

# Writing a Sign-On Letter

Sending a sign-on letter to a decisionmaker amplifies the political cost of their actions by showing that many of their constituents are concerned. While sign-on letters are not entirely effective on their own—there must be follow-up—they are a good way to bring your community together, to get your voices on the record, and to introduce yourselves to the decisionmaker and their staff.

**1. Identify the target.** The first step of writing a sign-on letter is determining your target. Research the issue to learn more about local influential decisionmakers. These include business owners, board members, heads of associations, community leaders, as well as elected officials. Learn more about what is important to them and where they have the most influence.

If you're writing about a national issue, you can send the letter to your representatives in Congress, but make sure to include the local impacts of the national proposal. Understanding the chain of impact can be difficult; search or browse [www.ucsusa.org](http://www.ucsusa.org) for blogs and press releases on issues for more information and analysis.

**2. Determine the ask.** What is your desired outcome from sending this letter? This will determine your ask (what want your target to do or not do). Stick to one ask and be direct about the action you want the target to take. If you are concerned with a specific vote, provide identifying details such as the bill number and official name. Tell the target why you are concerned about this legislation. Make it local, and make it personal. Make sure your letter directly comments on how the issue affects to lives of your target's constituents, and be explicit about who bears disproportionate burden of the problem you're trying to address.

If your ask is to have a meeting with the decisionmaker, include potential days and times, and the topic you are interested in speaking with them about. If you are extending an invitation to attend a public event you are hosting, make sure to provide the details of the event, including the date, time, location, attendees, topic, and what you would like them to do at the event (e.g., speak, answer questions). If possible, tailor the letter to the target by finding out what most interests them. You can find this information on their website, Twitter, or Facebook account.

**3. Engage collaborators and signers.** There are opportunities to build community and momentum for participation if you make the process collaborative.

Collaborators will likely be more invested in the letter, making them likely to take stay active and share with their networks to obtain signatures. You can use Google Docs, email, or other online sharing platforms to collaborate on the letter text, or you can meet in person or via videoconference.

Determine the best signers for the letter and develop a plan for reaching out to them. As a scientist, you can write a letter that includes some technical expertise in addition to layman explanations and encourage colleagues and other experts to sign on. If the letter is more general, encourage your friends, family, coworkers, and the public to sign on. Local business, institutions, and associations can have a great impact as well. When you present the letter to your target, invite a few prominent signers to join you (3-5 people is often a good number).

**4. Follow up.** The more times the target and their staff hear from you, the more seriously they will take your request. If you are asking for a meeting or sending an invitation to an event, you can follow up in a week to inquire about scheduling. If you are asking for a meeting to discuss a particular topic, have a plan for a yes or no response.

If you get a positive response from the decisionmaker, have a way to keep in touch with them about the progress of the issue. Use social media to praise them and to hold them accountable to following up on their promise. Celebrate with your collaborators and use the success to recruit others to get involved.

If you get a negative or vague response, you can leverage the letter to get media attention for your issue. Send the letter and the target's response to your local newspaper or news channel, take out an ad in a local newspaper to display the letter, hold a press conference, or share on social media. Keep at it and raise the cost of saying no. For ways to leverage social media, see our social media fact sheet at [www.ucsusa.org/usingsocialmedia](http://www.ucsusa.org/usingsocialmedia).