping with unemployment rates, ask them what ought to be done? Often, they will have no idea. This allows a legislator to demonstrate a willingness to listen, and it can likewise impress upon critics how difficult it is to get certain things accomplished in government.

### 3.1 Visiting Constituents and Touring the District



*Malawi: Holding Special "Days of Social Encounter"*

*In Malawi, one legislator holds "Days of Social Encounter" eight times a year in different locations within his constituency. The legislator invites traditional leaders, religious leaders, and the general public for traditional dances, football, food and informal public meetings. This allows the legislator to interact with his constituents in a fun, relaxed context yet still hear the concerns of the people and maintain contact with important local leaders.*

Some legislators find it useful to organize trips throughout key regions of their district and hold several different meetings in a short period of time. When planning these tours, be sure to meet with a wide spectrum of interest groups and publicize the tour schedule through the local media. Also consider asking local party officials or a local NGO to organize a tour. This helps with the basic organization and logistics, but more importantly, local officials and NGOs have a much better sense of the kinds of issues that voters care about and about popular attitudes toward a given party or ideology.

During their time in the constituency, legislators may want to also set up meetings with constituents at specific locations (also referred to as "clinics" or "surgeries" in some countries). Be sure to advertise the location, date and times. Choose locations where people are used to congregating, such as pubs, cafes, or public squares. Several of these meetings can be scheduled throughout the day. In the absence of a district office, setting up clinics on a regular basis can help convey a legislator's long-term commitment to constituents.

## 3.2 Special Events and Holiday Activities

Using special events to reach out to constituents is standard practice of legislators in many countries. Special events and holiday activities afford representatives a chance to talk informally with citizens in their district, increase their name recognition, and improve their party's profile. State fairs, agricultural festivals, community events, and parades are great outlets of which to take advantage. Typically, many politicians use the holidays to reach out to voters. Holidays provide an excellent opportunity to meet people when they are not as busy as they are during their day-to-day work schedules, and they are likely to be in more festive moods.



### *Nigeria: Participating in Health Fairs*

*With between two and five million Nigerians infected, Nigeria is estimated to have the third-highest prevalence of HIV/AIDS in the world. Nigerian National Assembly members have found ways to draw ordinary Nigerians into a dialogue with the government about HIV/AIDS and the other health issues that affect their communities.*

*To educate her constituents about HIV/AIDS and to learn about their biggest health concerns, Representative Jumoke Okoya-Thomas organized a health fair in her district in Lagos, Nigeria. More than 400 people attended the events. While discussions mostly revolved around HIV/AIDS education, Hon. Okoya-Thomas also learned that her constituents would like to see better treatment for malaria and diabetes as well.*

## 3.3 Job Fairs

Probably few things in life have the ability of winning over the loyalty of a constituent more than helping them find employment. A number of legislators in a variety of countries have helped link constituents seeking employment to companies and other entities needing to hire new employees. Job fairs are one of the smartest. By bringing together diverse groups of regional employers

and organizing a job fair, legislators are empowering constituents, assisting employers, and helping to stimulate the local economy. Hosting a contest for young students for summer work, or connecting them with job training centers are also ways of getting young people interested in the party and politics more generally, while helping them gain professional experience.

## 3.4 Forming an Advisory Committee

If representatives are interested in acquiring specialized or expert information from a given constituency, they might consider forming an advisory committee. A standard practice in the United States and many European countries, a good advisory committee should comprise a cross section of people who are interested in a particular subject or collection of subjects, and are then assigned specific tasks such as preparing recommendations, doing research, speaking with constituents, or organizing events.

Suppose a representative would like to improve the quality of the main street in a small town in the legislator's district. In order to pursue this project, the legislator could first assemble an advisory committee of local merchants, shopkeepers, building owners, historic preservation groups, tourist organizations, hotel and restaurant owners and interested citizens. The committee might then dedicate itself to preparing a master plan for the street, searching for funds for public improvements, writing letters lobbying

local and regional politicians for assistance, or preparing reports that document the unique qualities of the area.

When national legislators are in a position to lobby government ministries for assistance with the project, they will be equipped with valuable information, clear

cut facts, vocal support, and professional input, thanks to this committee. By becoming involved in the project, the advisory committee will also become invested in its success, and the individuals that form the committee might later be enlisted as useful allies in other key political projects in the district, including re-election campaigns.

## 3.5 Tours of the Legislature and Other Activities



*Macedonia: Opening Doors to Youth*

*In many countries, parliaments have taken the extra step of not only creating open and public processes in how they function, but also opening their doors to the public directly. Some countries have days each year on which the whole of the parliament is open to all, and individuals can wander the halls, sit at committee tables, and experience the parliament. This goes well beyond the standard tour. In Macedonia, for instance, the parliament opened itself to the children of the country, bussing in a number of schoolchildren to the parliament complex for a day of education about the parliament, how it functions, and what parliaments can do for them.*

In a democratic society, elected officials should encourage activities that strengthen the notion that government serves the people. Popular in many parts of the world, tours of the legislature and government offices help people engage in the political process. Allowing constituents to see a legislator's office, meet staff, and ask questions puts a human face to the legislature. Many constituents will remember their visits to a legislative office for years to come, and this familiarity often brings with it the added bonus of loyalty to the individual politician, if not the party, who sponsored the trip.

## 3.6 Conducting Opinion Polling and Surveying Constituent Needs

### ■ The Public Opinion Survey

Public opinion surveys afford legislators and political parties valuable information about a district's needs, priorities, and the perceptions of its citizens. Legislators are the representatives of the people in their constituency, and as such it is critical for these representatives to know what their constituents think and what their concerns are.

At times, what representatives and their parties consider a highly pressing priority might only vaguely correspond with the concerns of actual voters.

A benefit of public opinion research is that it lets citizens know that their opinions matter and that they have a stake in the governing process. Conducting surveys can be very simple, such as providing a one-page questionnaire to

constituents about their top concerns, or very complex, depending upon the type of information the legislator is seeking. If legislators are attempting to gather truly scientific data, research done by an outside polling firm may be the best option. This may provide more honest answers to questions that can be difficult to ask, including those questions relating to a legislator's job performance, or a specific stance on an issue.

### ■ Quantitative or Qualitative?

Public opinion surveys can either be quantitative or qualitative. Both types are described below:

**Quantitative Surveys:** A quantitative survey involves interviewing a large number of individuals using a set questionnaire. The individuals interviewed answer “yes or no” to the questions or simply choose from a list of responses. By compiling the answers collected from these questionnaires, one can estimate how a given percentage of constituents feel about the issue. The advantage of a quantitative survey is that it can be easy to design. The disadvantage, however, is that to provide statistically valid (accurate) results, it requires interviewing a large number of people, and those people must be chosen randomly. This can be expensive and time-consuming.

**Qualitative Surveys:** Qualitative research includes less structured survey methods such as free-form interviews or focus group discussions. The questions asked are usually open-ended and the person being interviewed generally answers in his or her own words. Formal qualitative research can be more complex to design, and does not provide easy numerical results, but it does allow for a more in depth examination of people's opinions. It essentially asks “why” people feel the way they do about an issue. Informal qualitative research can be conducted on an ongoing basis, simply by talking to constituents and meeting with groups of people to discuss important issues.

Focus group discussions, a relatively common form of qualitative research, involve assembling a small group of individuals (usually not more than 10) from the target demographic group. Each individual should be chosen through random selection. The group is then asked questions from a discussion guide of questions relating to a given topic. Detailed notes are taken, and once several discussions have taken place, the legislator and his or her staff can review the results and draw some conclusions about how constituents feel on the issues in question.

### ■ What Constitutes a Good Public Opinion Survey?

A good public opinion survey is one in which a wide enough sample of people is questioned to provide an opportunity for the average member of the community to have “his or her voice heard.” Generally, the simpler the survey the better, so try to avoid lengthy questionnaires. Remember that with each additional question after the first 8 to 10 questions, interviewers will begin to lose interest and begin to rush answers thus corrupting the end data. The most common method of polling is face-to-face interviews, although this may be substituted with telephone interviews that are less time consuming and involve a more controlled environment. Face-to-face opinion surveys can be conducted in one of two manners:

**The In-Person Interview:** An in-person interview is done through a series of questions and answers. It is moderated



## KISELA VODA

### YOUR MP STOJAN STOJANOVSKI CARES ABOUT YOU!!!!!!

Your MP, Stojan Stojanovski would like to hear what you have to say. My party and I are personally interested in you and your opinion. We want to know what the most important thing is for you so that we can do a better job for you.

*How do you obtain information?*

- From daily newspapers
- Listening to radio
- By watching TV
- Talking to colleagues from the workplace
- Talking in a coffee shop
- Nothing from the above

*In what order would you put priorities of the representatives who represent you?*

- Opening new working places
- Fight against corruption
- Reduction of taxes
- Nothing from above
- 
-

*How satisfied are you of the care of the authorities towards:*

**a) Pensioners**

- Bad
- Good
- Excellent

**b) Garbage removal**

- Bad
- Good
- Excellent

Your proposals, comments, concerns:

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Please send or drop off questionnaire to my Constituency office at:  
**Prvomajka br. 67, 1 000 Skopje**  
 Tel/Fax: 02/677-777

#### Macedonia: Short Sample Questionnaire

*This sample questionnaire from Macedonia is a simple way to ask constituents for their opinions. It includes specific questions as well as an open space for constituents to share what is on their mind, and provides clearly displayed contact information. Often, a questionnaire like this is handed out at the district office and also includes questions about the constituent's experience with the office and how well they feel their problem was addressed.*

by an interviewer who usually is an employee or volunteer for the legislator or his/her party. The interviewer asks specific questions and leads the discussion on the subject in question.

**The Self-Administered Survey:** For a self-administered survey, citizens are given forms to fill out and return once they have answered the questions. Whether legislators

choose to employ the in-person interview technique or the self-administered survey will depend upon the circumstances and reasoning for conducting the survey. The more issues, details and nuances desired, the more necessary it may be to consider using the in-person interview technique. If the survey is strictly to gauge support for a single issue that is well-known throughout the district, a self administered survey might be considered. ■



## CHAPTER IV. SERVING THE CONSTITUENTS THROUGH DISTRICT OFFICES

**D**istrict offices can help streamline constituency services and improve the efficiency of outreach activities. This chapter discusses some considerations when setting up a district office, and describes several tools to enhance the office's image and improve the quality of constituent services. While many of the tools are most easily utilized through a district office, legislators who have not set up a district office may also find them helpful.

### 4.0 Establishing a District Office

In many countries, legislators conduct constituent relations without the use of district offices or other sites designed to facilitate interaction between legislators and constituents. In these countries, meetings that take place between legislators and citizens occur in homes, offices, cafes or other locations.

In some countries, legislators are afforded budgets to set up constituency offices, closer to constituents. Such offices have a separate staff from those in the capital, and often separate financial resources to purchase equipment and pay for staff and outreach activities. Often, funds are allocated by the legislature for constituent relations activities, and provided to each individual legislator or to each party (who have representation in the legislature), who then determine how best to spend the money. District offices are typically located in a municipal building or are stand alone. Sometimes they are placed in local party branch offices, though this is not ideal. It is important that the legislator, wherever possible, avoid the perception of specific party affiliation. Regardless of where the office is located, all constituents, including those who voted for the legislator and his or her party and those who did not, need to feel that it is somewhere they are comfortable visiting and discussing their concerns.

Well-run district offices can increase a legislator's visibility in his or her district and convey a sense of permanence about a legislator's participation in a community. They can help to make constituent outreach activities more efficient by providing a consistent place to conduct meetings with

constituents and a centralized location for dealing with casework or individual requests for help from citizens. The rest of this chapter analyzes a range of tools and techniques for improving office operations and highlights several communication and outreach activities that are typically conducted from the constituency office. While they are geared toward district offices, most of these techniques and materials can be readily adapted to suit the needs of any legislator, district office or not.

#### Kosovo: A Need for Constituent Offices

*"Today, more than ever, I am convinced that I should open a constituency office."  
– PDK MP from Shtime in Kosovo*

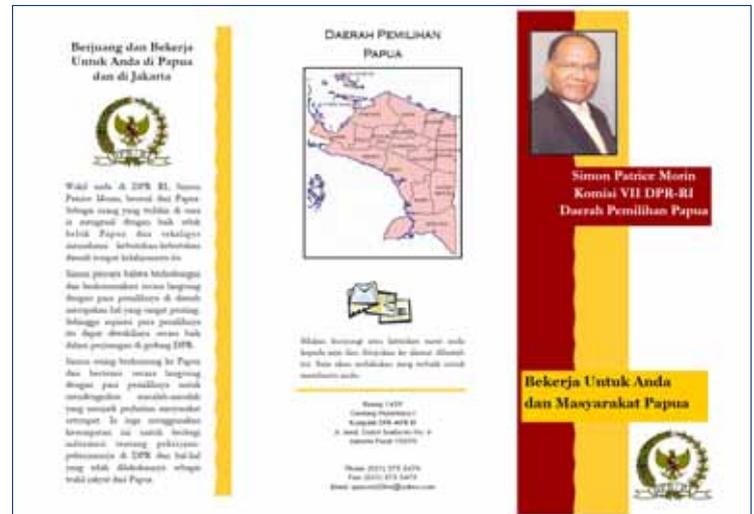
*Many legislators locate their offices in party branch offices for mainly financial reasons (four out of seven constituency offices in Kosovo are opened in this fashion). Some legislators support the idea of establishing separate offices (a representative in Podujeva rented an office and two other offices are opened using municipal assembly buildings). They believe it is important to separate their position within the party from their job as members of parliament.*

## 4.1 The Office Brochure

A brief brochure can help convey a positive first impression of the legislator. These brochures are generally handouts or leaflets allowing legislators the opportunity to introduce themselves, their activities, and explain what an elected representative does. A good office brochure does not necessarily need to be an expensive one. Whether creating a simple one page flier or a detailed glossy publication, there are certain elements that can help create the right document for any office.

Contents of a Professional Brochure: A good brochure should contain some (if not all) of the following:

- A basic biography and/or introductory statement by the representative;
- Essential contact information;
- Pictures of the representative in the capital, and in the district;
- Where the legislator represents a specific geographic location, maps and/or visual images of the area represented;
- A brief statement thanking voters for their trust and affording the legislator the privilege of representing the constituency. The office brochure is also the place to tell constituents what motivated the representative to want to serve. Tell them why public service was appealing, what issues are primary to the legislative agenda, and what has been done to help constituents and the district more generally.
- A basic listing of the types of services the legislator and his/her staff provide, or areas in which the staff can provide assistance. This brochure should try to tell constituents how the legislators are helping them solve



*Indonesia: District Office Brochure*

*Mr. Simon Patrice Morin, legislator from Indonesia, developed this detailed brochure to introduce himself and his district office to constituents. It folds neatly into a convenient tri-fold size, and includes his photo, a concise biography, office contact information, and a map of his district.*

their problems and expound specific areas of expertise. Of all of the challenges involved in fashioning a brochure, listing the types of services the office provides usually proves the most difficult. Often constituents possess very little knowledge of what an elected representative actually does and what types of activities constitute “constituent services.” Creating a short list of services the office provides and incorporating them into the brochure by way of an example helps take the feeling of arbitrariness out of situations when the representative or staff cannot assist someone with an issue.

## 4.2 Who Does What? Office Assistants and Specialists

In politics, first impressions matter. A first and lasting impression of any elected representative is frequently made when constituents interact directly with the legislator or his or her staff. All staff that work in the district office should be professional and courteous.

An effective office assistant can ensure that the office operates smoothly and maintains a positive image in the community. Anyone hired should have appropriate skills for the job, or be willing and able to learn. The specific duties of an office assistant will vary for each office, but should include at least some of the following: managing the office; helping constituents to connect with appropriate

government offices; arranging meetings; keeping records of meetings and constituent requests; assisting with telephone calls and other constituent correspondence; planning public meetings and other activities for the representative to attend; organizing news conferences and writing news releases; and, where appropriate, help the legislator report to the party about his or her constituency work.

If possible, hiring professional experts to address the concerns of citizens can make a big difference. Providing a basic list of who can do what, in addition to a list of basic services the legislator’s staff offers constituents, is helpful in this regard. First, it demonstrates foresight and planning

on the part of the legislator. Second, it affords easy contact and reference points for follow-up correspondence and future meetings. Finally, it informs constituents about the staff's given areas of expertise. By assigning specific roles to

staff, it compartmentalizes and solidifies who ultimately has responsibility for what, making the office more accountable to the public.

### Alternative Ways to Staff Constituency Work

When it is impossible to hire staff for constituency work, consider some alternatives:

- Ask supporters to volunteer their time. In Yemen, some legislators recruit the assistance of supporters they know well through elections or other community work to help liaise with constituents. The supporters, who volunteer their time, share updates about the community; help plan constituency visits, and meet with constituents.
- Recruit volunteers who want to make a difference in their community. In Cambodia, "Constituency Volunteers" (CVs), whom legislators identify and train with the assistance of local NGOs, help organize public meetings, record constituent requests, and stay in touch with constituents about the status of their requests.
- Create a student "internship" program in the constituency. Ask a secondary or university student to help with constituency tasks. He or she can help advertise constituency visits, share information on the legislator's behalf, and write down constituent comments and concerns. In exchange, the student learns new skills.

## 4.3 Office Hours and Meeting with Constituents

Although many legislators spend the majority of their time in the legislature, the district office is the ultimate symbol of a representative's local presence. If legislators in your system have a district office, and have some voice in determining where it will be located, try to place the office in a highly visible location. This could mean a stand-alone office, an office owned by the party, or even public space that is set aside from time to time as space to be used by elected officials. Be sure to visibly post hours of operation as well. Also, highlight the select hours and specific days the legislator has set aside personal time to meet with constituents.

Unless a constituent seems extremely uncomfortable sharing his or her personal problems in a small group setting, members of staff should sit in on the meetings and take notes about the issues discussed. This helps alleviate the burden on a representative who may only have a few minutes to dedicate to specific issues, and it allows the representative the opportunity to introduce the constituent to the staff member who will ultimately be doing the follow-up work.

Introducing staff into the process frees valuable time for the legislator and affords the staff person a chance to establish the relationship necessary to resolve the problem in the future.



### Mexico: Holding Regular Office Hours

Carlos Daniel Fernández, Local Congressman and President of the Party of the Institutional Revolution (PRI) parliamentary group in the Mexican state of Sonora, sought to improve constituent outreach mechanisms of his parliamentary group. With his leadership, the parliamentary group established 14 district offices, where each PRI state deputy was able to hold office hours on a regular basis. They were also better able to channel demands and disputes to the appropriate government agency, and share information about state and federal government programs. The offices were placed in visible locations, often near popular local shopping districts.

## 4.4 Tracking Constituent Requests

Legislators and their staff need to keep a good record of efforts made to help constituents. When someone enters the office, or meets with the legislator, access to documentation of who they were and why they came is vital, so that legislators and staff are not relying on their memories alone to resolve the situation later. A Constituent Fact Sheet, as described later in Section 5.2, can help with this process.

In many countries, legislators rely on a standard logbook kept in chronological order to document constituent visits. These logbooks often are little more than a simple ledger with names, dates, and contact information, as well as basic information regarding the nature of the constituent's visit. Some legislators use a simple pen and notebook system. This is not necessarily a poor solution to documenting who requests the help of a legislator in solving specific issues, though if a given office has computers, those are far easier to use.

Constituent tracking software provides a simple and accurate way for members and their staff to keep track of specific requests from constituents, dates of conversations, specific actions taken, and resolutions. While this software is swifter and has much more capability than the logbook, the main objective is to make this information easily retrievable and accessible; as long as the elected representative can stay well informed and staff can effectively answer the questions and requests of constituents, the system matters very little.

Legislators might also consider creating a method to collect and record comments received by them, their staff or their district offices. When people call the office of a legislator with a comment about a local issue, a national

Status	Date	Case	NP	Constituent	Municipality
Accepted	7/11/2008	Rental		John Smith	Bosanska Krupa / Krupa Na Uni
Accepted	3/10/2008	wants pardon	Vanja Halilovic (SVO)	Mr. Fred Smith	Glamoč
Accepted	11/8/2007	Problem with roads	Elio Zubic (PDF)	Mr. Neta Evans	Doboj East
Accepted	10/16/2007	Power Outage	Elio Zubic (PDF)	Mr. Ana Radovic	Zenica
Solved	12/4/2007	Health Insurance and Pension	Vanja Halilovic (SVO)	Mr. Elio Zubic	Srebrenik
Unsolved	7/11/2008	petrol on poor road side village	Elio Zubic (PDF)	Heather Easton	Bosanski Petrovac / Petrovac
Unsolved	8/20/2008	Public Transportation	Elio	Mr. Heather Easton	Tuzla Sarajeva / Istočno Saraj

### Bosnia: Tracking Constituent Needs Electronically

Since the advent of computer software like Microsoft Access, many NGOs and other organizations have developed programs that serve as constituent data tracking software. The program seen here operates in 20 constituency offices in Bosnia, is trilingual and functions to help elected representatives more efficiently fulfill part of their mandate. Depending on the constituency office, it is either web-based or hosted on a local computer, and can be used as part of national constituency relations initiatives if need be.

problem, or a personal concern, staff should have the ability to quickly document it and enter it into a permanent record. Knowing how constituents feel about an issue is important in representing the constituency effectively and to understanding changes in public opinion.

## 4.5 Listing Local Public Services

Legislators and their staff will not always have the resources necessary to resolve the problems brought to them, and they should be prepared to direct inquiries to the proper authorities when necessary. A large number of issues impacting the lives of constituents are resolved by local administrative agencies. Police, firefighters, emergency health services, water and electric companies, sanitation systems, and local healthcare providers are the types of institutions most people turn to when they want a problem resolved. NGOs and charitable organizations also often have programs and resources that can solve citizen problems as well. Many residents, however, are baffled by bureaucratic structures and frequently lack the basic information

necessary to begin addressing their personal issues.

Legislators and their staff should become familiar with their local service providers. The constituency profile serves as the initial foundation for this information, and by developing relationships with the individuals and institutions that provide local services, elected representatives are in a position to call upon these contacts when needed. Additionally, compiling and/or publishing a list of services provided by local government agencies or NGOs can serve as a helpful reminder that the local legislator is actively engaged in the community.

## ■ Creating a List of Local Services:

Legislators might consider distributing this list of local administrative agencies and NGOs as an advertisement for the office in such forms as a calendar that constituents can take home with them, or as an easy to use pamphlet describing both the legislator and the local services available. This information may even go well with the information provided in the brochures discussed above.

Be sure to remember the telephone numbers and addresses of local institutions and emergency contacts such as firefighters, police stations, hospitals and schools. Also include a short description of the key programs and resources offered by NGOs and charitable organizations, as well as the appropriate contact information. Adult education centers, literacy programs, childcare services, community projects and development programs, employment and career information centers, housing resources, and services directed specifically toward women and youth are all examples of non-governmental services that might be available in the district.

The advantage of these publications is that they serve as a constant reminder about the work of the party and the representative, while constituents tend to keep them as they provide valuable public information. If distributing such a list is not possible or resources are limited, simply keeping this list with a volunteer or in the constituency office back

in the district and ensuring that constituents are aware of it can also be effective.

ADRESE UTILE			HUNEDOARA			
Nr. crt.	Institutie	Adresa	Conducere	Funcția	Tel.	Fax
1	Directia de Sanatate Publica a judetului Hunedoara	Deva, str. 22 Decembrie, nr. 58	Lucia BULUGEAN	Director executiv	211 848 217 580	213 758
2	Casa Judeteana de Asigurari de Sanatate Hunedoara	Deva, str. 1 Decembrie, nr. 16	Dan FLORESCU	Director general	219 285 219 280	218 911
3	Inspectoratul Scolar al judetului Hunedoara	Deva, str. Gh. Baritiu, nr. 2	Anisor PARVU	Inspector scolar general	213 315 217 345	215 034
4	Directia pentru Cultura, Culte si Patrimoniu Cultural National Hunedoara	Deva, str. 1 Decembrie, nr. 28	Ioan Octavian RUDEANU	Director executiv	213 966	213 966
5	Directia pentru Sport a judetului Hunedoara	Deva, str. O. Goga, nr. 1	Constantin GRIGORE	Director executiv	212 067 214 985	218 469
6	Directia de Munca, Solidaritate Sociala si Familie	Deva, P-ta Unirii, nr. 2	Octavian BAGESCU	Director executiv	233 640 215 521	233 640
7	Agentia judeteana pentru Ocuparea Fortei de Munca Hunedoara	Deva, P-ta Unirii, nr. 2	Mariana BACILA	Director executiv	217 048 216 151	216 088
8	Inspectoratul Teritorial de Munca Hunedoara	Deva, Aleea Muncii, nr. 2	Dorel RAT	Inspector sef	216 157	233 670

### *Romania: Maintaining a List of Office Contacts*

*A well-run office should have a list of all pertinent personnel and institutions readily available for outreach on behalf of constituents. This list, used in a constituency office in Romania, shows the names, addresses, and phone numbers of the Executive Directors of several local administrative agencies.*

## 4.6 Creating a Guide to Common Problems

Many elected representatives find that they receive the same requests or questions over and over again. When the solutions are relatively simple, legislators may want to consider creating a Guide to Common Problems. Include a description of the problem, the responsible local government agency, and how they can be contacted. Having such a guide in the office or available to distribute shows

constituents that their legislator has been listening to their concerns and wants to help. It can also serve to educate constituents about the kinds of advice their legislator can provide, and where they can go to have their problems dealt with directly. The guide is not a substitute for face-to-face interaction with constituents, but it can provide a much needed service.

## 4.7 Using Technology and the Web to Reach Out

In many countries the Internet is changing the way politicians and political parties operate. The use of the World Wide Web to make homepages, produce political blogs, and solicit information from constituents is changing the ability of politicians to reach out to voters. The Internet is also changing the way voters interact with politicians. Although it has yet to assume the importance in many countries

that it has in the United States and Western Europe, the Internet's ability to alter the political landscape should not be underestimated.

A personal homepage highlighting a representative's accomplishments and vision for the district, and allowing for public feedback will prove increasingly critical to political

success in the digital age. A good homepage should be more than just a personal political advertisement; it should also highlight the unique aspects of a given district and legislator. A well thought out webpage should contain at least some of the following information:

- A biography of the representative and a list of office staff;
- Information on the primary issues for the legislator and why they are worthy of recognition;
- A way of contacting the legislator or his/her staff by e-mail or in person;
- Highlights of the district and links to various entities within the region, if the legislator represents a specific area;
- Photos and maps of the area represented, if applicable;
- Links to web-pages of smaller municipalities and service entities within the district;
- Advertisements of the outstanding features of the district, whether they are national parks, recreational activities, cultural monuments, tourist destinations, or the unique business possibilities that can be found by working in a certain constituency.



### Kenya: Developing an Effective Constituency Webpage

*The website of Hon. Nderitu Muriithi, who represents the Laikipia West Constituency in Kenya, is an excellent model that conveys a positive message of transparency and commitment to his constituents. He provides clearly displayed contact information, photos, a list of public services, and detailed information regarding the use of Laikipia West Constituency Development Funds. Like all good websites, it is user friendly, interactive, and leaves room for the addition of materials as political and other circumstances change. See his website at: [www.laikipiawest.org](http://www.laikipiawest.org)*

## 4.8 Keeping in Touch

After everything that goes into a successful electoral campaign, effective constituent service is critical to success as an elected official. In most jurisdictions, very few citizens



*Cambodia: Staying in Touch Through Community Volunteers*

*Keeping in touch with constituents is essential to a legislator's success, and it does not always require lots of staff. In Cambodia, where legislators lack a budget for district offices and staff, Community Volunteers (CVs) have helped them stay in touch with and be more responsive to constituents. CVs reside in the district, so they can check in with constituents on a regular basis. They assist with keeping records of constituent requests, making sure the legislator is aware of concerns, and sharing information with constituents about the legislator's efforts to solve their problems.*

have received a letter or a phone call from an elected official or from someone in government concerned about their personal needs. Regular contact with constituents is vital to maintaining a strong relationship with the district and its people.

In time and with the right methods of tracking constituent casework, any legislative office can create the standard templates necessary to address a wide variety of topics important to constituents. A simple letter can go a long way in demonstrating commitment to someone who otherwise might never have thought legislators would express concern for “people like them.” This can be a task easily compiled from constituent casework software, or by hand from a logbook of recent requests (both of these methods are described above in more detail).

In some countries, legislative staff are required to follow-up in writing at each stage of the investigation into a constituent's case. A brief letter listing what actions taken on behalf of a constituent or a phone call can lead to votes at election time, and keeps the legislator in the minds of the constituents as an active, effective representative. The advantage of staying in contact with constituents should not be underestimated. ■

## CHAPTER V. RESPONDING TO THE PROBLEMS OF INDIVIDUAL CONSTITUENTS

**H**elping individual constituents work through the bureaucracy to resolve their problems, or “casework,” is a demanding, but often rewarding, part of any legislator’s job. Few constituent relations activities have as much potential for directly impacting citizens’ lives, or for enhancing citizens’ perceptions of their legislator. This chapter describes several forms of casework, provides tips for doing casework, and explains why legislators choose to do this kind of work.

### 5.0 Constituent Casework – A General Overview

In essence, “constituent relations” means nothing more than solving the basic needs of the people living next door. Whether it is facilitating trash collection, having the electricity turned on, solving a pension problem, or recruiting new businesses to the district, working with the local public administration to solve citizen’s problems is vital to success as a representative. Engaging in successful constituent relations can help play a role in resolving the problems faced by ordinary people, all the while increasing the chances that legislators can win supporters at election time.

Casework simply means engaging in the bureaucratic process of helping individuals solve the problems they are facing. All too often the majority of people are unsure what a legislator can do for them. While most people instinctively understand that legislators and staff have a much broader knowledge of public administration than the basic constituent, and while they realize legislators have contacts and connections that can speed up an otherwise difficult and lengthy process, they do not necessarily understand the types of activities in which legislators can and cannot intervene. This is the reason for publishing lists like those noted previously when discussing office brochures and websites.

What is considered to be a “case” typically varies among legislators. For some only a matter requiring action or information from a government agency qualifies as a case. Others define a case as any constituent request -- even

questions that can be answered without doing any research. While it is easier to carry out casework from a district office, it is certainly not impossible to track constituent requests without one.



*Kosovo: Addressing Health Care Concerns*

*Helping constituents can involve calling or writing letters on behalf of constituents, or visiting an institution in person. Legislators in this photo are visiting with a constituent about health issues at a public hospital in Kosovo.*

## 5.1 Why Do Casework?

A legislator clearly cannot solve every type of problem constituents bring to him or her. In fact, it may be illegal for a legislative office to interfere in some types of constituent requests, such as influencing a judicial decision or overriding a court order. Try to remember though that any good public servant should be sympathetic with people coming into the office or meeting with the legislator, and should try to resolve what problems they can. More often than not, constituents may think the position and authority of the legislator offers them their best, last, or only hope in obtaining justice, while the activities members perform on their behalf can ultimately win votes at election time.

Despite its importance and the advantage it affords elected representatives, constituent casework is not without its challenges or its critics. Legislators and their staff face a large number of responsibilities in their daily work, so it is fair to question how much time should be spent doing constituent casework. One political philosophy holds that it is the representative's responsibility to devote time and energy to every constituent who comes to them for help. This idea is almost certainly a recipe for wasted time and resources. Unless the office is in an exceedingly rural location with very few constituents ever entering its doors, legislators are inevitably going to have to assess whether or not "this type of case" is one that they can help resolve.

In all honesty there is no single answer to the question, "how much time should be spent doing constituent casework?"

Any representative's answer will depend on numerous factors including the size of the district, the number of complaints generally received, the level of staff and financial resources available, and the type of solutions that are being requested by constituents.

The question, "why do casework?" is slightly easier to answer. Remember that legislators function in multiple capacities. A good representative strives to improve the life of the people he or she represents, and this is done by creating responsive laws, developing wise policies, and helping those who are negatively impacted by government's rules and regulations. Constituent casework allows an elected official an opportunity to acquire first-hand knowledge of the ways in which the government is working – or not working – from a constituent's perspective.

Moreover, engaging in constituent casework tells citizens that the legislature cares about the impact of governmental decision making upon their daily lives. In a democracy, representatives should understand that citizens are, in many ways, their "bosses," and that elections have authorized the representatives to exercise their power as a public trust. In a practical sense, constituent casework is an important tool for furthering a party's and a legislator's goals as servants in winning and keeping the public trust until the next election.

## 5.2 Tips on How to Do Casework

**Opening the Case:** On some level, it is important to give the person who asks for aid from a legislator a chance to tell his or her story in his or her own words. On the other hand, representatives rarely have the time to listen to every single complaint whenever someone walks through the door. How then should legislators, staff or legislative volunteers proceed in assisting people who desperately need or want help now? The following tools can assist a legislator in making that decision:

**The Constituent Fact Sheet:** The constituent fact sheet is an excellent tool that preempts many of the early difficulties in handling constituent casework. An effective fact sheet allows constituents to share pertinent information in

writing with legislative staff about their situation in writing, including the basics of who they are and the problem they are hoping to have resolved. The advantages of having a constituent fact sheet in the office are numerous:

- It forces the constituent to condense the basic facts of the case in his or her own mind before telling a complicated and at times contradictory story;
- It allows staff to refer back to the facts during the follow-up interview; and
- It provides staff with a permanent record of what the constituent noted the problem was in his or her words.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
MP: \_\_\_\_\_  
No: \_\_\_\_\_

**SHORT DESCRIPTION OF YOUR PROBLEM**

First name: \_\_\_\_\_

Last name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone number: \_\_\_\_\_

Reason why you are here to meet with the MP (please provide short description of your problem and what you would like for the MP to do):

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Constituent Fact Sheet**

*A constituent fact sheet is a standard form used by legislators and their staff in the casework process. Constituents complete the form, either alone or together with the legislator's staff, when lodging a complaint or making a request for assistance. Having the information in writing allows the legislator's office to track the case and follow up more efficiently. As shown in this template, basic information, like name and address, should be included, as well as plenty of space to describe the problem.*

Since a single problem could consume days of work and attention and collecting a story from a constituent can take a long period of time, the fact sheet allows the office to be pro-active while obtaining a permanent record of the constituent's story for future casework.

Ideally, a member of staff and the constituent should fill out the form together. This creates the impression of the constituent being empowered and affords the constituent the impression that someone in the office is dedicating time to help them resolve their problem.

Once the fact sheet is returned, the legislator and his or her staff will want to go over it with the constituent and conduct an initial interview. After the interview, staff should have a rough idea of how difficult it will be to try to resolve the problem. Some cases will involve hours of the office's time and significant resources, while others will only require a quick phone call or a short letter from the office. There are four basic approaches to resolving casework problems explained below in Section 5.3, The Basis for Casework.

## 5.3 The Basis for Casework

An elected representative usually has four options in responding to a constituent's request:

1. Refer the case to another (usually local) authority;
2. Reject the case altogether;
3. Resolve the problems of multiple constituents collectively at a later date; or
4. Get involved personally and find a solution for the individual.

### Option 1: Referring the Case

Helping a constituent is often as simple as referring the case in question to the appropriate government agency or ministry responsible for resolving the matter. The most common problems arise when citizens are not sure to whom to turn or where they can go for advice. In these instances a legislator should try and help set them in the right direction. Staff can phone other agencies, set appointments, or draft a brief letter to the local administration encouraging them

to assist the citizen. These are relatively simple and quickly handled activities, and they might be enough to help the constituent get a fair hearing at his or her next stop in the bureaucracy. In some cases, especially where the local government is unresponsive or otherwise unable to help, NGOs or charitable organizations may also be able to assist the constituent. If and when this is the case, the legislator will want to refer the person directly to that NGO or charitable organization.

One thing to keep in mind is that working with a local agency usually requires a different approach than does working with a national agency. A local agency may need only a brief phone call or a personal introduction from the legislator or staff. If the problem is such that it requires a solution from an agency or ministry, a cover letter asking the agency or ministry to resolve the dispute would probably prove more effective than a phone call, unless the legislator has excellent contacts at the ministry in question.

## ■ Option 2: The Hardest Part – Saying “No”

Saying “no” is never easy for a politician. A good politician is taught almost instinctively to keep all the doors open and never make enemies. For many reasons though, be it questions of legal jurisdiction or matters with which it may be best to not get involved, such as family disputes or monetary disagreements, representatives or staff may have to utter the dreaded phrase, “We cannot help you.” For example, most disputes before a court or court ordered judgments are usually outside the realm of constituent services.

### *The Importance of Soliciting Feedback*

*When a legislator chooses to engage in casework, it is always a good idea to solicit feedback from those he or she has helped or attempted to help. Such feedback can help the legislator to identify aspects of his or her constituent services that are most effective, as well as areas that can be improved. The above Casework Questionnaire is an example of the types of questions to ask.*

Likewise, any involvement in cases under the jurisdiction of the prosecutor’s office or in a criminal investigation may not only prove unethical, but illegal. In those cases where legislators simply cannot resolve a constituent’s problem, honesty is usually the best policy.

## ■ Option 3: The Collective Basis for Casework

Before deciding to resolve a constituent’s case on an individual basis, make sure that this is not the type of issue that would be better resolved collectively. In some instances, problems of many citizens can be dealt with on a collective basis far more efficiently and effectively than on an individual one. Many representatives are often besieged with the same types

of requests again and again. The recalculation of pensions, problems related to the ownership of land, and complaints with utilities and/or transportation infrastructure are extremely common. In such instances, it may be best to wait for a critical mass of individuals or attempt to solve their problems through some sort of collective action.

A creative way of addressing the issue is to organize local meetings or forums, inviting people for discussions while having legislative staff take notes on individual cases. This raises the legislator’s public profile in these cases. An alternative approach might be to obtain the pro bono legal services of an attorney, where this is possible. Many lawyers will already be highly familiar with the subject at hand, and can be of great assistance in getting the problems resolved while reducing the amount of time staff spends on the issue. A final approach might be to submit joint applications, mailing in all the complaints to the local or national office responsible for resolving the issue and adding a letter stating what the legislator would like to see done with these complaints and how they would like to see these problems resolved. If this course of action is pursued, be sure and let the constituents know that the office took the time to do it on their behalf. When the office engages in difficult constituent casework, it is important that constituents know that the legislator took the effort to get things resolved on their behalf.

## ■ Option 4: Playing the Role of Advocate

If an elected official or staff member decides to directly assist in resolving a constituent’s case, there are a variety of ways in which to play the role of advocate. Before beginning a case, start thinking about the appropriate person or agency to contact. Building up a list of contacts in the local public administration, as described in Sections 1.1 and 4.5, will ultimately prove vital to long-term success.

It is also extremely important that when staff or legislators contact the national or local administrator or municipal agency, they not give the impression that they are seeking “special favors.” An elected representative and his or her staff should carefully maintain the impression that the office is simply ensuring that a constituent is receiving fair consideration within the administrative process. It is vital to every representative’s reputation as a lawmaker that outsiders see legislators are using the law, not abusing it.

**How to Contact the Entity in Question?** Should casework be done by letter, telephone or personal meeting? When should formal inquiries (which are described below) be used? These are largely questions of personal style and efficiency, but legislators should not be afraid to find a

### Malawi: Playing an Effective Advocate Role

*One legislator from Malawi had several water wells in her constituency repaired simply by telephoning the district water office repeatedly to ask when the work would be finished. Another Malawian representative drove from her constituency to the provincial capital, picked up a technician from the Ministry of Irrigation and Water Affairs, drove him to a broken water well and insisted that it be fixed immediately. Both of these activities were time consuming, but in the end effective and appreciated by each of their constituents.*

prefer a brief in-person meeting or phone call, while large municipalities may insist upon something in writing.

**The Telephone Call:** While phone calls are fast and efficient, they might require a high level of follow-up that can often be neglected in a busy office. A bureaucrat may agree over the phone to straighten out a problem on a constituent's behalf and the legislator may be content with the solution, only to see it reappear months later, unresolved. Written verification that the request was made makes it much easier for the legislator to follow-up. This lack of an adequate "paper trail" can be offset by keeping a written log of the conversations, but actual physical evidence in the form of a letter helps in maintaining files and records if a breakdown in communication or changes in staff occur along the way. Another rule to keep in mind is that the simpler the request, the more useful the phone may prove in resolving it.

method that works best for them. The district represented will greatly influence this style. Rural district agencies may

## 5.4 Letters to Constituents

An official letter from an elected official on behalf of a constituent compellingly indicates at least some degree of commitment. Constituent letters generally come in two types, specific letters and unsolicited mailings. Both are described below:

**Specific Letters:** This type of letter directly addresses the constituent's dilemma. Specific letters should be personal in nature, underscoring the issue in concern. The letter should be concise and if possible offer potential solutions to the problem in question.

**Unsolicited Mailings:** This type of letter addresses members of a group. It is a way of reaching a larger audience on a specific issue or issues. Unsolicited mail is generally an effective way of reaching out to audiences who do not necessarily expect to hear from an elected representative. It allows each legislator to build relationships with groups who might not otherwise know about their involvement in select activities. Examples of this type of mail might include newsletters or a mass-mailing on an issue of particular interest to the district or an important topic that is in the news.

## 5.5 Letters to the Local Public Administration

In rural localities, staff frequently prefer to call or even walk to the local administrative office when a problem arises. In many places this approach should not be discouraged. However, a letter from an elected official allows the office to document an attempt to solve the problem. It also affords

the constituent a valuable piece of evidence that someone at the political level is concerned with working out a solution to the matter in question should he or she be required to go from agency to agency later.

## 5.6 Letters to Government Agencies and Other National Administrative Bodies

It is often difficult for local residents to obtain relief from distant ministries or agencies, especially when they do not reside in the capital themselves. In many situations citizens do not have a basic understanding of where they need to go for help or how they should go about solving their problems.

In these cases, a letter from a legislator may greatly clarify and expedite what would otherwise be a lengthy ordeal. Once the office has acquired the basic information on a particular case, a standard letter addressed to the appropriate authorities may prove critical to a constituent's success.

## 5.7 Formal Inquiries on Behalf of Constituents

If the matter is serious enough, a legislator can use the power of the legislature to make an inquiry on behalf of a citizen. Formal inquiries can be submitted in written form (such as a letter) or verbally (during debate or plenary session, for example) to the government. In many parliamentary systems, this process is known as interpellation, and the

government is usually required to respond to the inquiry. Through interpellation, a legislator can make an official and public inquiry to the government regarding a matter that may have originated through casework. Taking such an action can help to pressure the government to solve the problem, often through a change in the law.

## 5.8 Promoting Community Development and Improvement

Representatives are sometimes in a unique position to assist in promoting economic development in their constituencies. They can leverage their status as a legislator to help constituents untangle confusing bureaucracies and identify potential sources of NGO or government funding to carry out improvement projects. Below are some of the ways legislators have promoted development in their districts.

requirements, where appropriate.

### Constituency Development Funds

*In some countries, legislators have authority to distribute funds – or determine how funds will be spent – for specific projects in their districts. When this authority is abused, it is referred to as pork barrel spending, but when used well these funds may help cover critical needs in a legislator's district.*

### Assisting With Grant Applications

In many countries, grant funds are widely available for many compelling social needs. Legislators can assist citizens, groups, or community development leaders in accessing these funds to carry out a project they have identified. Whether it is establishing a small business improvement district, digging a well for access to clean drinking water, or cleaning up the environment, when a community group or local organization receives a grant the entire community can benefit. National or local governments may provide grants, as well as local or international NGOs or international donors. The representative can help in a number of ways:

- Kenyan legislators oversee constituency funds that help pay for needs in their districts, such as bridges, clinics, water systems, and schools. The constituency development fund now represents 2.5% of Kenya's national budget, which amount to US\$656,000 per district in the 2006-2007 budget year. (Joel D. Barkan, "Legislatures on the Rise?" *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 19, No. 2 April 2008 Page 131)
- Zambian legislators have a similar constituency development fund, but funding levels are much lower than Kenya's.
- Philippine Congress members are granted \$1.2 million in Priority Development Assistance Funds (PDAF), and Senators \$3.6 million each year to pay for projects in their districts. (The government implements the projects, but legislators decide how the funds will be spent.)

*Orientation Handbook for Members of Parliament, by John K. Johnson and Robert T. Nakamura. World Bank Institute (WBI), 2006.*

- Assist in identifying an appropriate funding source;
- Offer advice on writing grant proposals and/or completing application forms;
- Suggest appropriate co-sponsors or add the legislator's leverage to the proposal;
- Train grant writers and help research past proposals;
- Locate how and where grant monies are being allocated;
- Help to plan, organize and oversee the project, by working with a committee of citizens or community leaders, and communicating with the donor on their behalf; and
- Provide advice and encouragement; Visit the site frequently and help the community with donor reporting



### Morocco : Training Local Organizations

*Mohammed Oudor, Member of Parliament from Morocco, set up a workshop for local service delivery NGOs to learn how to fundraise for their projects. Coordinating with the Secretariat General of the province, he helped to improve the local NGOs' capacity while showing that he cared about both the NGOs and citizens in his community. The workshops helped to strengthen his credibility among his constituents and established Mr. Oudor as an active representative attuned to the needs of his region.*

## ■ Collaborating with NGOs

Legislators can also work with local and international NGOs and charitable organizations to encourage them to undertake development projects in the district. Find out what NGOs are active in the constituency and meet with their representatives (the list of Public Services, explained in Section 4.5, can assist with this). They will not always be able to help, but the legislator's deep knowledge of his or her constituents' needs he or she can help the NGO determine what projects are priorities. Representatives can associate themselves with the projects, demonstrate a commitment to citizen needs, and increase their popularity as well, which can be helpful during the next campaign period.

## ■ Monitoring Government Projects

In most countries, the majority of development projects are carried out by government agencies. Legislators can help to promote economic and social development in their constituencies by monitoring the progress of ongoing government-funded development projects. Stay in touch with constituents and constituent groups to learn about the success of the projects and whether they are appropriately addressing relevant needs. If a project is not going well, the legislator may choose to intervene on the community's behalf by contacting relevant ministries or local government agencies. In some cases, it may take only one phone call to have the problem resolved.

## 5.9 Measuring Constituent Success

After exploring various solutions to a problem, your efforts may nonetheless prove unsuccessful. Justice cannot always be served even in the most deserving of cases. However, just because you could not obtain the result you set out for in a particular case does not mean you failed. When handled with care and consideration at least one citizen

will have had a positive experience with you or your office and the legislative process. By having worked on that case, and by having taken the constituent seriously, you will have taken a step toward empowering someone. You have also performed a generous political act that may well be remembered at election time. ■





## CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION

Constituent relations, when conducted effectively, enable legislators and political parties to make a positive impact on their constituents' lives. When performed well, constituent relations activities strengthen democracy in a country by building public trust in democratic institutions, and by reinforcing principles of participation, accountability and transparency. In many countries around the world, citizens are too often convinced that that government does not represent them and has little concern for their interests. Responsive legislators who are effective at engaging citizens can help to change this perception. A dedication to professionalism and a respect for the authority that has been entrusted to a legislator through the voting process are vital if he or she and the party are to keep the goodwill and trust of the voters.

From communicating through the media and conducting public outreach, to setting up a district office, to implementing casework, legislators have a broad range of options to choose from when developing and carrying out a constituent relations strategy. The approaches chosen, however, should be diverse and should provide opportunities to establish two-way communication with constituents. Sharing information with constituents is useful, but listening to them is equally important and is essential to being able to effectively represent them. The strategy should also consider opportunities for collaboration with NGOs, local government, or local party branches. Working together can be more cost-effective, and solving some local problems often requires it.

This guide was intended to provide practical tools and methods for constituent relations, based on best practices, real-life lessons learned, and examples from legislators in every region of the world. For every democratic legislature, constituent relations is an evolving process. Challenges that a legislator faces today may be reduced or altogether different tomorrow. Constituent issues and concerns will also change over time. Successful constituent relations strategies, however, can allow elected representatives and parties to adapt and become more effective democratic institutions. ■



## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Constituency Handbook for Elected Representatives in Namibia. National Democratic Institute, Washington, DC, and Namibia.

Available at: [http://www.accessdemocracy.org/library/1376\\_na\\_constituencyhdbk.pdf](http://www.accessdemocracy.org/library/1376_na_constituencyhdbk.pdf)

Constituency Handbook for Members of Parliament. National Democratic Institute, Washington, DC, and Malawi.

Available at: [http://www.accessdemocracy.org/library/127\\_mw\\_constituency.pdf](http://www.accessdemocracy.org/library/127_mw_constituency.pdf)

Constituency Outreach: Creating Channels of Access. National Democratic Institute, Washington, DC, and Capetown, South Africa.

Available at [http://www.accessdemocracy.org/library/190\\_sa\\_const\\_outrch.pdf](http://www.accessdemocracy.org/library/190_sa_const_outrch.pdf)

Constituency Outreach in Sierra Leone: A Guide for Members of Parliament. National Democratic Institute, Washington, DC, and Freetown, Sierra Leone.

Available at [http://www.accessdemocracy.org/library/1376\\_na\\_constituencyhdbk.pdf](http://www.accessdemocracy.org/library/1376_na_constituencyhdbk.pdf)

Constituent Service Manual for Romanian Parliamentarians: Effective Methods of Bringing Constituents in the Decision Making Process. National Democratic Institute, Washington, DC, and Bucharest, Romania, 1996. Available at: [http://www.accessdemocracy.org/library/380\\_ro\\_conreparl.pdf](http://www.accessdemocracy.org/library/380_ro_conreparl.pdf)

Effective Local Councilors: Your Place in the Council, Among the People, and in Your Party! National Democratic Institute, Washington, DC, and Zagreb, Croatia.

Available at: [http://www.accessdemocracy.org/library/1624\\_gov\\_councilormanual\\_033105.pdf](http://www.accessdemocracy.org/library/1624_gov_councilormanual_033105.pdf)

A Guide to Organizing Public Forums. National Democratic Institute, Washington, DC, and Islamabad, Pakistan, 2004.

Available at: [http://www.accessdemocracy.org/library/1700\\_pak\\_forum\\_complete.pdf](http://www.accessdemocracy.org/library/1700_pak_forum_complete.pdf)

Legislative Public Outreach on Poverty Issues: Parliaments and Poverty Series, Toolkit No. 3. National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2004.

Available at: [http://www.accessdemocracy.org/library/1684\\_gov\\_poverty\\_public\\_050504.pdf](http://www.accessdemocracy.org/library/1684_gov_poverty_public_050504.pdf)





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