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## **About AIGA's design policy advocacy campaign**

As the oldest and largest association for communication designers, AIGA is engaged in an extended campaign to raise awareness of the value of effective information design in the public sector. The purpose of the campaign is to make information design an integral part of national legislative reform initiatives, including election reform, Social Security reform, Medicare reform, immigration reform, tax reform, the census and e-government. The goal is not only to raise awareness but to see that designers become part of policy discussions, by demonstrating that designers can make a meaningful contribution through their mastery of integrative design thinking. By improving the quality of federal, state and local governmental design as a means to improve democracy, AIGA's efforts will set an example for both the public and private sectors.

### **Objectives**

Specifically, AIGA hopes to accomplish the following with legislators and other influential parties:

- Develop the understanding that only clear, accessible and effective communication between the U.S. government and its diverse citizens will strengthen trust and enable our democracy to achieve its full potential for participation.
- Educate that clear communication is a design challenge and there is a profession that is equipped to respond to this challenge. The association representing that profession is AIGA, which will arrange expert witnesses to provide testimony and advice.
- Gain legislators' support for explicit consideration of an information design component in authorizing and appropriations language as well as in legislators' remarks on the floor.
- Win consideration for launching a federal design assembly and the development of guidelines for federal information design.
- Pursue specific goals and objectives developed each congressional session by AIGA representatives.

### **Activities**

AIGA representatives engage in direct lobbying efforts. These consist largely of meetings arranged by AIGA's executive director or a Washington representative, potentially including board members, prominent national and local designers or clients for whom design has made an impact. Most visits are with key committee staff, Congressional leadership or potential alliance partners, such as other design organizations and interest groups, like AFL-CIO and AARP. In these visits, we try to acquaint key people with the concepts of our campaign and to look for potentially productive legislative opportunities.

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## Materials in this kit

Individual designers and local AIGA chapters can make a difference! The materials in this kit are inspired by AIGA's federal advocacy work, yet they are intended to be a model for what chapters and members can do locally at the municipal, county and state levels. For instance, local advocates can help the national campaign by developing the case for effective design in their communities, communicating with legislators, government officials and media in their area and corresponding with their Members of Congress. Designers can also develop comparable strategies for state and local issues. Use and adapt the following steps and resources:

1. **Create a local position statement and advocacy packet** adapted from AIGA's national materials, including examples of local effective information design and local needs, as well as the size and impact of the local design community using substantial metrics (such as total dollars of printing purchased or total gross billings of all local design firms). Start with the following:  
[AIGA's position on government communication design](#)  
[Sample talking points](#)  
[AIGA facts](#)
2. **Learn about your members of Congress.** Identify your state senators and local representative(s) and visit their websites to learn about their particular interests, committees and any recent legislations in which they have been closely involved. The more you know about your Congress members, the more effective you can be in developing an effective angle for presenting information. (Use a similar approach to learn about local legislators when pursuing local issues.)  
[Congressional and other government links](#)
3. **Identify local interest groups, influential citizens and media.** Local community groups favoring elderly rights (AARP), immigration reform, language accessibility, electoral reform (League of Women Voters) and other similar groups may be willing to endorse your efforts. And look for people who could potentially influence your Congress members by examining the interests of their key aides or a major donor. If any of them feel strongly about design, you might have a critical ally and messenger for your case. Familiarize yourself with the vehicles of public relations; the right press coverage will help you get results.  
[A media primer for advocacy work](#)
4. **Write a letter to your members of Congress.** This letter could take the form of: a general introduction to the design profession and meeting request; an issue letter, advocating your position on a current topic and requesting a meeting; or an invitation to speak at an event. Send it to them and be sure to follow up. Adapt from these samples:  
[Sample general letter](#)  
[Sample issue letter](#)  
[Sample invitation to speak at an event](#)

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For advocacy around a specific issue:

- **Send copies of your letter to your local papers' opinion pages (or find an influential local citizen to send it).** This is an important act, regardless of whether you are able to arrange an appointment with your member of Congress.
  - **Provide a template for other citizens in the community to write letters.** Start a letter-writing campaign by asking friends and loved ones, such as your grandmother and her citizen center, or members of your local AIGA chapter board (they can write letters at the next board meeting) to help. Each letter should be different, but the message should be clear and consistent.
  - **Ask interest group boards in your community to write their own letter** to congressional delegations.
  - If you have been successful in working on issues at the local government level, **get local officials to write letters to your senators and representatives.**
5. If possible, **attend a fund-raiser for a member of Congress** and find like-minded people in the audience to mount a campaign.
  6. **Request a meeting** with your local senator or representative, or with his/her staff, to discuss the legislator's position on design-related issues.  
Meeting with your legislator
  7. **Say thank you—in a meaningful, memorable way.** Create a framed, visual piece that shows a local design issue solved. Make sure the AIGA logo is on the image. Try to get this placed prominently in your Congress member's office.  
Saying "thank you" to your legislator

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## **AIGA's position on government information design**

Government in a participatory democracy has a responsibility to remove the barriers to participation in civic life. This includes making the “tools of participation” (ballots, surveys, forms, web sites and informational publications) accessible and easy for every citizen to use.

When citizens get confused while filling out tax forms, the problem is not the intelligence of the citizen, it's the design of the form. When a family fails to return a government questionnaire because it looks too complicated or an election ballot is tossed out because it is filled out incorrectly, the problem lies with the materials, not the citizens.

“Every citizen” should mean just that — everyone who is a citizen, regardless of age, physical challenge or education, should have an equal opportunity and ability to participate in democracy. Design is the key to ensuring this.

### **Information design**

Information design is the art and science of making raw information and instructions easy to read, understand and use. It is a field composed of communication designers, usability experts and language simplification specialists. Information design, undertaken by experienced professionals, helps to address the different needs of different audiences, whether they be elderly, young, disabled or challenged by English as a second language.

In the private sector, the information and service economies use information design to insure that information products (web sites, manuals, product instructions and customer services) are effective and easy-to-use. In the competitive new economy, information design makes the difference between product acceptance and failure.

Information design is just as important in the public sector, yet the practice and application of design lags significantly behind. At the same time, the general public (with exposure to sophisticated communications products) has increased expectations for the government to perform at the same level as the private sector.

### **Design in a participatory democracy**

Government can benefit from private sector advances in information design. Information gathering tools, such as ballots, surveys, and forms need to be consistent, clear and easy to use. Information dissemination tools, such as public service instructions and government web sites must encourage use through clarity and usability. They may be designed at the district, local, state or national level and with a clear appreciation for the performance standards that need to be met by the designed forms, screens or reports.

Participatory democracy relies on the free and equal exchange of information and ideas. Government communications that are difficult to use give preference to those with time, resources and education. The government has an opportunity to improve compliance through ease-of-use and to improve goodwill by demonstrating that taxpayers' money is being well spent.

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## **The public information product development process**

Though the design of information products, such as a universal voting machine and ballot, might seem simple at first, this is misleading. There are a number of critical information product design processes and experts that are important to the success of such undertakings. No major design initiatives would be complete without the following user-centered design activities.

### *Secondary research*

Investigate and learn from similar projects undertaken in the private sector, local government or other countries. In many cases, information problems have already been solved and tested. A design strategist and researcher can help create design plans that harvest the best ideas around the world and avoid duplication.

### *User experience research and usability testing*

Study and explore how the public interacts with tools of participation. Experienced ethnographers and usability professionals can employ observation techniques and careful user testing at intervals throughout the design process to avoid mistakes and provide confidence that new products will be accepted and easy-to-use by the broadest public.

### *Language simplification*

Work with writing professionals to shorten text and to craft language that the majority of citizens would understand, simple language. Simple language is also the best basis for translation, where alternate languages are required.

### *Accessibility*

Work with accessibility experts to ensure that citizens with various abilities are able to communicate with government systems. This will satisfy legal requirements, but it is also shown that efficient design for alternate methods of access enhances the usability of products for the diverse majority.

### *Identity development*

Make sure that all communications have the appropriate look and feel of authority and security of the government. Use professional designers to develop brands or signatures for any communication program.

### *Information design*

Work with graphic designers to develop appropriate, timeless and useable styles and formats for all communications. This includes layout, use of color, typefaces, illustration and formatting.

### *Interaction design*

Work with interaction designers to ensure that two-way communications between citizens and machines are understandable, efficient and transparent.

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### *Industrial design*

Work with industrial designers to develop the form and function of any hardware associated with an information product. This includes materials development, product design, ADA issues and finishes.

### *Measurement and assessment*

No new information product is complete until it is evaluated under real conditions for at least one year. Evaluation would explore rates of compliance, security issues, and unexpected problems or benefits. Results should feed future product enhancements.

### **Where to find help**

AIGA, the professional association for design, is the largest and oldest professional association of designers in the country. It is a nonprofit, nonpartisan association that represents communication designers and designers working in print, motion, new media and interactive media. AIGA Design for Democracy works with public sector agencies and offices on complex communication and service design issues and can help agencies partner directly with designers who are qualified to meet their challenges. Visit [www.designfordemocracy.org](http://www.designfordemocracy.org) to learn more.

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## Sample talking points

### Opening

We are designers from the local chapter of AIGA, the professional association for design. AIGA is the largest and oldest professional association of communication designers in the country. The fast growing presence of the design profession ensures a broad range of professionals with perspective on design problems and solutions that span most of the disciplines needed in a challenge like **[your issue here]**.

AIGA counts within its ranks of over 22,000: researchers, type and book designers, corporate identity designers, information designers, new media designers, experience designers and web designers. Since information design has become a more comprehensive practice, we now also represent social scientists, illustrators, and programmers.

With the importance of differentiation and strategy to business, designers are no longer viewed as those who simply make things pretty, but as thinkers critical to early development. This ability to effectively communicate ideas and information, based on client objectives, brings clarity to the complex. These skills can and should be harnessed in challenging governmental processes.

### Background

*The need for inclusive communication between government and the governed*

The 2000 Census reminds us of the variety of constituencies with whom federal programs must be able to communicate effectively. Elderly, immigrant, ESL, functionally illiterate, physically challenged and young (Gen Y) populations each have special needs. Meeting our nation's ideal of a participatory democracy requires that government be able to speak and listen to these groups clearly. Information designers carefully consider audience needs and wants, and can work with the government to find the simplest, most effective solutions.

*Trust is based on communication*

The trust necessary for successful democracy is based on communication. Effective information design can improve the quality of these communications and in doing so increase the level of trust they engender.

*Information design is the discipline of making the complex clear*

Information design is the effective transfer of information based on experience and skills in graphic design, usability analysis and language simplification. By serving as the intermediaries between information and understanding, information designers can carefully consider the full implications of communications. Our country has led the world in the discipline of information design, creating a global advantage in many products and services as a result of the differentiating attributes contributed by design, particularly information design. The nutrition label is an example of how good design can clarify a message and how the federal government can lead the way

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*Effective information design involves designing a citizen's experience with the government.*

A citizen's experience with the government can be designed so that it is clear, easy and effective in ways that go beyond the design of forms, announcements, reports or websites. For instance, in election reform, the issue to be addressed by a designer is not just the functioning of a machine or the look of a ballot. It is also the way a citizen learns of voting, is informed of the choices, is reassured that his or her choice has been recorded accurately, and the confidence with which the citizen leaves the balloting place. These are all part of the citizen experience, which need to be carefully designed for maximum effectiveness.

### **Why it is important to us**

This is an important issue to us, as designers in your district, for a number of reasons.

- We as designers believe we have the skills to make an important contribution to government and commerce.
- The fundamental proposition of government is to serve its citizens effectively. As local designers, we believe that the federal government can set the standards for clear, straight-forward communication and in doing so can help us make the case locally among public and private interests.
- Our chapter has XX local designers in it, but we represent the interests of at least XX (ten times the membership) among traditional graphic designers and, if we add those who are working locally in digital design disciplines, we represent XX (30 times the membership) local professionals.
- We create the visual identity of the region and define the competitive advantage for local businesses, particularly small businesses, which represent the greatest employment growth in the economy.
- We create jobs, through our own services and through specifying local businesses to produce our work. On average, we are responsible for printing, paper and other purchases of XX each year (multiply the national average of \$1.85 million per year times the number of designers). Almost all of these purchases occur through the local economy.
- We are nurturing economic activity at the cusp of media, technology and design, which is a critical nexus for the future of every local economy, even if it is always on a small scale.
- Good design protects market share in a slowing economy.
- We create a professional base for the small but talented group of creative, young students whom may want to stay in the region.

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### **The need**

The nation needs the federal government to demonstrate the value of good design, for it will strengthen the relationship between government and citizens and it will brand the US with an enlightened approach to a democracy's relationship to citizens.

### **“The ask”**

In the visits with Congressional delegations, you need to be very clear about what you are asking for. You will vary “the ask” in some cases, depending upon the jurisdiction of the member of Congress, however the following are examples of AIGA supported “asks.”

- Request explicit language in e-government initiatives, Social Security reform, Medicare reform, Census review, immigration reform and tax reform that mandates a serious effort to simplify the forms to make citizen involvement easier and more effective. This does not necessarily have to result in any reduction in the amount of information collected. An information design team, working with a statistical or analytic team, should undertake this effort.
- Request that AIGA, the largest and oldest nonpartisan professional association of communication designers in the country, be asked to recommend witnesses or experts for hearings and task forces on major government initiatives.
- Encourage Congressional committees to engage the services of professional information designers to assist in making information clear to the American public on issues such as the federal budget or complex initiatives such as defense reprogramming.

### **Contact**

**[Add information on your local contact]**

At the national level, coordination will occur through:

Richard Grefé, AIGA executive director

212 710 3100

grefe [at] aiga [dot] org

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## **AIGA facts**

### **Contact information**

164 Fifth Avenue  
New York NY 10010  
Tel 212 807 1990  
www.aiga.org

### **Advocacy staff**

Richard Grefé, AIGA executive director  
212 710 3100  
grefe [at] aiga [dot] org

### **About AIGA**

AIGA, the professional association for design, is the premier place for design—to discover it, discuss it, understand it, appreciate it, be inspired by it.

AIGA's mission is to advance designing as a professional craft, strategic tool and vital cultural force. AIGA stimulates thinking about design through journals, conferences, competitions and exhibitions; demonstrates the value of design to business, the public and government officials; and empowers the success of designers at each stage of their careers by providing invaluable educational and social resources.

Founded in 1914, AIGA remains the oldest and largest professional membership organization for design. AIGA now represents more than 22,000 design professionals, educators and students through national activities and local programs developed by 64 chapters and 240 student groups. AIGA is a nonprofit, 501(c)(3) educational institution.

### **Quick facts**

- Founded: 1914
- Number of members [professional, associate, educator, student]: more than 22,000
- Number of chapters: 64
- Number of campuses: 240
- Rank among communication design associations worldwide: 1
- Functions: competitions, exhibitions, conferences, publications, advocacy

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## **Congressional and other government links**

[CapWeb](#)—information on the legislative, executive and judicial branches of government, including Congressional email addresses

[U.S. House of Representatives](#)—information on House members, committees, organizational information, schedules and more

[U.S. Senate](#)—information on Senate members, committees, organizational information, schedules and more

[The White House](#)—information about the federal government, news releases and federal statistics

[Thomas](#)—one-stop Congressional information including text of the Congressional record and pending legislation

[Library of Congress](#)—website for the world’s largest library, with resources available and useful to the Congress and the American people

[American Society of Association Executives: Advocacy Center](#)—association issues, Congressional directory, database of all state legislatures and daily Congressional schedule

[Roll Call](#)—a Capitol Hill newspaper

[Congressional Quarterly](#)—the latest news of what’s going on in Congress, plus links to their selection of best political sites

[C-Span](#)—nonprofit network providing public access to the political process; site offers schedule of coverage, glossary of terms, plus interactive Q&A section

[Legislative Action Center \(VOXCap.com\)](#)—site providing email links to Congress, guides to federal and state elected officials and summaries of recent votes and bills

[National Endowment for the Arts \(NEA\)](#)—a public agency dedicated to supporting excellence in the arts, both new and established

[National Endowment for the Humanities \(NEH\)](#)—an independent grant-making agency of the U.S. government dedicated to supporting research, education, preservation and public programs in the humanities

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## **A media primer for advocacy work**

Here are some general tips for working with your local media, along with some suggestions for new ways of thinking strategically about press coverage to help you get results.

### **The press release**

Press releases are the standard vehicle for expressing the who, what, where, when and why of your story. We suggest you include important information about who in your community will be participating in this exciting national event, including those coming to Washington and those mobilizing from home. Will members of your board be available for interviews about information design and its integral role in your community? Will your organization be engaging in a specific call to action? Now is the time to let the media know.

The best thing to do with your release is to keep it simple. If your local newspaper is small, there is a good chance it may be printed word for word. More often, however, it is used as a starting point for a broader story. Below are some suggestions for making yours a keeper:

- Keep it short, punchy and to the point. Limit it to one page, front and back, double-spaced (for readability).
- Engage your reader with a strong headline and catchy lead paragraph. Use action verbs.
- Think “inverted pyramid:” most important details near the top, less important in the paragraphs to follow.
- Assume your reader knows little, if anything at all, about your organization and cause. Be thorough.
- Give the editor a timeframe. By writing “For Immediate Release” on top, you are saying the information is relevant now.
- Include a boilerplate at the end to identify your AIGA chapter, just a brief sentence or two explaining who you are and what you do.
- Be professional: avoid flashy letterhead, fancy paper, way-oversized headlines and flippant jargon . . . and never send something handwritten.
- Proofread!

### **Editorials**

An important part of AIGA’s efforts to win support for design in your community will be gathering editorial support from the local media. Newspapers are under no legal obligation to take a position on any particular issue or to present contrasting viewpoints. You must take the initiative to develop good working relationships with those responsible for developing editorial positions including editors, publishers, managing editors and beat reporters.

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The publisher or managing editor decides the issue position that a small newspaper takes. A group from the editorial staff decides editorial positions in larger newspapers. If you have never coordinated an editorial board meeting, call the managing editor or editorial page editor and describe your organization. During your call indicate that you would like to arrange an editorial board meeting to discuss why it is important for the newspaper to take a position on the issue of government information design. If the newspaper does not have a formal editorial board, suggest an informal meeting with the publisher or editor over coffee or lunch. Ideally, you should limit the number of people you bring to an editorial board meeting to two or three. Be prepared to stress from a local perspective why public funding for the arts is important and deserves their support using facts, anecdotes, and other details.

If the paper runs a favorable editorial, make copies and distribute to your local elected and appointed officials, Congress people and others who may have a vested interest in design and your chapter. If the newspaper decides not to take a position or to oppose your position, ask the newspaper to print an op-ed piece, stating your position.

### **Op-eds**

The advantage of doing your own commentary is that you can make your points exactly as you want to. The disadvantage is that you may spend a lot of time creating a piece that may not make it into print. Before you sit down to create an op-ed, be sure you have a market for it. Feel free to call the paper and present your idea briefly to the editorial page editor, who should give you a good sense of whether it is something the paper is interested in. They may even suggest a tangential direction for you to pursue, instead. Op-eds should raise general awareness of an issue while educating policy-makers and positioning your chapter as a resource for the media and the public.

When writing an op-ed, it is important to underscore your broader message with examples and statistics of local significance. Some general guidelines and tips:

- Be clear and concise. Your op-ed should only be about 500-800 words, including a suggested headline and byline, as well as a very short (one sentence) biographical statement about the author.
- Remember the reader. Keep your statements short and punchy. Don't get carried away with jargon or assume your reader knows as much as you do about the subject.
- Be creative! Find a way to engage your reader start to finish.
- Know your timeline. Newspapers take up to two weeks sometimes to publish an op-ed. Be patient, but keep in touch to find out the status of the piece once you have submitted it.

### **Letters to the Editor**

Letters to the Editor are an excellent and personal way to communicate about design issues important to the community. Letters are usually in response to a local issue of importance or

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a recent article or editorial. Publications are open to critical letters, as long as they are composed in a constructive manner and raise valid issues. Include in the letter your name, address and phone number. Never send an anonymous letter, as the majority of newspapers refuse to publish letters without signatures. Make sure that the letter is, at maximum, 250 words in length and is proofed carefully before it is sent.

### **Radio and television**

Much of what has been said about approaching the print media applies equally to radio and television, except that you need to give even emphasis to the visual or audio possibilities of your story. Also, remember that on television or radio, there is much less time to get into the details of a story; the average piece is between 30 and 90 seconds.

Get to know the appropriate correspondents, program directors and producers on your nearest public radio and public television stations, since these are often the people most inclined to publicize a nonprofit cause in a sympathetic way. Listen to, and watch carefully, what they produce. Then consider how you can mesh your interests with theirs. A radio talk show is one of the easiest and most effective ways to get your word out. The electronic equivalent to the letter to the editor page, its format has the benefit of dialogue during which you can develop your case more fully. And local radio stations reach listeners at home, at work and in transit.

Television talk shows are ideal for exploring issues and building awareness of your organization. However because you do not have control of the show, you must be selective about the show you appear on and your spokesperson must be prepared. News-oriented talk shows, ranging from broadcast of local roundtable discussions to network programs, are most receptive to addressing issues, such as the design. Although the audience is more limited, local television affords easier access and can be invaluable in providing exposure for your issue. Most television and cable stations publish a list of producers and will provide your agency with a copy. You should contact the producer, the host, and the researcher of the program you are interested in; send a letter, along with a press release or press kit, and follow up with a phone call.

When working with local television, here are some tips:

- Organize a list of experts from within your organization or the field, and offer a source list to the assignment editor. (You may want to have a list like this on hand, anyway.)
- Work with specialty reporters, those who consistently cover arts-related or community development stories, as they can help you “sell” the story.
- Send weekend stories to weekend assignment editors on Friday (television stations operate using different “crews,” so if you pitch your weekend story to someone on a weekday, they won’t be the one to see it through).

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- Do not send full press kits to assignment editors. There is no room for excess paper in their annual day files where they keep media memos.
  - In your release, if a word or name is tricky to pronounce, insert in parentheses the pronunciation in phonetics after the word.
  - Provide background videotape whenever possible, particularly to smaller stations. Whether they use it or not, it may influence the way the station shoots its own story. (Be sure to include only a brief clip, however. And don't expect the tape back!)

### **Being a spokesperson**

Common guidelines for a spokesperson apply to print and broadcast media alike. Be sure that you, or the designated spokesperson for your agency, are comfortable talking with the press. Remember that the spokesperson is not seen as an individual, rather as a representative of an organization, an issue or a field. When talking about an issue, it is important that the spokesperson be prepared with talking points and specific facts and figures.

If you will be coming to Capitol Hill on September 26, you might want to coordinate with the Washington bureau of your local newspaper, letting them know that representatives from their hometown are going to be in town for the largest single design advocacy effort to date. The best thing to do would be to contact your local paper's assignment desk and ask for the number for the Washington bureau, then call directly. Some assignment editors prefer to pass the information on themselves, but don't let that discourage you from following up within a few days to inquire whether someone will be covering your story. Persistence is key to media coverage, and this is too good a story to be missed!

### **Share your success**

Let us know if you place articles or op-eds in your local papers. You can send your clips to AIGA manager of communications and marketing, Jennifer Bender, [jennifer\\_bender \[at\] aiga \[dot\] org](mailto:jennifer_bender@iga.org).

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**Sample general letter**

**[Note the address and format for a Representative or Senator]**

The Honorable [Full name]  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative **[Last name]**:

The Honorable **[Full name]**  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator **[Last name]**:

**[The following text is suggested and should be adapted to the writer's voice]**

As the representative of the design profession in **[your state]**, I would like to request some time to meet with you on one of your visits to the district along with other local designers. AIGA is the professional association for designers ranging from graphic designers to web designers. Most importantly, they have a common thread as information designers. We are eager to speak with you about ways in which the federal government can improve its information design in the forms that are the principal means of communication between the people and their government.

The elderly, young, immigrant and disabled populations all have thresholds to surmount in their relationship with government, particularly when that relationship is dominated by Social Security, Medicare, immigration, tax, election or Census forms. There is no reason not to be more effective in this communication (think of the nutrition label on foods!). We would like to meet with you to encourage information design criteria being included in reform legislation in each of these areas.

**[Your state]**, incidentally, has some of the finest information designers in the world and we would like to meet with you to help discuss the opportunities, not in terms of benefits to **[Your state]** designers, but in terms of benefits to the citizens of **[Your state]** and beyond. Incidentally, our membership includes about **[# of AIGA members in state]** designers in the state, although we represent about **[#of designers in state]**. Our members alone are responsible for spending **[\$XX (multiply the national average of \$1.85 million per year times the number of designers)]** in the paper and printing industries a year, much of it in **[Your state]**. We are no longer the romantic concept of designers in their rustic studio.

I hope it will be possible to meet with you for about 20 minutes on your next trip to the state. We would be pleased to meet you wherever it is convenient. Thank you.

Sincerely,  
**[your name]**  
AIGA, **[your chapter]**

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**Sample issue letter**

**[Note the address and format for a Representative or Senator]**

The Honorable **[Full name]**  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative **[Last name]**:

The Honorable **[Full name]**  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator **[Last name]**:

**[The following text is suggested and should be adapted to the writer's voice]**

As a constituent and a professional designer, I would like to inform you of an issue that can help us to realize the full potential of our democracy in ways that reach every one of your other constituents, with little cost, yet substantial effect.

While focus is often placed on information technologies and databases, the true challenge is helping citizens to access information in clearly understandable ways. Yet little attention is paid to using professional information design assistance to improve this interaction despite the main contact between government and citizens being in the form of information requests or reports. This is an extraordinary missed opportunity, since the US has an absolute global competitive advantage in the design of communication and information — including remarkable talent within your district **[or state]**.

**[Add example of government information design that could use improvement, based on your issue paper]**

I have enclosed an issue paper that my colleagues and I have written on **[issue above]**. We would like to make you aware of this issue and ask your support for the Design for Democracy initiative. Our interest is in raising the quality of public communication and design. We are also prepared to help local, state and federal officials in finding and working with qualified information designers. As specific legislative vehicles are introduced for e-government initiatives, election reform, tax reform, Social Security reform, Medicare reform and immigration reform, we will be seeking your advice on how we can achieve our objectives for introducing design criteria for federal communications.

We would like to meet with you when you are in the district in order to pursue these issues with you. Our idea sharing will most certainly benefit the citizens of our state.

Sincerely,  
**[your name]**  
AIGA, **[your chapter]**

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**Sample invitation to speak**

[Note the address and format for a Representative or Senator]

The Honorable [Full name]  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative [Last name]:

The Honorable [Full name]  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator [Last name]:

[The following text is suggested and should be adapted to the writer's voice]

I am writing to invite you to be a main stage speaker at the [Event name]. The dates are [Date of event] and the place is [Place of event].

["Event name"] is based broadly around issues of [Topics of event] as they relate to design. We are particularly interested in your perspective of the character of communication that is critical to civility in public life. What does it take to improve the quality of public discourse and to build trust? We are interested because we believe that communications design and information design, of the type that you are promoting through [What they are doing], are important to providing cohesiveness and trust in society.

Generally, we like our speakers to do three things: talk about their recent thinking, tell the audience a story they haven't heard before (or at least from a perspective they haven't heard before) and be as personal as possible in their presentation.

My personal hope is that you would find this an opportunity to reflect on issues that allow effective public discourse. I think it could be an important forum for positioning yourself in the profession's eye. It offers a chance for you to influence a broad audience of professionals who themselves lead the way in communicating the complex in simpler terms.

Sincerely,

[Signature of director/president in your company/organization]

[Name, Title]

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## Meeting with your legislator

Whether you plan to meet with your legislator in Washington, D.C. or schedule a visit with staff in the district office, keep in mind the following when preparing for your meeting:

### **Scheduling the meeting**

Each office schedules appointments differently, but usually the Washington or district scheduler arranges them. Your legislator's office in Washington may be reached by calling the Capitol Switchboard, 202 224 3121. Be prepared to tell the scheduler the date and time you would like to meet with your legislator and your general discussion topics.

### **Prior to the meeting**

Whether your meeting is in Washington, D.C. with your legislator or in your legislator's district office with staff, call the office the week before. During this call, confirm your appointment and speak with the legislative assistant who handles your issues to notify him/her of your upcoming meeting. Doing so may better prepare the legislator and district staff and creates a relationship with you and the legislative assistant.

If others are joining you, be sure to provide the scheduler with a list of the names and their affiliated organizations. You should also provide the scheduler with an agenda of topics discussed and the time allotted to them. Assume that the time allotted by the legislator's office is the actual amount of time. Don't assume that once the meeting begins, you can extend the meeting time.

Do not be surprised if you meet with legislative staff, even if you had an appointment directly with the legislator. Most likely, there is a legitimate reason for the legislator's absence. Remember that staff are important in the process as well; they are responsible for gauging constituents' views on issues and communicating them to the legislator. Ask the staff if they need any additional information or assistance from you

### **Tips for running an effective meeting**

- Be on time. An unwritten law of lobbying is that it's okay for the legislator or staff to be late, but unacceptable for the lobbyist to be late.
- Have clearly defined roles and ideas about the meeting's purpose. It is important to meet with the other members of your group prior to meeting with the legislator to discuss what you want to achieve and how you plan to do it. Choose one member to be the spokesperson and then give a specific role to each other individual attending the meeting.
- Make it clear to the legislator at the top of the meeting that you know how much time you have, so he or she can listen without worrying about time.
- Be sure to provide the legislator or staff with written materials to illustrate or amplify your points, but try not to overwhelm him/her with paper.

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- Be sure to listen and take notes. Try to explore what the legislator's or their staff's views are by asking questions and giving them a chance to respond. Discuss your legislator's voting record on the issue.
  - When the legislator asks questions, provide direct answers whenever possible. If you don't know the answer, say you'll get back to him/her.
  - Stay focused on your agenda. You will most likely have a short amount of time to meet with the legislator so it is critical to not lose focus on your objectives.
  - Wrap up. Make sure to leave time to summarize the meeting and identify points for action and follow up.

Within 24 hours it is good to provide the meeting participants with a thank you and a summary of the meeting, careful to focus on the relevant points. Make sure to follow up on any discussed future actions or meetings.

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## **Saying "thank you"**

A typical Member of the U.S. House of Representatives will receive more than 1,000 letters, postcards, phone calls, faxes and visits every month—almost all of them asking, demanding or castigating. A U.S. Senator, depending on the size of the state, may receive 50 times that many. Fewer than 20 of those 1,000 communications will be saying "thank you."

In that simple equation is a clear indication toward how you can be differentiated from the masses in the eyes of any elected official and how to develop an often-ignored, but very important, component in our strategy for advocacy.

Citizens and the press seem to have the notion that legislators constantly have to choose between good and evil. In fact, that rarely happens. Every member of Congress has good ideas and worthy issues. The real choices involve the decision on which to pay attention to, which to devote limited time, political capital and staff resources to, and which to stick your neck out for.

Saying "thank you" can be done very effectively with limited resources. Because that message is heard so rarely, the results can be enormous.

For organizations that don't have massive budgets for campaign contributions, publicity or armies of campaign volunteers, making the most of limited resources is vital to your success. So, you want to say "thank you" efficiently, while maximizing the effect of the message. Because designers can provide visually compelling ways of showing gratitude, you may be able to compensate for the lack of other resources. The trick is to get the most advantage out of what you already do.

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### **How and where to say “thanks”**

*Your “thank you” letter.*

This is the simplest effort, but it can be very powerful. If the issue were personally significant to you, tell them so and how. The thought currency among legislators is in concepts and anecdotes. If you can provide a genuine tale of how their action affected your life, it may stick in their minds, and may even come out later when they are trying to persuade others. If the official’s action took some special courage or effort, let them know you appreciate their dedication. As with any communication to an elected official, the letter does not have to be long, and should be limited to one subject only.

*Readdress your thank you letter to the “Letters to the Editor” of your local papers.*

Some people make a religion out of sending letters to the editor. Generally, they’re not worth the time it takes to write them. The people who read them tend to already have their own, often rigid, opinions; you are catching almost no one who is persuadable. However, if you already have a letter written, you might as well send it to the paper. Even if no one else reads it, if it gets printed, the elected official *will* see it and appreciate your effort. Remember, you can make sure the elected official sees it by sending a clipping of it straight from the paper to the legislator’s office.

*Say “thank you” personally in a public forum.*

This can be a general event, an event related to your issue area, or even an event totally unrelated to your issue.

General events are the “Town Hall” meetings that most legislators schedule several times each year in their districts. Related events might include a meeting of some groups with an arts-related focus (e.g., an education organization) at which the legislator will appear. An unrelated event could be anything—environmental groups, nurses association, retired military officers, chamber of commerce, anything. You just have to have a member of that group, or somebody whose presence would not be out of place, who will speak for your interest, like a designer’s parent.

*Include the official or their staff in one of your organization’s regular activities.*

The objective here is to acquaint the official (and keep the official acquainted) with the members of AIGA and the work we are doing, as well as to have our members and/or audience meet the legislator.

This doesn’t have to be “Congressman Rand’s Night of Design.” In fact, usually it shouldn’t be either a big event or focused primarily on the elected official. [See the note below about rare exceptions for big events.] Many of your members are not going to be all that enthusiastic about putting together an event where the primary objective is showcasing a politician. There’s also a chance the official will be trapped in Washington and unable to attend. Then, you wind up with an event with no purpose. This should be an event you would

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normally have; including the elected official is just the extra bit. However, still make a big fuss over their attendance and be sure to introduce them around.

*Include the official or their staff in one of your organization's regular activities AND publicize their attendance in your own newsletter after the event.*

This is self-evident. If your newsletter can carry photographs, be sure to arrange to have a camera and photographer at the event that can take publication-quality pictures. Be sure to send a copy of the photograph and newsletter to the Congressman afterwards with a personal note.

*Include the official or their staff in one of your organization's activities AND publicize their involvement in the media.*

Before the event you need to have a press list with all media outlets in the legislator's district and even beyond. Try getting such a list from the legislator's press secretary; usually they are only too happy to help someone who wants to make their boss a hero. If that doesn't work, solicit lists from other elected officials in the same political party whose districts overlap. You can also try the press offices of the local government (e.g., the Mayor's office) or local government agencies or groups (e.g., Chambers of Commerce). Refer to the "Media Primer" in this Kit for more details about handling media events.

Include the legislator in your activity in some way that will make compelling photographs and appeal to the editor of a newspaper (or TV news editor, if you're successful in getting a camera crew out). For example, if it is a concert, let the official conduct a two-minute piece, like throwing out the first ceremonial ball in the World Series (or let them think that's what they're doing). Or let the official be one of the judges of students' work. You want a photograph that will be active and attractive enough to move the story that goes with it to (or toward) the front page. Plan this all out in advance, but be ready to take advantage of opportunities that present themselves.

As far as the actual promoting of your agenda when you have the official at your event, err on the side of the lighter touch. Your purpose is to say your thank you and make them look like a hero in front of the largest possible audience. You want to get the legislator invested in your program and give them the incentive to ask how they can help you do more. Reserve these more serious conversations for one-on-one meetings or private meetings with your board of directors and the Congressman.

You definitely do not want to lean on them, much less maul them at your own public event, or let anybody else do so. It's simply bad hospitality on your part and you can make a permanent enemy that way. If it happens in front of the press, you've really stepped in it.

Immediately after the event, carpet-bomb the local newspapers in the legislator's district and beyond with your press releases, accompanied by photographs. In smaller markets, most of the copy that appears in a newspaper will be unedited (or little-edited) paste-ups from

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wire services *and* whatever press releases appear unsolicited in their mailbox. They'll take everything you give them.

If a legislator's staff member shows up as a surrogate, do not be disappointed. Treat the staffer just the same as you would the Member with your press release, accompanying photos—the whole business—but always identifying the staffer as from the office of the congressman and keep repeating the Congressman's name. The official will see that you are savvy enough to do that and will have the incentive to make an extra effort to be the one who shows up the next time you offer an invitation.

Don't get discouraged if this doesn't work out flawlessly the first time you try it. This is a process that you can improve on with practice and you will almost certainly come up with a few local modifications that nobody else ever thought of. It can't hurt to get help and advice from local news people and communications staff at state and local art agencies. Over time, all of the local elected officials will start fishing for invitations to your events.

### **When to say thank you**

Generally this is a retrospective operation. Track when there has been an important event (e.g., a vote in the legislature, the issuance of a grant, an activity supported by the grant). The closer to the event (or at the event) you can get, the better. And, if you are pursuing press coverage, choose the event with the most potential for good visuals. If it works out that you can do something when it can have an increased legislative effect because of timing, do it.

### **A few reminders**

*Politicians are 95 percent deaf to those who don't see their name on the ballot.*

The communication that gets the most attention from any elected official is from his or her own constituents. Getting one thank you letter generated from a legislator's district is worth 20 from other citizens. If you cover many districts and you send a letter expressing gratitude to a legislator, make sure you send copies of your letter to your members who are that official's constituent *and* make sure you let that official know you have done that. Even if their constituents don't write to the legislator, he/she will know that the message has gotten to them.

*Poster for the office wall.*

If you can create a poster that is engaging, relates to the legislator's interests and also reflects something local, there is a good chance you can get it hung in the office. The poster should have the AIGA logo on it and our tag line. In this way, we will be promoting our presence daily with the legislator and his staff and it will be even easier for them to know who you are next time you visit.