**Get to Know Your Legislators**

To be effective in getting the actions we want from our state’s legislative branch, it is important that our legislators (representatives and senators) know who we are and what we do. In many cases SWCDs remain unknown, so we should step out and talk about what we do and how we can help our legislators in their work. When the state legislature is in session, our representatives and senators are usually very busy. This occurs in January through June in odd numbered years (long session) and February through March in even numbered years (short session). It is often best to get to know your legislators when they are not in session.

The first step is to identify your legislators. You can do this by going to the Oregon Secretary of State website, finding the district maps, and identifying the districts that extend into your SWCD boundaries. Then you can go to the Oregon Legislative Information System (OLIS) website and find the elected person in each district. You can also go to the OACD website and look under, members only, advocacy, and 2021 legislative session. Here you will find a list of senators and representatives for each SWCD. But be aware, redistricting will happen in the fall of 2021, and new people come into office so this list may become outdated.

Next, do a little homework to learn about the legislators. A good way to do this is to go to the OLIS website, find your legislators, and go to their own websites. In most cases you can find information such as biographies, assigned committees, press releases, and newsletters. This information will allow you to learn about their priorities and positions on various issues. When you are on the sites, be sure to sign up for newsletters and e-mail updates and look for information on upcoming town halls. Often, town halls are announced in the newsletters.

Now you are ready to meet your legislator and a great way to do this is to contact their office and set up a “meet and greet.” It may be most convenient for everyone to meet in in the legislator’s district between sessions, and sometimes it is nice to meet in their legislative office in Salem. It works well for the district manager and a board member to attend. The legislature may also want to have a staff person present. Once the meeting is set, prepare to share information about your District. It can be helpful to bring a copy of your annual report, key outreach publications from your district, and information about your signature projects. Also, ready to share your needs for changes in state laws and budgets. Be careful not to make this a one-sided presentation and be ready to abandon your presentation plans if the legislator wants the conversation to go a different direction. Make sure to set aside time to let them talk about their priorities and what they would like from you.

There are other ways to help build your relationships as follows:

* Attend town halls and be sure to have a question or two in case you get the opportunity to be heard
* Invite the legislator to attend special events hosted by your district
* Invite the legislator to be a speaker at your district’s annual meeting
* Attend legislative committee meetings that involve your legislator and topics that are important to you
* Send letters of support for legislation that your legislator is sponsoring

Getting to know your legislators can be fun, rewarding, and very important. If you need any help, OACD is ready to assist.