



Legislative Engagement Best Practices: **Amplifying Your Voice for Fire Service Funding**

Effective engagement with elected officials is crucial for securing the vital funding our fire agencies need. This guide offers practical tips to help fire districts, community organizations, and individual advocates communicate effectively and influence policy decisions.

Core Message:

I. Understanding Your Audience: Who Are You Talking To?

Before you engage, research your target legislator or the Governor's office.

- **Legislator's Priorities:** What committees do they serve on? What issues have they publicly supported or championed in the past? Do they represent a rural, urban, or wildland-urban interface (WUI) district? Understanding their existing interests helps you connect your issue to their concerns.
- **Constituent Needs:** What are the key issues and industries in their district? How does the fire funding shortfall specifically impact their constituents (e.g., increased wildfire risk, longer EMS response times, economic impact from disasters)?
- **Political Context:** Are they up for re-election soon? What are the major political currents in Sacramento that might affect their willingness to support new funding initiatives?

II. Tailoring Your Message: Speak Their Language

Once you understand your audience, adapt your message for maximum impact.

- **For Legislators Focused on Public Safety:** Emphasize the direct link between funding and essential services like emergency medical services (EMS), hazardous materials response, and effective wildfire mitigation. Highlight how the funding crisis leads to tangible risks like longer response times, brownouts, and a strained mutual aid system. Use data like the "Unable to Fill" (UTF) statistics to show operational strain.
- **For Legislators Concerned with Fiscal Responsibility/Economy:** Frame the funding as a smart investment in community resilience and economic stability. Explain that deferred maintenance and equipment upgrades lead to higher costs in the long run. Emphasize that a robust fire service prevents larger, more costly disasters and protects property values.



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- **For Legislators in Rural or WUI Areas:** Stress the unique challenges faced by fire districts in these areas, particularly regarding wildfire response and the need for specialized training and equipment. Highlight the critical role local agencies play in the statewide mutual aid system during major wildfires.
- **For Legislators Focused on Local Government:** Point out the disparity in cost recovery methods available to fire districts compared to city and county fire departments. Explain how outdated funding formulas (stagnant since the 1970s) disproportionately impact fire districts.

III. Effective Communication Strategies

- **Be Clear and Concise:** Legislators and their staff have limited time. Get to your main point quickly.
 - **“The Ask”:** Clearly state what you want them to do (e.g., “We urge you to support legislation that provides sustainable, long-term funding for California’s local fire agencies.”).
- **Personalize Your Message:**
 - **Share Stories:** Data is crucial, but personal stories resonate more powerfully. Share specific examples of how funding shortfalls have impacted your district, firefighters, or community members (e.g., a delayed response, a piece of equipment that couldn’t be replaced, a critical service that was reduced).
 - **Connect to Their District:** Explain how the issue directly affects the constituents in their specific district.
- **Provide Concrete Data (Briefly):**
 - Mention the vast service area and population covered by local agencies.
 - Cite the significant increase in service demands over 50 years, particularly EMS and wildfire response.
 - Note the outdated funding mechanisms from the 1970s.
 - Highlight local agencies’ critical role in mutual aid (e.g., over 60% of personnel in recent fires).
 - Mention the alarming “Unable to Fill” (UTF) statistics as evidence of strain.
- **Be Solutions-Oriented:** Don’t just present problems; suggest that solutions should focus on increasing funding to meet modern service demands, and that fire service experts (like FDAC, CalChiefs, FIRESCOPE) should be consulted in developing these.



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➤ **Utilize Multiple Channels:**

- **In-Person Meetings:** If possible, schedule meetings with the legislator or their staff. Be prepared, professional, and provide a concise leave-behind document (like the “Fighting Fire with Funding” packet).
 - **Letters to the Editor & Op-Eds:** Encourage fire chiefs, community members, and local leaders to write and submit these to local newspapers to build public awareness and pressure.
 - **Emails:** Send targeted emails with specific requests.
 - **Phone Calls:** Brief, polite calls from constituents are effective for flagging issues.
 - **Social Media:** Use platforms to share facts, stories, and calls to action.
- **Follow-Up:** Persistence is key. Follow up respectfully on your requests and continue to build relationships with legislative staff.

IV. Ethical Considerations

- **Truthfulness:** Always provide accurate information and data. Do not exaggerate or misrepresent facts.
- **Transparency:** Be clear about who you are and who you represent.
- **Respectful Engagement:** Maintain a professional and courteous demeanor, even if you disagree. Focus on the issues, not personal attacks.
- **Compliance:** Be aware of and comply with all applicable lobbying laws and ethics regulations.

By applying these best practices, California’s fire agencies and their allies can significantly amplify their voice and effectively advocate for the critical funding necessary to ensure the safety and preparedness of communities statewide.