

Advocacy Toolbox:

RTC's advocacy toolbox offers you key resources to meet with your elected officials and invite them out on the trail. For additional advocacy resources, check out www.railstotrails.org/policy/changemakers and for additional advocacy actions you can take today, head to www.railstotrails.org/takeaction!

1) Preparing for and meeting with your elected officials

To successfully plan, build and maintain connected trail and active transportation networks across the country, we need key partners at the federal, state, and local level. Whether it's advocating for funding, technical support or policy changes, meetings with elected officials are critically important to our movement.

To help make these meetings successful, here are some recommendations for engaging your elected officials in meaningful conversations about trails, walking and biking.

Best practices to consider for your meeting

- Plan ahead: Reach out to an office and try to be flexible on the date that you meet with your elected official or their staff. If you have a specific deadline you are working towards, reach out early ahead of the deadline for a meeting.
- Find the right contact: Elected officials at the local, state and federal level typically have schedulers or staff available to assist you. You should be able to locate the best contact information online by searching for the elected officials' local office. Calling, rather than emailing, the office is likely the fastest way to get a response.
- Be strategic in who you invite to the meeting: Consider what message you want to emphasize in the meeting and think about inviting people that can help emphasize that point. Emphasizing safety? Consider inviting some people involved in your local safe walking and biking organizations. Emphasizing economic development benefits? Consider inviting a business owner near a trail. Ideally, you can talk about all the benefits from trails and invite a diverse set of stakeholders and constituents to attend.
- Prep and show up early: Before any meetings, invite all attendees to gather and assign different roles and talking points for each attendee, including who will take notes, who can send a thank you note and who can do introductions. Also be sure to show up a few minutes early for your meeting.
- Build a relationship with staff: whether it be a Member of Congress or your Mayor, meeting and building relationships with staff can be key to supporting trails. While the elected officials themselves vote and hold authority, staff are often following legislation more closely and are often available to attend events or meetings. Engaging with the elected officials is a great goal, but meeting with staff can also be useful.
- Send a thank you note and follow up: Make sure you send a thank you note or email to the person you met with and be sure to stay in touch, particularly with staff in the office. Building a

relationship with the office will help ensure that you continue to get responses for future outreach, meetings and events. Consider sending updates on your local trail and invite them to future gatherings so that the office and staff continue to be engaged.

Talking Points for your meeting:

RTC has provided some sample talking points that you can consider using in your meetings; however, it is important to tailor the discussion to the elected officials and local dynamics. For example, be sure to include references to your local trails and other related local issues, like safety, public health or economic development opportunities. If you are meeting with a federal or state official (or their staff), highlight the need for sustained, dedicated funding for trails and emphasize that they have an important role in providing that funding. If there is a relevant local, state or federal bill that impacts trails, be sure to mention that in the meeting as well.

General talking points:

- Trails and active transportation networks are essential infrastructure for communities.
- Connected trail networks serve as an important transportation mode for people to get to everyday destinations like schools, workplaces, and businesses.
- Communities across the country want to invest in and build trail networks but sustained local, state and federal funding is critical to meeting the large demand for this infrastructure.
- Investing in active transportation networks can create jobs and help make communities greener, healthier, safer and more equitable.
- Elected officials can help by providing funding for trails, working closely with their Metropolitan Planning Organization or State Department of Transportation counterparts to support effective planning and implementation, and prioritizing policies that support building accessible trails, walking and biking infrastructure.

2) Inviting Elected Officials to Events on the Trail

Elected officials are key to the success of any trail or active transportation project. They can provide critical support in planning, land acquisition, funding and more. Inviting your representatives to experience trails firsthand in their communities is one of the best ways to get them interested in a project, build local support to move trails forward and create the momentum needed to connect trails across the country.

Events on the trail, including during [Celebrate Trails Day](#), can be an excellent opportunity to engage your mayor, local commissioners, state representative, governor, member of Congress or other elected officials depending on the type of support you need. It's easy—just let them know about any community events you're planning for the celebration and invite them to take part!

Here are a few tips to help make it easy to engage your decision-makers on Celebrate Trails Day or other events out on your local trail:

Consider Who to Invite:

It's a great idea to invite local, state and federal officials to your events since they all play a role in moving trail and active transportation projects forward. Local officials are important for planning and local policy efforts; state representatives and the governor can play a key role in statewide policy and funding; and members of Congress are critical to securing federal funding and grants.

All of these officials belong on your invite list! If you don't know who your representatives are, use online search tools like www.congress.gov/members/find-your-member to find their names and contact information.

Engage Staff at All Levels:

In addition to the elected officials themselves, make sure you also invite their relevant staff—if this is a Member of Congress, send an invitation to their local district office. You can find this information using the same search database listed above by first identifying your elected official, then visiting their website to identify relevant staff. If this is a state representative or local elected official, consider inviting the chief of staff.

While the officials themselves may vote on important matters, elected officials' staff are often very involved in key decisions. Including them in events is a chance to educate them about the project and the community support that exists for trails and active transportation. It is also easier to build relationships with district level staff and including them in your event invitation is a great way to grow the relationship.

Send the Invitation Early and Follow Up:

Once you determine who to invite, make sure to find an official email address, likely for staff, and send your invitation as soon as possible. It helps to copy a scheduler or the chief of staff on these invitations as well. If you know someone who has a close relationship with the elected official, consider asking them to also reach out to the office.

In your invitation, include all of the relevant information as well as contact information (email and phone number) for the event organizers. Many elected officials have very busy schedules. If you haven't heard back in a timely manner, don't hesitate to continue to follow up by phone or email. And don't be alarmed if they don't confirm early because final decisions about event participation often happen at the last minute.

Continue to follow up by phone or email until you get confirmation and if the elected official themselves can't attend, ask their staff to join you out on the trail and consider following up to get a meeting scheduled with the official themselves in the near future.

Consider Offering Speaking Opportunities:

One great way to encourage elected officials to attend is to consider offering them the chance to speak or make brief remarks at the event. Even if you haven't planned for it, be prepared that often elected officials expect to provide remarks, so it's helpful to clarify in advance. This can be a great opportunity to educate their office on the particulars of the project and to have them show support among the community.

Send A Thank You Note

After your event, be sure to send a thank you note to the elected officials and their staff. This is an opportunity to continue to build your relationship and work more closely with their office to plan, fund and develop trail and active transportation networks in your community.

Sample invite email:

Dear _____,

My name is [NAME], and I am a [INFORMATION ABOUT YOU; CITY, ORGANIZATION YOU REPRESENT]. We are going to be hosting [INSERT NAME OF EVENT] on [INSERT DATE]. I wanted to invite [ELECTED OFFICIAL'S NAME] or a staff member to join us on the [TRAIL NAME] at [TIME] for the event.

Here is a link to our event with more information: [INCLUDE LINK TO EVENT].

We have invited [DESCRIBE ATTENDEES] and other community members to attend, and I hope [NAME OF ELECTED OFFICIAL] or someone in your office will consider joining us.

This trail is essential in our community and helps keep residents safe and healthy, in addition to providing an important transportation option. We hope you will consider joining us.

[NAME]