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The Art of the Check-In

Effective advocacy rarely relies on one-and-done activities, such as making an introductory (*i.e.*, cold) call to ask for a vote. Almost always, relationships are key. State associations of nonprofits have mastered the artform of relationship building, including Nonprofit Days at the Capitol, regional meet-and-greets with elected officials, candidate forums, and more. Those big events can win friends and influence decisionmakers in powerful ways. Another form for ensuring nonprofits have the respect and attention of policymakers is the recurring “check in.” Upcoming examples make the case.



The [Hawai`i Alliance of Nonprofit Organizations](#) (HANO) conducts check-ins on a quarterly basis. The state association of nonprofits bills the calls as an opportunity to “[Connect and Talk Story](#) With Hawai`i’s Congressional Delegation Staff About Federal Funding.” The informal conversations allow congressional staff to share resources and updates on how nonprofits can access federal dollars. The staff have committed to the regular check-ins so they and the attending nonprofit professionals get to know each other and learn about federal funding or legislative processes. HANO makes clear that the calls are not “a direct lobbying opportunity on specific projects or legislation” or “a session to air gripes about any individual Congressional

offices or Congressional processes.” Setting these clear expectations allows for the check-ins to be focused on building rapport, learning from one another, and ensuring the right information is getting to the right people. Any direct lobbying can come later.



The [Massachusetts Nonprofit Network](#) (MNN) hosts regular [Public Policy Forums](#) to “bring together MNN members and government leaders to have candid conversations about issues impacting the nonprofit sector.” The check-ins with government officials “not only benefit [MNN] members but also increase the awareness and support for the vital work nonprofits undertake each and every day.” Hearing from various state government secretaries in virtual or in person settings allows nonprofit leaders in the commonwealth to ask questions, express concerns, and work in partnership on hard issues. The regular communications with high-level officials also provide check-ups for what is working and not working across the state. The most recent forum with Massachusetts Secretary of Health and Human Services Kate Walsh explored topics such as cost of care, the need for increased funding, methods to access government grants, and forming partnerships with the Administration.

Regular check-ins with nonprofits give government officials the opportunity to share information, sound out ideas, and identify areas of need. They also serve to remind the officials that charitable organizations are key players in the economy and know the problems and solutions in their communities. Perhaps most importantly, the regularity of the meetings can cause the officials to think as they act on policy matters about how those decisions will affect the charitable sector and how they will explain those actions on the next call.

Relationship building, mindfulness of charitable nonprofit concerns, informed decision making; these are all byproducts of the art of the check-in.