

# Policy

# Toolkit

**A guide to climate policy**



**The  
Climate  
Initiative**

**Communicating with Legislators**

# Introduction

Hello!

My name is Javan Santos and I am the Policy Manager for The Climate Initiative. Through these policy toolkits, I hope to show youth that policy can be simple and accessible for young people who are passionate about making change in their community. I started writing policy when I was in high school and have worked in policy for almost seven years now. The experience and knowledge from those years are poured into these toolkits for youth to use to make a difference in climate advocacy. Whether you are hoping to analyze policy, talk to a policymaker, or learn about what it takes to turn an idea into a law, I hope that you will learn something helpful in the resources these toolkits provide.

After you learn the fundamentals of navigating policy, this toolkit also comes with a run down of several different state-specific policy tools. In it, you'll find a history of climate policy in your state, legislators that are supportive of climate policy according to organizations within your state, and other useful information. Climate advocacy is not easy, and there is so much at stake for youth if nothing is done. My hope is that these toolkits will provide you all you need to make much needed change in your state and your community!

If you have any questions or thoughts on how we at The Climate Initiative can help your advocacy, please feel free to reach out to me at:  
[javan@theclimateinitiative.org](mailto:javan@theclimateinitiative.org)

*Javan*

Javan Santos  
Policy Manager



# Communicating with Legislators

One of the best ways to advocate for climate action is to communicate with legislators directly and tell them what you would like to see from your government. Here are some tips to make the most out of any communication you have with a legislator.

## 1. Do your research

- a. It's important to show elected officials that you are well informed, prepared, and that you take the issue seriously, especially if you are a youth advocate. It is so impressive when youth demonstrate as much knowledge, or even more, about policy than the legislators themselves. The best way to do that is to do research. There are many things you should know before even contacting an elected official, including:
  - Who you are contacting and why: you can decide this based on who is best to talk to about climate issues, who represents your district, or who holds leadership positions in the body or in the appropriate committee.
    - For example: If there is a bill to open up a new solar farm, you might want to contact a legislator who is the chairperson or a committee member of a committee with oversight of energy utilities.
  - The bio of the legislator, their platform, and current events of the legislator.
  - Their voting and introduction track record of environmental bills.
  - Current climate related bills up for discussion in your area as well as other jurisdictions.
  - Current events in the community related to environment/climate change
  - Use [Congress's website tool](#) to find your state/territory legislative website!
  - Use [this tool from USA.gov](#) to find your state, local and tribal governments, as well!
  - In these toolkits, you will also find information breaking down climate leaders and climate policy in several states!

- b. It's important to do research before you decide what your ask is because you might find out that the topic that you hope to address is already being discussed by legislators.

## 2. Decide on your ask and stick to it

An ask to a legislator can be put into two categories: either you are asking them to (1) support a particular bill or resolution, or (2) introduce something completely new. If you are not doing either of these things, it will be very difficult to get tangible deliverables from them.

- If you are deciding on asking for something completely new, consider drafting the bill yourself and giving it to them. This significantly increases the likelihood that the issue will be discussed by the legislature. Drafting legislation is not as hard as you may think, and this toolkit can show you how!
- If you are asking for their support for current legislation, make sure you know what the legislator can do (i.e., vote yes on the legislation, make a motion to move the legislation onto the session floor, amend it in committee, etc.) and explicitly ask them to do it.

## 3. Decide on the contact method

There are four ways to contact a legislator: via phone, via mail, via email/social media, and face to face. Each has its pros and cons.

### 1. Phone

- Phone is likely the quickest way to get feedback and speak to a real person.
- You might end up either leaving a message or talking to a staff member, who will take notes and report back to the elected official.
- It is unlikely that the elected official themselves will answer or be available for a phone call.



### 2. Mail

- Writing letters puts something physical in their office that can be archived and reviewed at any point.
- It will probably be interns or junior staff who will receive and review your letter(s), and they might not have the most influence on the legislator's policy.



### 3. Email

- Email is the most convenient to write, send, and follow up.
- Your email could get lost in a flood of other emails, so this method may be the least likely to elicit a response.

### 4. Meetings

- Meetings are the most difficult to secure, but they are by far the most impactful means of engaging with legislators.
- Speaking with a legislator or their staff, results in a meaningful in-person conversation and an opportunity for you to listen to the office's perspective.
- Legislators may be more accessible due to the increasing use of virtual meetings.

## 4. Structure your argument

Now that you have done the research, chosen your topic, and chosen your medium, make sure to prepare by planning your approach to persuading the legislator. Some topic points to think about include:

- A brief explanation of your topic
- Why the topic is important to the climate movement
- Why the topic relates to the legislator's platform/constituency
- What the opposition says, and why they should support anyway
- What actions the legislator can take on the issue

## 5. Important notes for your communication

- a. Be polite and thankful! Open your communication or meeting by thanking them for some specific work they've done or congratulating them on a recent accomplishment.
- b. Be clear about what your ask is and remind them of the ask at the end of the meeting.

- c. Make sure that you have follow up action items or conversations with them. Whether it be more info on the issue, a specific document, or a point of contact to give, having a deliverable to give them after the meeting. keeps open a line of communication and allows you to follow up on your ask.
- d. Remember that your elected officials may work for you, but they are their own person with their own desires and agenda. You cannot force elected officials to take up something they do not want to, but you can communicate your desires and use the power of the election to hold them accountable for not meeting your expectations.

**Keeping all of this in mind, you should be more than prepared to make successful and effective policy asks!**

If you have any questions or need advice or support with your legislative communications, please contact Javan Santos, policy manager at KCI at [javan@theclimateinitiative.org](mailto:javan@theclimateinitiative.org).