

**Downtown Legislative Training**  
**Tips for Influencing your Decision Makers' Decisions**  
**Maggie Drummond, GrowSmart Maine, January 2010**

- 1. First and foremost- know who your decision makers are and communicate early. Know the legislator outside of the state house. Earlier contact is better than later contact- don't wait until an issue comes up and you need his/her help or vote. If your Representative already knows you, you have a distinct advantage – he/she is likely to ask your opinion, communication will work both ways, and you'll have access.**
- 2. Never assume the legislator knows what you are talking about. Legislators face a steep learning curve. Start at middle ground. Don't use acronyms or jargon- such as 'MDC'. Don't assume the legislator knows the LD number of the bill you are interested in talking about. Start at the beginning and take it slow.**
- 3. Credibility is essential; it's everything. If you are not sure how to answer a question, tell the legislator that. Say "I don't know, but I will find out and get back to you at x time and x day." If you promise information, make sure to follow up when you say you will.**
- 4. Don't go it alone. Build coalitions and partnerships. Have friends with you. It is critical mass that causes action in most cases.**
- 5. Don't go away. Stay with the committee. Talk with legislators. Be there at the end as well as the beginning. Stay with it year to year, too- not just day to day. We all know about those issues that come back year after year.**
- 6. Make it personal. Make it local. Information and data is important, but communicate what the issue is doing to you- literally. If the bill passes, what will the world look like? Why is it important to you, personally, or to a community?**
- 7. Never take it personally. Let it go every day. The legislator who says no to you today will support you the next time. Be an effective advocate and emotional advocate, but do not be defeated by your emotions or by personalities.**

- 8. Know all the angles, not just your own. Do your homework. What are the pitfalls? Who won't like it? Call them. Talk to legislators to find out why they taking the position they are taking. Maybe you'll find common ground; even if you don't, you will be prepared to respond if you know what your opposition will say.**
- 9. Set priorities. Be pragmatic. Know what your bottom line is. If a legislator asks you to prioritize, have your answer ready. DO NOT say- "it's all important."**
- 10. Don't just talk. Ask questions. Some legislators are quiet – you want to make sure you know what direction s/he is going in. If you walk away without knowing what that legislator thinks and why he/she thinks it, you haven't done your job.**
- 11. Always say thank you. Being a legislator is not an easy job. There is not much compensation. We are all in this together. Say it multiple times, not just in person. Send a letter or email, too.**

#### **Top Five Steps Every Downtown Revitalization Advocate Should Take:**

- 1. Make the call. Call your Representative and your Senator and introduce yourself, every year, after every election, and anytime in between. Establish yourself as a contact and as an interested citizen.**
- 2. Always ask. Invite your Legislator to come to a meeting, speak at an event, be on a committee, or otherwise be engaged in your work. Ask him/her to speak with your board members regularly to share ideas and hear his/her priorities. Keep asking, even if he/she says no the first time.**
- 3. Send the material. Send copies of your newsletter, an article about your work, a thank you card whenever you think of it.**
- 4. Go where your Rep goes! Spend a day or two shadowing your Legislator every year.**
- 5. Put someone in charge of it. Nominate a legislative 'liaison' for your Downtown organization and ensure that person attends coalition meetings and keeps track of State House action.**