

Effective Constituent Communication with the Washington State

Legislature

Thesis

submitted in partial fulfillment of degree in Master of Public Administration

Leslie Erinn Wolff

The Evergreen State College, Olympia, WA

2010

© 2010 by Leslie Wolff. All rights reserved.

Many thanks to my readers: Amy Gould, Ph.D., Cheryl Simrell King, Ph.D., and
Representative Brendan Williams.

Table of Contents

Research Question	1
Abstract	2
Introduction	3
Literature Review	6
Methodology and Methods	27
Results	31
Chart 1.0	32
Chart 1.1	33
Chart 1.2	34
Table 1.0	36
Table 1.1	37
Table 1.2	39
Table 1.3	40
Findings	49
Chart 2.0	52
Discussion and Areas for Future Research	53
Conclusion	56
Bibliography	59
Appendix A- Research	62
Appendix B- Survey Tools	64
Cover Letter and Consent Form for Online Research	64
Survey Tool	65
Interview Tools	70
Appendix C- Response Table Analysis	74
Response Table 1.0	74
Response Table 1.1	75
Response Table 1.2	78
Response Table 1.3	80
Response Table 1.4	82
Response Table 1.5	83
Response Table 1.6	85

Research Question

What method of communication is most effective for Washington State constituents when communicating with their state legislators either directly or through legislative staff?

Abstract

When contacting your legislators, it may be difficult to determine which methods of communication will work best for you. Therefore, the research question for this thesis was: what method of communication is most effective for Washington State constituents when communicating with their state legislators either directly or through legislative staff? Although the results of my research cannot be generalized to all legislators or their staffers, the first major finding based upon their responses was: personal contact and well thought out messages from constituents are key elements of effective communication. The second major finding was: constituents in the state of Washington communicate most effectively with legislators and staffers when they are clear, concise, and non-threatening. The key to effective communication from constituents is to clearly state an issue and be capable of explaining proposed outcomes or concerns. While in person visits were given the highest rating among legislators and staff as an effective means of communication, clear, concise and well thought out communication is desirable regardless of the method of communication utilized. The third major finding was: the most effective method of communication is to take time out of your day and go to visit your legislator. If you are a stakeholder and would like to effectively communicate your concerns and ideas to your legislator, an in person visit is considered to be most effective, closely followed by testimony at a hearing. Face to face contact allows your legislator to get to know you as a person and also provides them the opportunity to ask clarifying questions as needed. One survey respondent suggests going to your meeting prepared with speaking points, or better yet, a one-page paper outlining your arguments/ideas. Legislators deal with a high volume of communications. The more clear, concise, and understandable your communication is, the better your elected officials can represent you.

Introduction

As a voting constituent in the state of Washington, I often wonder whether or not I am contacting my elected officials in the most effective way possible. It is important for constituents to be able to effectively express their ideas to their representatives in order to ensure that they are well represented. For a representative democracy to function properly, it is imperative that constituents understand how to effectively communicate with their representatives. Therefore, for my thesis topic, I determined what methods of communication are preferred by participating Washington state legislators from their constituents. The problem addressed is: Washington voters need supporting information as to whether or not their communication methods are deemed effective by their legislators. The research question is: what method of communication is most effective for Washington State constituents when communicating with their state legislators either directly or through legislative staff? This research will benefit my intended audience, other Washington voters, by establishing foundational research on which methods of communication are preferred by the self-selected respondents to my survey. The study is not generalizable to all legislators or even all Washington state legislators. Rather, the findings represent only those Washington state legislators and staff who responded to the survey or took part in the interviews. The research may serve as a model for other investigative endeavors or as a preliminary tool of supporting information for individual voters. Although the study can make no conclusions beyond its respondents, I will make

this research available by working with The Evergreen State College's student union voter registration drive and the League of Women Voters to post this information online or otherwise note in brochures.

In order to best present my research to my intended audience, especially given the topic is effective communication, I decided to write this thesis in a personal style using my perspective as a Washington stakeholder to frame my discussion. My research taught me that clearly thought-out, personal contact is most effective when contacting legislators. I assume this less formal method of communication is also effective when submitting my research to the general public of Washington. This makes the data and analysis more accessible to Washington constituents. As this research is in the form of a case study, it is neither generalized nor generalizable. To maintain perspective, I focused my research exclusively on the Washington State Legislature. I conducted a survey of Washington State Legislators, asking about their concepts of effective communication and perspectives on constituent communication methods. This online survey was sent to the email addresses of every Washington State Senator and Representative. Responses came from Senators, Representatives and their staff members. There were 46 total respondents to the survey. Of those 46 respondents, 16 self-identified as legislators and 19 self-identified as staffers. 11 survey participants chose not to respond to the demographics question. There are 147 legislative positions in Washington and an unknown number of staffers. This means the survey had a response rate of at least 11% for the legislators and an unknown response rate for staffers. Survey respondents were asked, within the

survey, if they would be willing to participate in a brief interview after the close of the survey in order to help me gather more information about effective legislative communication; I was able to interview three respondents.

In this thesis, first, an overview of the literature is provided which led to my thesis research question. The books, articles, and websites referenced were either directly influential on my thesis, guided my methodology, or provided some insight into the nature of effective communication. A complete list of materials used in this thesis can be found at the back of the work in the bibliography.

The next section of this thesis demonstrates the methodology used to answer my research question. This is followed by a section on the results derived. I then discuss my findings and how they answer the question of which method of communication is most effective for Washington State constituents when communicating with their state legislators either directly or through legislative staff. Finally, I draw conclusions, analyze my research methodology and suggest next steps for future research in this field.

I conducted this research in order to solve the problem I experienced, as a voting Washingtonian, of never knowing if the method I was using to contact my representatives was the most effect method. This is important because if one is contacting one's representatives in an unfavorable manner then one's message runs the risk of being lost because of the method of communication. Washington voters can be greatly helped by learning which methods of communication are the most effective according to their legislators. If effective methods of

communication with Washington legislators are not determined, many constituents will attempt to contact their legislators in ways that are not only ineffective, but detrimental to their message. After some preliminary research, I discovered that this subject has not been researched in the state of Washington. This research provides Washington voters with a foundational case study to assist them when thinking about the most effective way to approach their representatives.

Literature Review

Overview

This literature review covers key aspects of the body of knowledge currently available to researchers interested in investigating legislative communications. It is not an exhaustive review. It begins by providing a brief history of legislative communications in order to provide a foundation. From there the review moves on to discuss legislative communication in the age of the internet. Discussions focus on the work conducted in the state of Washington and the need for a study on effective constituent communications. Finally, there is a review of three studies of state legislatures that provided models for my research.

The purpose of this literature review is to look over the body of knowledge relating to my thesis topic, effective constituent to legislator communications. Methodologies outlined in Rubin, Rubin and Piele's book on research strategies proved very useful (Rubin, Rubin and Piele, 2005). The rapid

rise of the internet and mobile communications has led to unprecedented change in this field. According to an article by Alan J. Rosenblatt, the “average number of daily emails received by US Senators and Representatives (was) 880 and 538” respectively, in 2001. For one representative on whom he did a case study, this figure was up 52% from 1999 (Rosenblatt, 2002). It is my assumption that legislative communications will become more heavily reliant on constituent emails in the near future, if for no other reason than the fact that “the state legislative budget does not include a line item for members’ technology needs beyond Microsoft Office and Outlook” (Barko, 10).

Literature Review

One work that came up multiple times in information searches that I conducted both at the libraries and online was a book titled written in 1986 by Stephen E. Frantzich. 1986 was a point in time slightly before electronic mail (now known as email) and computer usage became widespread amongst the populace. As seen in Frantzich’s work,

one congressman predicted: Soon a person will be sitting home watching 60 Minutes and he’ll see Mike Wallace do an expose on high taxes and he’ll say, ‘Damn it, I want to balance the budget,’ so he’ll flip a switch on the back of his television and plug in a phone line and away you go with a message... (Frantzich, 1986, p.133).

Emails were a reality for some “computer types” (Frantzich, 1986, p.133), but not for the general public. Communications from constituents to their legislators was generally done through the United State Postal Service and more rarely in person.

Since the United States' declaration of independent nationhood letters were historically the primary means of constituents' communications. As stated by Frantzich, the founding politicians of the United States of America did not necessarily "realize that their commitment to an inexpensive public mail system and the granting of free mailing rights to elected officials would lead the politicians of the 1980s to view constituent communications as a primary part of their job" (Frantzich, 1986, p. 1). Mail was not always as popular as it would become. Former Congressman Martin Dies, in fact, tells a story about working as clerk under his father, who was a congressman as well. He claims that between 1909 and 1919 his father was receiving approximately 15 letters per week. By 1980, Congressman Dies and his colleagues in the House received nearly forty times the amount of mail his father had at an average of 600 letters a week. Members of the Senate received twice that of House members (Frantzich, 1986).

The volume of Congressional mail has been going up. Frantzich claims this growth is because of "ad hoc constituency mobilization" as investigated by Keller in 1982 (Frantzich, 1986 p11). Events such as Watergate, the death of John Lennon, and other cultural moments, have greatly increased letters to members of Congress as well. Now information is moving far more rapidly than it did in the 1980s. The average member of Congress can face upwards of 2,500 emails alone in a given week. With the onslaught of messages sent to political figures each and every day, how can a constituent determine the best way to ensure that his/her message is one that gets heard?

In 1986 Frantzich hypothesized that there were a few simple rules for constituents to follow if they wanted their message to be taken seriously: targeting, format, timing, personalization, knowledge and specificity. The first of these, targeting, means that constituents should target their own representatives. Many letters from those outside a politician's jurisdiction end up being sent back to the letter writer without so much as a comment. Frantzich also advocates writing to members with "weak electoral margins" as they "tend to develop responsive communication patterns that they maintain over time" (Frantzich, 1986, p. 138). By "format," Frantzich explains that those who would have their letters read by their representatives are best served by dispensing with the form letter, telegrams (now outmoded anyway) and phone calls and instead writing a personal letter that is brief and concise and easily digested. In his discussion of "timing," he explains that a message from a constituent stands a far better chance of making a strong impact on a member of Congress and his/her position on a topic BEFORE the Congressional member has made a public statement declaring their stance on said topic. This tendency is explained by Robert B. Cialdini (Cialdini, 2009) in further detail, which I will get into later. At this point it suffices to say that public commitments are very difficult to break.

By "personalization," Frantzich means that "unless a constituent is a substantive expert, his chief contribution lies in outlining how a particular policy affects his life" (Frantzich, 1986). As explained by Randolph Hester (Hester, 2006), perhaps one of the best ways to show someone your side of things is to get them involved in the process. Hester, in his theory of "ecological democracy,"

explains that “actions, on every level, are guided by understanding natural processes and social relationships within our locality and larger environmental context” (Hester, 2006). “Knowledge” is also important in legislative communications. Conveying a sense of familiarity with the representative, his/her voting practices and the legislative processes lets the recipient of the letter see that their correspondent has given full attention to the issue at hand and knows about that which (s)he speaks. Finally, “specificity” is necessary in order to make sure that the letter writer’s topic receives its due weight and consideration. A request like, “end all war now” comes across as vague and half-baked. However, if constituents request that their representative act on a specific piece of legislation and a particular idea the thought and care put into the letter will be echoed by the legislator’s response. With Frantzich’s advice there is also a special section on communication hints for constituents requesting specific casework that was taken from Senator William Cohen. This “dos and don’ts” list consists of a few simple rules that constituents desiring aid should follow to help get their issues into the forefront of their legislatures thoughts. First, they should include all relevant identifying and contact information. They should be candid and brief and outline steps they’ve already taken to remedy the problem. They should not misrepresent the facts, write to more than one legislator about the issue, wait until the last minute to write or imply in any way that their support of the legislator relies upon the legislator’s ability to solve their problem. The final piece of advice offered by Frantzich is that where one letter may not make a huge difference, letters written

by dozens of constituents will. If the issue is worth attempting to gain your legislator's support then one should be able to first influence one's peers.

The next book that I found to be useful to my thoughts and studies on legislative communication was Robert B. Cialdini's work in the nature of influence (Cialdini, 2009). While this text does not relate directly to effectiveness in legislative communications, it explains influence and the ways that certain ideas get listened to and agreed to and others do not. It explains seven kinds of influence and how they are used by human beings for manipulative purposes, be they good or ill. The seven kinds of influence are: reciprocation, commitment and consistency, social proof, liking, authority, scarcity and instant influence. The influence rule of reciprocity explains quite well why legislators are not allowed to accept gifts over fifty dollars in value under Washington State Law, according to RCW 42.52.150. When we receive something (whether asked for or not), we automatically feel the urge to reciprocate. Cialdini discusses the implications of reciprocity and politics thoroughly from page 26-8. He gives a description of Lyndon Johnson's early vote trading in Congress and how granting favors to his colleagues early on in his career enabled him to have a very successful rate of passes when he later became President. He also explains that despite the fact that politicians are "sober and conscientious" the effects of a gift are felt whether they intentionally allow them to be or not. Cialdini's arguments about consistency and commitment as influence tools are also relevant to legislation. Frantzich mentioned in his 1986 book that it is easier to influence legislator's opinions on an upcoming vote before they have made a public announcement about their

position. This is because of what Cialdini terms “consistency and commitment.” Once a legislator has made a public statement about his/her position on an issue, (s)he becomes committed to this statement. Straying from this stance on an issue can not only create a media nightmare (Recall the widespread accusations against John Kerry for “flip-flopping” in the 2004 Presidential election.), changes in stance on an issue make a politician appear inconsistent. As Frantzich states in his discussion on ‘timing,’ “realize that in politics it is usually better to be consistently wrong in some people’s minds than to be seen as inconsistent” (Cialdini, 2009, p. 138-9). As an aside, on page 65 on his book, Cialdini discusses political petitioning as a way to get citizens to act on something they have committed to. Once a voter signs on to a petition, (s)he has committed himself/herself to an ideal and will defend it with more vehemence in the future. Legislators also fall into this trap.

Cialdini also discusses many other methods of influence, but what might be the most relevant and interesting for my topic is the notion of “instant influence.” This kind of influence occurs because of the amount of information we currently receive. Cialdini notes that John Stuart Mill, who died in 1873, is purported to have been the last human being “to know everything there was to know in the world” (Cialdini, p. 230). This concept is perplexing and a complete impossibility in this day and age, even allowing for a slightly narrow definition of “everything” and culturally and geographically biased definitions of “the world.” There is so much information being created on a regular basis, so many forms of media and so much new data, that no one is capable of having a handle on it. This

means that many decisions that people make on a daily basis are made through “short cuts” without accessing the full range of facts and details that would allow for a truly informed decision. I found this to be relevant to effective legislative communications because instant communication is becoming more and more prevalent as Americans become more and more reliant upon the internet for information and actively engaged in social networking. According to the Pew Internet and American Life Project, “Some 19% of internet users now say they use Twitter or another service to share updates about themselves, or to see updates about others. This represents a significant increase over previous surveys in December 2008 and April 2009, when 11% of internet users said they use a status-update service” (PEW, 2009, Twitter and status update, para. 1). This means that more and more decisions will need to be made instantaneously, utilizing short cuts.

Also relevant is the theory of “social proof” as a form of influence. As what may have been initially a survival mechanism, the need for social validation is very strong in people. More than just having one’s behavior and actions taken as acceptable, social proof can mean imitation of actions one has witnessed as well. Cialdini begins by explaining the logic behind the pervasive and hated laugh tracks that accompany many sitcoms. Despite the fact that people find them irritating, they still make the same people find the shows to be funnier. He then went on to explain social action in uncommon situations. When people are not sure how to act, they look to others. If someone is lying on the street and no one else is calling 9-1-1 or checking on the person on the ground, very rarely will

anyone else act. However, if there are already people helping an injured person, more people will probably join in.

In an article by Kenneth J. Gergen (Katz, 2008), implication of the use of new technological advances for democratic communication are examined. Gergen argues that “it is imperative to sustain deliberation about (mobile communication’s) place in cultural life, to sensitize ourselves to possible futures, and to open dialogue on ways in which such trajectories might possibly be altered” (Katz, 2008, p.297). He presents his article as a conversation starter, something to assist other researchers so that the groundwork can be made solid and the affects of mobile technologies on democratic processes can be truly useful. Gergen claims that while cell phone technologies tend to lead to withdrawal from civic activities, this is not always the case. Sometimes constant, instantaneous communication is used for political purposes. He cites MoveOn.org as an example of mobile communications assisting in activist organizing efforts. Formed in 1998, MoveOn.org is a 501(c)(4) nonprofit organization which has maintained significant political power for nearly a decade. It connects activists and net-activists from across the nation to increase donations and support candidates preferred by their donor base (Moveon.org, 2009, About, para. 2).

Gergen also writes that because people have a small and explicitly chosen group with whom they’re in contact through mobile communications, that “we may anticipate greater extremism” (Katz, 2008, p. 307). Through constant information sharing and affirmation and approbation of this information, groups with similar opinions will reinforce one another’s political views and become

more hardened in them. This idea fits in nicely with Cialdini's theories on commitment and consistency and social proof. While the ability to communicate with others is becoming stronger, our social groups are becoming more solidified.

James Stayner speaks to the changing nature of political communication. He claims that "in the US and UK over the last 50 years there has been a dramatic growth in the opportunities that members of the public have to express their political views" (Stayner, 2007. p.158). This growth, writes Stayner, has come about primarily in "what can be termed 'individualistic' as opposed to 'collective' forms of expression" (Stayner, 2007. p.160). This new form of political communication does not make the attendance of others a prerequisite to political action. Instead, individuals can act alone at different points in time and "rely on the cumulative input to make an impact" (Stayner, 2007, p. 160). Forms of individual "attitude-expression" on the rise include: petition signing, email chain letters, colored ribbons or wristbands, blogging, v-logging (video logging) and SMS texting. Stephen E. Frantzich expresses his own opinions about the changing face of political communication.

The Founding Fathers would have loved the internet. Their engine of revolution was the hand-powered printing press stamping out provocative newspapers and broadsides. Today, thousands of citizens are becoming high-tech pamphleteers in a planetary public square, using computers and modems to recruit and organize without leaving their keyboards (Frantzich, 2005, p. 69).

The internet is changing the face of political communication. According to a study conducted by the Pew Internet and American Life Project, “Young voters continued to engage heavily in the political debate on social networking sites. Fully 83% of those age 18-24 have a social networking profile, and two-thirds of young profile owners took part in some form of political activity on these sites in 2008” (PEW, 2009, The internet’s role in campaign 2008, para. 6).

Politicians are also online quite frequently. A brief search for my representatives to the Washington State Legislature found Karen Fraser and Representative Sam Hunt on LinkedIn, a professional networking site. Representative Brendan Williams is an active member of the Facebook community, posting information ranging from his political opinions to thanking a local fitness club for being open during Thanksgiving weekend.

In order to understand the rapidity with which the internet has been changing the face of political communications, let’s run through a brief time-line of email usage in Congress. The internet has been influencing day-to-day political life in Congress for over a decade. In 1993, Senator Charles Robb became the first Senator to accept email and to post his email address to constituents. One year later, Senator Ted Kennedy became the first Senator to set-up a congressional website. In 1997, Senator John Ashcroft launched the first senatorial online petition and by 2001, the last Congress Member without an email address finally succumbed. Luckily for him, his constituents with email accounts still had a means of communicating with him besides phone calls once the “anthrax scare” hit a short time later (Johnson, 2004, p. 103).

While the internet may be changing the ways in which we communicate, it can be argued that it doesn't actually provide any usages that are innovative. As pointed out by Hill and Hughes, "the internet is a great thing. At the same time, we maintain that the internet is merely an extension of the fax machine, the telephone, the postal system, the picket fence and cable television in being a medium of political communications" (Hill and Hughes, 1998, p179). If the internet were a wholly new form of communication and not simply a more expedited form of older communication technologies, it might be worthwhile to do a study on the effectiveness of email communication by itself. However, because I am interested in determining the best and most effective methods with which a constituent can communicate with his or her state legislators it will be necessary to look into telephone calls, in person visits, postal letters, *and* email.

The Washington State Legislature has information posted online about which methods and communication styles might prove most effective. The webpage begins with a brief overview of legislative process. The Washington State Legislature advocates that would-be participants have an understanding of how bills become law and how to read and interpret bill drafts. By doing this, the constituent can become "the expert" on a topic of interest to them. After gaining a more complete understanding of the procedure and the issue the concerned constituent is advised to develop a relationship with their representative and his/her staffers. "Networking with other citizens" is also mentioned as a means of becoming more effective. Finally, the webpage offers some general advice to all constituents who want to effectively connect with their legislators:

Regardless of how frequently you contact your legislators, you will be far more effective if you follow these points:

1. Be well prepared for your discussions.
2. Provide a written statement with all verbal presentations.
3. Make letters and e-mail formal, specific, and concise.
4. Don't berate or argue with your legislator when you disagree. Simply thank the member for the time spent with you and express a desire for further discussion (Washington State Legislature, 2010, Guide to effective participation, para.16).

The Washington State Legislature is far from the only website offering advice on how citizens can effectively communicate their opinions to their legislators. The Wisconsin Arts Board has put forth information about effective advocacy, beginning with the advice seen on the Washington state Legislature page: get to know your representatives and their chief staff members (Wisconsin State Arts Board, 2009, content no longer available). On this site they claim that “perhaps the most effective way of getting your views across to your legislator is through a personal visit.” Letter writing is suggested as the next course of action for those who cannot visit their legislators in person. Another site giving detailed information about how best to contact your legislators is the Christian Life Resources Page (Christian Life Resources, 2009, Tips for legislative communication, para.1). While the Christian Life Resource Page is more nationally based, it serves as an interesting guide for those wishing to connect with their legislators in any state. The site provides a list of 12 dos and don'ts and

also gives users a template for letters, emails and faxes and a guided script for phone calls. The resources on this site advise constituents to write a letter instead of sending an email whenever possible because “though e-mail is convenient, letters hold more weight to your legislator.” They also recommend that letters be specifically crafted for each representative to whom it will be sent. Form letters lose potential power. Perhaps the “don’t” that most readily spoke to the need for individual letters from the general public was “**DON’T** be anything other than ‘ordinary.’ Even if you belong to a pro-life organization, it is more important that you remain ‘just an ordinary citizen.’ It is quite likely that your legislator will be hearing from the organization separately anyway. Legislators are looking for personal, grass-roots opinions.” No other sites mentioned anything quite the same. In his book, Frantzich did mention that there are letters written to members of Congress that are obviously from outliers, extremists and what he classifies as “‘kook’ letters” (Frantzich, 1986, p. 104), but advice along the lines as just seen has to be teased out through examining the implications of his statements. It isn’t mentioned directly.

Information about how to communicate with legislators can be found all over the internet. A simple Google search reveals pages upon pages of advocacy sites, ranging from universities to organizations for the disabled to lobbying groups to grassroots organizations. While much of the advice is the same, these sites are often tailored to specific interest groups. As a side portion of this study, I originally thought it might be useful to examine a large sample of these sites to determine whether or not they present the same information as relevant to their

support base or whether they all utilize different tactics and maintain different beliefs about how to most effectively contact legislators. This portion of the research is not included in this thesis and might be an interesting avenue for future study.

One lead in what makes for effective legislative communication and what kinds of activities can drive home an idea comes from a program piloted in Washington State called the “Walk a Mile Program.” The program was started in 1994 by Natasha Grossman, a student at the University of Washington’s School of Social Work. Grossman learned, while visiting a representative, that the legislator had never been in contact with a person who received welfare. This bespoke a tendency for legislation about poverty issues to be decided upon “based on myth and stereotype” (Walk-a-mile, 2009, Our work, para.1). Grossman decided to change this and created a program that would allow legislators to “walk a mile” in the shoes of welfare recipients. In order to accomplish this, she matched 21 policy makers with underprivileged welfare recipients. The recipient family and the lawmaker then spend a month participating in the program together. This includes weekly telephone conversations, a joint food budgeting exercise and the opportunity to take part in a common activity from each of their lives. This means that the legislator might go on a grocery shopping trip with the underprivileged family and the family might attend a press conference or a hearing with the policy maker.

While participant voting records are not tracked after program completion, the Walk A Mile Program does boast some successes on their website. For

example, in the state of Maine, a Parents As Scholars Program provides college funds to Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) recipients because of the Walk A Mile Program. Better bus routes have been created in areas that need them. The Murray-Wellstone Amendment to the Personal Responsibility Act allowed for time-limit exemptions for victims of domestic violence and Washington State House Bill 2002 was passed, which allows foster children enrolled in college or voc- tech programs to stay in foster care through the age of 21.

The Walk A Mile Program has also seen lifestyle improvements for the foster children and welfare recipients who have participated in the program. Participants have reported that they vote more often, have learned valuable networking skills, are more effective with employers, have pursued further education, volunteer more often and have served on nonprofit boards. The foster children who have participated have gained internships, testified at committee hearings, registered and committed to vote and have started attending Youth Advocacy Days at their state legislature. Constituents understand and listen to the messages they receive from their legislators far better when the legislator is perceived as a fellow human being and not as a distant policy maker or bureaucrat with power. The converse of this is also true: when constituents can share their lives and issues with their legislators, they are enabling the policy makers to make informed decisions based upon the real lives of the voting populace rather than making decision through conjecture based on “myth and stereotype.” This also ties in with the advice given by the Christian Life Resources group on their

website. Legislators respond best to ordinary citizens leading ordinary lives. This may be in part because legislators are often not only serving as a representative to their constituents, but also running for re-election. What better way to persuade the voting public that you can represent them than telling them stories about ordinary people, just like them, who you have helped or listened to in the past?

The website Knowledge as Power, very new and currently under construction, is a resource for Seattleites and other Washingtonians. (Knowledge as Power, 2009) It functions as a legislative tracking site to keep citizens apprised of political happenings within the state.

In an article which specifically quotes Gary Robinson, the director of Washington's Department of Information Services, Robinson discusses the usage of email as a communication form and its use for public records. This article examines the increased use of technology in government-constituent relations. Robinson claims that when it comes to public records, "it's the same thing we've been dealing with for years. We started documenting and storing emails on mainframe computers 10 years ago" (Patton, 2008. p.63). This implies that while emails may not appear to be as personal and well thought out as other methods of legislative communication, they are far more traceable and may possibly lead to better governmental transparency.

A further article referencing the state of Washington and communication technology examines the practice of soliciting responses from citizens about governmental budget writing. According to the article, outreach is often impeded by five factors: "lack of governing board interest, poor citizen response in past,

citizens won't respond, lack of time, lack of personnel" (Walters, 2009. p. 62).

The article references Redmond, Washington as a city in which a sincere effort is being made to garner feedback from citizens. Mayor John Marchione and council member Richard Cole are working towards what they call "budgeting priorities" by attempting to "align the budget with citizen priorities" (Walters, 2009. p. 61). This demonstrates desire for citizen participation within the state of Washington.

While all of this provided adequate background to the concept of political and legislative communication, the article that most specifically informed this research is a study that came out of Minnesota and Wisconsin. Davida J. Alperin and David Schultz conducted research and submitted a paper to the 2003 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association. The research paper is a detailed study looking into the nature of political communications between legislators and constituents in those two states. A survey covering three larger issues was sent to every member of the Minnesota and Wisconsin legislatures. This survey asked legislators to determine the quantity, effectiveness and processing and response procedures used for constituent communication. The study was conducted as a follow up to a 1997 survey done by one of the researchers in the 2002 project. The 1997 survey determined that email was not a largely effective way for constituents to communicate with their legislators. As seen elsewhere, email comes across as too slipshod and impersonal. The researchers wanted to see if this still held true five years later. They determined that email can be effectively used for legislative communication, but only in certain circumstances. Emails must be personally written and they must come

from constituents. In the 2002 study, email was still not viewed as something equally effective to personal visits and letters. I conducted a similar survey in the state of Washington to determine which methods of communication are the most frequently used and which are the most effective.

A similar study was also done in the state of Illinois in February of 2000 (Sheffer, 2003). Mary Lou Sheffer of Louisiana State University conducted a survey of Illinois House and Senate members. Sheffer distributed the surveys by hand and by mail during the legislative session in order to help ensure a high response rate. Sheffer based her research on three research questions and one hypothesis. The three research questions were: “Are younger legislators more likely to implement e-mail as a political tool of communication than older legislators? Do politicians believe e-mail is an effective means of communicating with constituents? and Are male legislators more likely to implement e-mail as a political tool of communication than female legislators?” The hypothesis which informed the research was, “Legislators will report agenda-shifting in response to constituent e-mail.” While only the second research question is directly related to the research that I conducted, I find the hypothesis and the results of the survey to be interesting. Sheffer assumed that email would be an influential tool that legislators would use to determine constituent opinion. It could be used to help inform legislative posturing and votes. This hypothesis turned out to be untrue. Sheffer writes, “Legislators expressed a sense of caution about responding to constituent e-mail. That caution presented itself in several forms, including a reluctance to change personal political agendas and a delay in responding to

certain e-mails.” As in other works, Sheffer was sure to note that one of the chief problems with the use of email as an effective communication tool was difficulty in sorting emails from constituents and non-constituents. Sheffer also noted, however, that if the same House and Senate members were to be polled again in the future (post-2000) the results of the survey might prove to be different.

Sheffer argues this for several reasons:

First, at the time of the survey 44% of legislators responding chose constituent feedback as the most important influence in determining their own political agenda, second only to personal belief (51%). Secondly, within the last year, 79% of legislators responding have witnessed an increase in the amount of e-mail they received. More importantly, however, when legislators were asked to predict the importance of e-mail, the majority of them agreed that, in the future, their offices would become more reliant on e-mail as a means of political communication (Sheffer, 2003).

A final study that was useful was conducted by Lilliard E. Richardson, Jr. and Christopher A. Cooper (Richardson and Cooper, 2006). This 2006 study, which cites the two aforementioned articles, was a postal mail survey sent to state legislators in Arizona, Colorado, Missouri, New Jersey, North Dakota, Pennsylvania, South Carolina and South Dakota. The purpose of the survey was to determine how state legislators utilize emails from different sectors (constituents, journalists, interest groups, and governmental officials both legislative and non) and how those emails influence policy. They also, like

Sheffer, delved into the demographics of the legislators themselves to determine if this had any influence on their opinions about email. In their research they discovered that legislators tended to have a more negative view of emails when they came from constituents. This was due to the “heavy burden of constituency service experienced by such legislators” (Richardson and Cooper, 2006, p.121). Older legislators viewed email more negatively than younger ones. Minority legislators find email less useful than others, probably because “studies of media use in the population have almost uniformly found that minorities are less likely to use or even have access to information technology”(Richardson and Cooper, 2006, p.122, quoted from Mossberger, Tolbert, and Stansbury, 2003). Women in the state legislature saw email as a more positive thing. It was mentioned that this may be because of observations made by Lyn Kathlene in 1994 and 1995 claiming that female legislators are more positive about communication in general and more likely to facilitate and encourage discussion of issues. Richardson and Cooper cite the need for more research to be conducted on state legislators and modern political communication. They admit that much of the literature out there is of limited value because of the differences between Congress and state legislatures. “Members of Congress spend more time in office, have larger budgets and are provided far more staff. State legislators are relatively unprofessional in comparison and have few staff resources” (Richardson and Cooper, 2006, p.115).

It is fair to assume that there is a need for more research to be done on state legislatures and the ways in which they effectively navigate the two way communication streams that are becoming more and more available. It is apparent to me, after much digging, that there is a strong need in the state of Washington for research to be conducted on effective legislative communication for Washingtonians. In order to begin this research, I developed and conducted a survey asking Washington State Senators, Representatives and their staff members questions about which methods of communication work best for them. The guiding research question for this study was: What method of communication is most effective for Washington State constituents when communicating with their state legislators either directly or through legislative staff?

Methodology and Methods

Distribution

In order to collect data to inform my thesis, after receiving HSR approval from The Evergreen State College, I conducted a survey of Washington State Senators, Representatives and their staff members. It is important to include not only legislators in this study, but also staff members because staff members are often respondents to constituent correspondence. This was proven true while I was conducting my research. I first sent the survey out via email on Friday, March 19th, 2010. The survey was sent to the direct legislative email address of each Washington State Senator and Representative. The email was addressed to the legislator or receiving staff person. Below are copies of the emailed consent form

and cover letter, the survey, the consent form and cover letter for interviews, the interview questions, and the interview phone script.

Participants were provided with multiple options for response. They could complete the survey online by filling in a Word document, arrange a phone conversation with me and answer questions while I read them off, receive a copy of the survey through the United State Postal Service or respond to the survey through <http://www.surveymonkey.com>. I had ten respondents during the first week that the survey was available. 16 of them responded through the website and one of the returned a copy of the document through email. A reminder email was sent to the same recipients as the original survey on Friday, March 23rd, 2010 and the first round of more than 50 follow-up phone calls were made on March 26th. In the week following this reminder email and phone call all the way through April 2nd, eight more responded. A second round of more than 90 phone calls was made on April 2nd. This inspired 13 respondents in one day, including one respondent over the phone, and another five over the next week. One last reminder was sent to potential participants on April 15th, the final day before the close of the survey. A final five responses were gained. There were 46 total respondents to the survey. Of those 46 respondents, 16 self-identified as legislators and 19 self-identified as staffers. 11 survey participants chose not to respond to the demographics question. There are 147 legislative positions in Washington and an unknown number of staffers. This means the survey had a response rate of at least 11% for the legislators and an unknown response rate for

staffers. The survey was intended to be distributed right after the end of the 2010 Washington State Legislative Session. The regular session ended on March 11, 2010. Unfortunately, the legislature was called back for a special session which went on through April 12. During this time period, some members unaffiliated with the budget process were sent home. Many of their staff members were either on vacation already or taking mandatory furlough. This made the process of collecting responses more difficult than initially thought. A few respondents were too busy working on the budget to take the time to answer the survey questions. Others were in the process of moving back to their districts and couldn't devote the time or resources.

My survey consisted of fourteen questions, the most important of which was the second question. This question was based on my overall research question and asked respondents how effective different methods of constituent communication were to them. Participants compared phone calls, in-person visits, hand-written letters, typed letters, faxes, testimony at hearings, email and web-based correspondence. Respondents were also asked how often they personally use those forms of communication when conducting legislative business, whether each form was heavier, lighter or about the same as usual for the 2010 Session in comparison to the previous session, their own preferred method for contacting legislators and their estimation of how effective their legislative website is. Respondents were also asked to provide a brief, summative definition of their interpretation of "effective communication" with reference to constituent communications. Participants were asked to respond to seven demographic

questions as well. They were asked for their gender identification, occupation (Senator, Representative or Staffer), length of service in occupation, age range, area of the state and whether it is urban, rural or suburban, and their highest level of education. A final question asked survey participants if they would be willing to participate in a follow-up interview after the survey closed.

This is a case study. The research was designed to be extrapolated no further than analysis of the responses received. The research was conducted with the assumption that responses from self-selected legislators and legislative staff in Washington might provide a starting point for constituents desiring the ability to effectively communicate with their legislators. It is also assumed that this research process and analysis may prove helpful in future studies of effective communication with the Washington State Legislature.

Responses were solicited from every legislative office in the state of Washington. For the purposes of this study, 'legislator' is defined as an elected Washington Representative or Senator holding office at the time when the survey was conducted. A 'staff member' is one working in the office of an elected Washington Representative or Senator holding office at the time when the survey was conducted. 'Effective communication' is assumed to be the best and most compelling means of contact used by constituents when addressing their legislative representatives. A 'constituent' is assumed to be a citizen of the state of Washington able to vote in elections.

Results

The State of Washington has 98 Representatives, 49 Senators, and each has an office and, presumably, at least one staff member. From these 147 legislator positions and the unknown number of staffers, came 46 respondents who started the survey and 35 who completed the survey. With 16 self-identified legislators and 19 self-identified staffers, the survey had a response rate of 11% for the legislators and an unknown response rate for staffers. Obviously, this is a low response rate and any inferences made can only apply to survey respondents. Again, this is a case study and the research was actually designed to not extrapolate past the responses given.

Of the 35 participants who filled in the demographics data, 57.1% of them were male (20) and 42.9% were female. (CHART 1.0) This is a slightly higher ratio of females to males than found in the 2010 Washington State Legislature. The 2010 roster was 32.70% female. No data can be found of the gender ration of legislative staff members, so correlation cannot be determined.

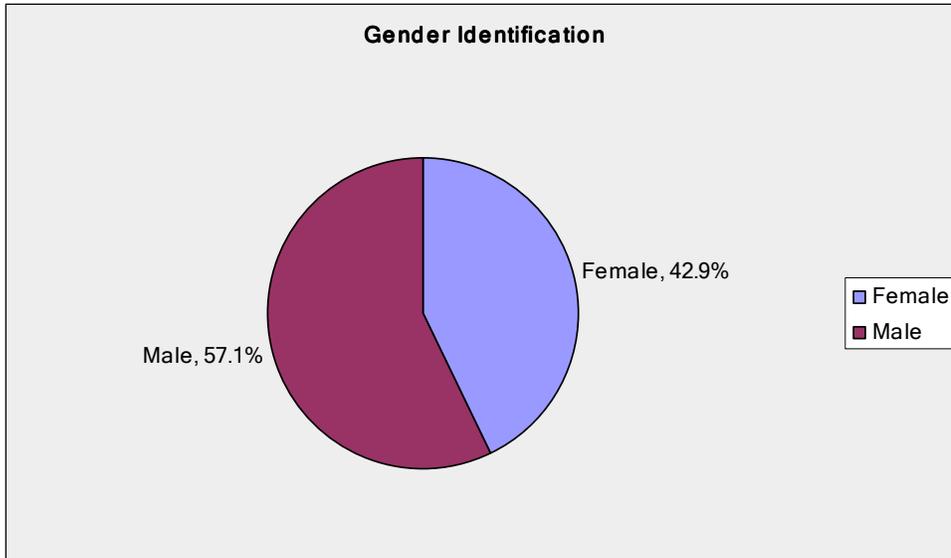


CHART 1.0

Of these 35 respondents, four of these were Senators, 12 were House Members and 19 were legislative staff members. Seven of them held their positions for two years or less. Nine had been with the legislature for somewhere between two and four years. The majority, at thirteen, held their positions for between five and ten years. Six participants served in the legislature for ten years or more. It is important to note the time served in office because of the drastic changes in communication technologies over the past ten to fifteen. During this time period, the internet, email and social networking have all come to play larger and larger roles in Washington communication. This question was included in the survey in order to immediately highlight any assumed biases based on whether or not survey participants found email and other newer technologies solely effective solely for the fact that they were newly elected to the office and therefore unused to the variety of communication methods. It was also important to determine

whether results were biased by those holding office for a lengthy period of time potentially being reluctant to change from hand-written and typed correspondence to email. After reviewing the results, it appears that although the largest number of respondents held their positions for ten years or more, the overall results were dispersed evenly enough to effectively mitigate these concerns.

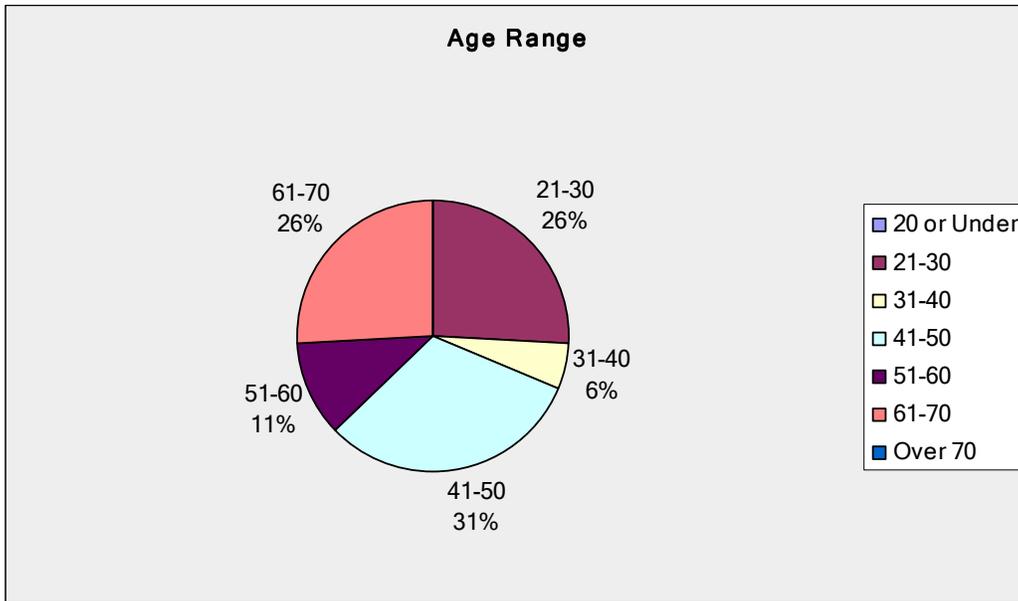


CHART 1.1

The age of the respondents were distributed fairly evenly. The highest frequency of respondents was in the 41-50 range. Age results were included in the demographic portion of this survey in order to determine whether or not a high proportion of younger or older respondents influenced the end result. The assumption is much like that for the length of service demographic. One can assume that younger participants may be more likely to favor new technologies because they have used them from an early age. Older respondents, however, might be less willing to see email or web based correspondence as an effective

means of communication. The wide range of respondent ages and even distribution shows that no age was favored in the results.

Thirty four participants responded to the regional demographics questions in which I asked for a general location and description of the district in which each of them worked. The majority of participants served suburban western Washington. In fact, more than 75% (26) of participants worked in Western Washington districts, with only one response from Central Washington and 7 from Eastern Washington. 16 respondents served in the suburbs, ten in rural areas and eight in urban regions. These questions were asked in order to form a basis for future research. If another study in conducted and more respondents are from rural districts in Eastern Washington, it will be interesting to see whether the results remain the same.

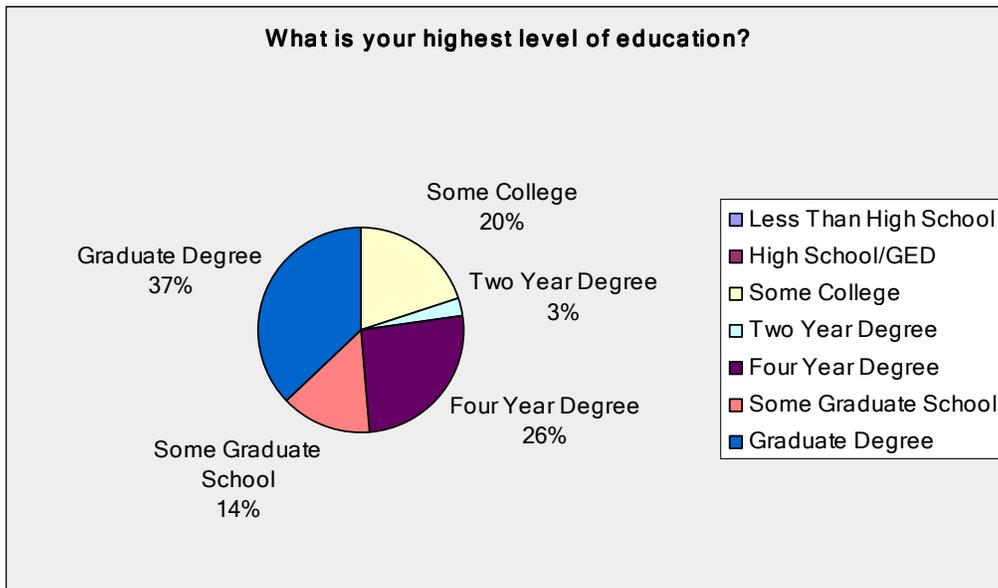


CHART 1.2

The final demographic question asked of survey participants was about their highest level of education. (CHART 1.2) Of the 35 respondents, each of

them had at least attended some college. Education was included in the order to help future researchers establish a basis for understanding whether one's level of education influences what one considers effective communication. Detailing the breakdown of legislative and staff education levels and comparing these figure to the answers given on the research questions uncovers a picture of what certain demographic groups view as effective communication. While the sample size of this survey proven too small for this to be statistically valid, interested readers can find this information in Appendix C of this text.

Respondents were asked to rate the effectiveness of various ways constituents communicate with them. As can be seen in Table 1, it is apparent that respondents to this survey feel the most effective method of constituent communication is through an in-person visit.

If we accept these results, the most effective means to communicate with your legislator is to meet with him/her in person. If you want to convey a message, it would be arranging an in-person visit to your representative, either at their office or for coffee, will show dedication to your issue and sincerity. This method of communication allows you to meet with your elected officials and provides you with a great opportunity to lay the ground work for a good working relationship. In-person visits are closely followed by testimony at a hearing, hand-written letters and emails. After examining the even spread of much of the demographics data, it is interesting to note that respondents rated email as only minimally less effective than hand-written letters. This is different than what Sheffer and Alperin and Schultz found in their studies (Alperin and Schultz, 2003

and Sheffer, 2003). Both previous studies found email regarded as far less effective than hand-written letters. The difference between the two in this study is so minimal that constituents contacting their legislators with either format would be likely to effectively communicate their message. It should also be noted that while testimony at a hearing was rated as the second most effective method of communication used by constituents, this is a more formal method of communication and is not always applicable. For example, if a constituent wishes to contact a legislator about an issue that has not yet been written into a bill, (s)he has to find another method to contact their legislator.

There are several ways in which constituents communicate with legislators who represent their districts. Please rate each of the following on its effectiveness. (Please note, there may be rounding errors due to the sample size.)

Answer Options	Very Effective	Somewhat Effective	Somewhat Ineffective	Ineffective
Phone Call	27 (30%)	14 (31 %)	3 (7%)	1 (2%)
In Person Visit	41 (91%)	4 (9%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Fax	3 (7%)	18 (41%)	10 (23%)	13 (30%)
Hand Written Letter	27 (61%)	16 (36%)	0 (0%)	1 (2%)
Typed Letter	26 (58%)	12 (27%)	6 (13%)	1 (2%)
Email	27 (60%)	18 (40%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Web Based Correspondence	9 (20%)	23 (51%)	6 (13%)	7 (16%)
Testimony at a Hearing	35 (78%)	7 (16%)	3 (7%)	0 (0%)

TABLE 1.0

The two communications methods with the lowest very effective response rate were both the highest in the somewhat effective column. 51% of respondents found web-based correspondence to be somewhat effective and nearly 41% found faxes to be somewhat effective. Given that many Washington State Legislators have Facebook and LinkedIn profiles, I had assumed that web-based correspondence would rate more highly. The low rating may be explained by a comment in the open-ended section of the survey. One participant explained that

they had assumed that form emails, originated by special-interest groups and companies, were included in the web-based correspondent category. Typed written letters and web-based correspondence received the second most somewhat ineffective responses and faxes received the most in that category with almost 23%. The communication method which received the most ineffective votes was the fax with 29.5% of respondents claiming that it was an ineffective means of constituent communication. No respondents put email, in-person visits or testimony at hearing into the ineffective category. One respondent considered phone call to be ineffective, one placed typed letters into that category and one decided that hand-written letters were ineffective. From this data, it can be assumed that the fax machine is not an effective means of communication and may soon be entirely replaced by email and other web-based technologies.

Another question was, how often do you personally use the following forms of communication when working on legislative business? (TABLE 1.1) Respondents were given the same choices as they were for the questions referenced above.

How often do you personally use the following forms of communication when working on legislative business? (Please note, there may be rounding errors due to the sample size.)

Answer Options	Frequently	Intermittently	Rarely	N/A
In Person Visit	26 (57%)	12 (26%)	7 (15%)	1 (2%)
Web Based Correspondence	17 (37%)	14 (30%)	11 (24%)	4 (9%)
Phone Call	36 (80%)	7 (16%)	1 (2%)	1 (2%)
Fax	0 (0%)	3 (7%)	34 (76%)	8 (18%)
Typed Letter	15 (33%)	17 (37%)	13 (28%)	1 (2%)
Hand Written Letter	6 (13%)	15 (33%)	20 (44%)	4 (9%)
Email	42 (91%)	3 (7%)	0 (0%)	1 (2%)

TABLE 1.1

According to responses, emails were used the most frequently on legislative business. Phone calls were the next most frequent. The majority of respondents used web-based correspondence frequently as opposed to intermittently, rarely or NA. This does not coincide with responses asking about the effectiveness of web-based correspondence from constituents. According to this response, it could be assumed that web-based correspondence would be rated as an effective method of communication from constituents. However, this was not the case. Again, this may be because web-based correspondence was never clearly defined in the survey. Typed letters were most frequently rated as something respondents used intermittently with working on legislative business, with 44% rating hand-written letters most highly at rarely. Faxes were the most infrequent use of communication during a legislative work day, however. No respondents used them frequently, 7% infrequently, about 75% used them rarely and 18% were NA. As was seen in the results for Table 1.0, it appears that faxes are being replaced by email and other technologies.

I also asked respondents about communication flow for the 2010 legislative session. (TABLE 1.2) Of our eight forms of communication, which ones were heavier than usual? Which one is lighter? Which methods of communication were about the same as usual? I included an NA section in this question in case not all offices embraced all technologies.

During the 2010 Legislative Session, was constituent correspondence for each of the following lighter than usual, heavier than usual or about the same as usual? (Please note, there may be rounding errors due to the sample size.)

Answer Options	Heavier than Usual	Lighter than Usual	About the Same as Usual	N/A
Phone Call	16 (36%)	6 (13%)	22 (49%)	1 (2%)
In Person Visit	15 (33%)	8 (17%)	22 (48%)	1 (2%)
Fax	6 (13%)	7 (15%)	24 (52%)	9 (20%)
Hand Written Letter	4 (9%)	11 (24%)	30 (65%)	1 (2%)
Web Based Correspondence	20 (44%)	1 (2%)	19 (42%)	5 (11%)
Typed Letter	5 (11%)	15 (33%)	25 (54%)	1 (2%)
Email	34 (74%)	0 (0%)	11 (24%)	1 (2%)
Testimony at a Hearing	8 (17%)	6 (13%)	28 (61%)	4 (9%)

TABLE 1.2

Interestingly, each of the eight categories was rated about the same as usual by the largest amount of respondents (no less than 47.8 percent or 22) except for two. Web-based correspondence was rated as heavier than usual by 20 respondents. Again, this is not reflected in the results regarding the effectiveness of web-based correspondence from constituents. In future studies, the definition of ‘web-based correspondence’ will need to be laid out more clearly. Email was also rated as higher than usual with 73.9% or 34 respondents noting that it was heavier than usual. No one voted it lighter than usual and about 24% decided it was the same as usual. One respondent decided that email was not applicable. It can be assumed that this was an anomaly or a mistake.

I asked respondents to tell me how they would communicate with a legislator. (TABLE 1.3) “If you were to contact a legislator who represented you, which correspondence method would be your first choice?”

If you were to contact a legislator who represented you, which correspondence method would be your first choice? (Please note, there may be rounding errors due to the sample size.)

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Phone Call	19.6%	9
In Person Visit	43.5%	20
Fax	0.0%	0
Hand Written Letter	2.2%	1
Typed Letter	6.5%	3
Email	26.1%	12
Web Based Correspondence	2.2%	1
Testimony at a Hearing	0.0%	0

TABLE 1.3

None of them chose fax and none of them chose testimony at a hearing. I find this interesting because over 75% of them stated that testimony at a hearing was a very effective method of communication for constituents. Testimony at a hearing may have had such a low rating for this question because, as mentioned, earlier, it is a formal method of communication and can only be used effectively at specific times.

My final survey data question asked participants how effective they found their websites to be. This question was included to determine whether respondents found their websites to be useful. If an overwhelming majority of respondents felt that their website was ineffective then we could expect to see email and web-based correspondence rated much lower than with a group finding their website to be very effective. The majority, at 26, found their websites to be somewhat effective. Fifteen found their websites to be very effective, three found their websites to be very ineffective, and two found their websites to be somewhat ineffective. This can be interpreted to mean that there was no significant technology bias in survey responses.

Open Ended Question Analysis

I asked survey participants, “How would you describe what ‘effective communication’ means to you in reference to constituent communications with legislators?” This question was open ended. By asking this question, I intended to give respondents another way to show what really mattered to each of them when thinking about effective communication methodology. Respondents gave a large variety of answers. However, several themes emerged. Respondents expressed a very solid desire for concise, clear, cogent and timely communications.

Respondents wanted open responses that were respectful and many expressed a desire for not only a clearly stated problem, but a recommended solution as well. Participants emphasized the need for a personal connection to be made through whatever form of correspondence was chosen and asked for timely, relevant points with suggestions. In essence, effective communication might be defined as clear, concise and personal communication providing reasonable solutions or suggestions while being presented in a respectful manner.

Several participants explained that form letters are undesired and ineffective. Many offered form letters up as the opposite of effective communication. In one interesting case, a respondent noted that (s)he thought of form letters as a form of web-based correspondence and therefore considered web-based correspondence to be ineffective. This should be taken into account when looking at the web-based correspondence survey results.

One respondent explained that effective communication is best described as, “communication that is clear, to the point, and articulated in such a way that

allows the Representative to know what the constituent thinks, wants, feels, and gives the Representative a clear line of questioning to which he can respond if necessary. Also, form e-mails from organizations are LARGELY ineffective.” In fact, many respondents were disdainful of form letters. Another respondent answered that the definition of effective communication is, “NOT a form letter. Something that is concise and to the point--no one has time to read long letters. Always include complete contact information (address, phone, email). Always spell check your letters. Do not use threatening language.”

Many respondents voiced the desire for, “cogent and timely, relevant to specific matters before the legislature, using accurate information.” Clarity was stressed repeatedly, as were personal relationships and the ability to make sure the legislator actually heard what the constituent was trying to say. The message, more than the medium, seems to determine whether or not the constituent is communicating effectively, as mentioned here, “clear message whether in-person, phone or e-mail. a clear message will have a specific purpose and relate to a specific bill or budget item.”

It is important to build a relationship with one’s representatives. This helps to create trust levels. As one respondent wrote, “constituents must be sure that their legislator hears their concern. Personal contact is the best way of doing this. Constituents should ask their legislator if they can meet for coffee and talk, either in district or in Olympia. Frequent communications should be established and maintained.”

Interviews

In my survey, I asked respondents if they would be willing to participate in a brief follow-up interview to further assist my research. Six respondents stated that they would be happy to be interviewed. I was able to arrange interviews with three of them. Two interviews were conducted over the phone and one was conducted in person. These three respondents were all asked the same questions. All three respondents were state representatives, all were male, two were democrats and one republican. The questions posed to them were:

1. What method of communication is most effective from constituents?
2. Tell me about the last time you contacted a member who represented you.
3. What is the most memorable constituent communication you have received?
4. Was it effective? Why or why not?
5. Please define what “effective communication” means to you.

My first interview was with Representative Al O’Brien. Representative O’Brien finds email to be the most effective method of communication, especially in light of the fact that the legislature is provided with laptops. O’Brien was trained in how to respond to emails and use the laptop, but just put the laptop away at his desk at first. Now he is heavily into it. Before the laptops and email, he preferred phone calls and handwritten letters. Less effective are mass mailings and form letters.

When I asked Representative O'Brien about how he contacted his representatives, he informed me that he was going to have coffee with one of them the next day. He also mentioned that talks to his Jay Inslee, his representative, quite often and generally calls him on the phone.

Representative O'Brien's most memorable communication was received from a conservative constituent who was less than thrilled with his new legislator. O'Brien offered to meet up with the constituent to discuss the issue, however the constituent asked that instead O'Brien come to his house. The constituent was disabled and unable to meet O'Brien in a coffee shop. O'Brien agreed to meet the constituent and after an hour and half of in depth conversation the two understood each other better. The two continued to have coffees together each quarter and maintained a good relationship until the constituent's death last year.

O'Brien also mentioned another memorable constituent communication. While campaigning for re-election about eight or nine years ago, the legislator was on his way out the door for some door-belling when the phone rang. He answered the phone to discover a constituent calling him to give him his life story. O'Brien couldn't walk out, this call was obviously important to the man on the other end of the line. The constituent was calling O'Brien to ask for help after having lost everything when the dotcom bubble burst in the late '90s and early 2000s. He had mortgaged his home and lost nearly everything, yet he was hopeful that things would turn around. It was then that he began to lose his sight. He lost his business, he and his wife starting having conflicts and she left and took their children. At the time when he called Representative O'Brien, his 15 year old son

was living with him again and the two of them were sharing a tent. He was calling his legislator from a phone booth, seeking help. O'Brien's wife happened to be working on Section 8 housing during that time period and started looking into ways to help this constituent. Representative O'Brien also called U.S. Senator (D-WA) Patty Murray's office and she helped the man get on social security and disability plans. Representative O'Brien found this communication to be memorable because you don't always get such strong and immediate results when working in the legislature. Often you're so busy that it's hard to watch it all.

Both of these communications were effective. In the first case, an angry constituent was able to voice concerns and eventually befriend his legislator. Strong relationships mean effective communication. In the second instance of constituent communication, the constituent took a chance and ended up getting, instead of legislation, a new lease on life.

Representative O'Brien defines effective communication as "getting the message across." This is important because so many issues go through each session (sometimes between three and five thousand topics a biennium) that there's no way on earth legislators can carefully peruse each and every bill proposal or amendment. Legislators depend on their constituents to convey messages in order to help them be better representatives. Effective communication means providing strong and open rationale for choices. Representative O'Brien said that suspicion about issues and motives makes people start splitting hairs which makes good legislation more difficult to achieve.

My next interview was with Representative Ed Orcutt. According to Representative Orcutt, the most effective communication generally takes place outside of session. He encourages constituents to meet up with him in district or come see him. Email works well, as it can be sent anytime. He also always has email in front of him.

He contacts those who represent him through email. He has also had the opportunity to go and meet up with them in D.C. Also, if he happens to be in the same place as those who represent him, it's a good opportunity to talk. He generally corresponds through email and letters. Email seems to be the best method.

Representative Orcutt mentioned several communications from constituents. The first memorable communication mentioned was an email from a constituent letting him know that he had been featured by her in a letter to the editor. He was mentioned because he had responded to her messages while one of her other representatives had not responded. He responded to this "friendly democrat" and got back an articulate answer in which she wondered why he wasn't the one running for Congress.

A second memorable communication was from a principal in the Washougal School District. This principal invited him to come to the school to meet with other district principals to talk about education issues. He went and was invited back to attend 5th grade presentations. He again accepted. He and the principal have maintained a good exchange of information since then. Representative Orcutt was featured in a district paper and he expects more contact in the future

and a better working relationship for education issues. He enjoys going to the school classes and also went to five of them in the Camas School District.

Representative Orcutt feels that you can have a very effective relationship through email. The goal of effective communication is for both parties to have a better understanding of one another. When people call and email he can explain his position and the things he is already doing in the arena they're interested in. Through conversation he can discover whether or not the bill his constituents are referencing will solve the problems they want it to. In this light, his communications with the principal have been very effective.

Effective communication to Representative Orcutt is when someone is able to get their point across so that people know exactly what it is that the person needs. Through effective communication you will be able to tell the difference between what you thought you needed and what you actually do need. It's easiest to determine the best solution after learning about the issue. Ineffective communication is when constituents contact the representative to ask him to pass a bill in its entirety and vote down any amendments without having first checked out whether or not he has sponsored any of those amendments.

My final interview was with Representative Larry Springer. Representative Springer feels that a handwritten letter is the most effective means of communication. Although he receives them only occasionally, he says they are effective because when writing out a letter people have to take the effort to think about the issues, write about them, explain their views and stamp the letter all before it's even on its way to a legislator. Phone calls are also considered to be

effective by Representative Springer, especially when it is apparent that the caller has carefully considered the issues. When asked about contacting those who represent him, Representative Springer has most recently called city council members who represent him when he has wanted to discuss an issue.

Unfortunately, the most memorable communication from a constituent was a hand written note left at his store. The note consisted of a thinly veiled threat. “It happens occasionally. Rarely, but it does happen,” he said of the incident. Four to six years ago it would have probably been ignored. Times are more volatile now. These things need to be taken seriously. On the positive side, his best recent constituent communications have been letters from children thanking him for coming into their classrooms to discuss the legislative process. He considered the threat to be ineffective. The intent was to get him to respond to the issue. Instead, the author of the threat had a negative influence. A better response would have been a non-threatening phone call or a well thought out email or letter. Emails and letters that are carefully thought out and respectful are more effective than those that are not well thought out. He specifically mentioned disliking letters and email using all capital letters and also form emails. He received about 5000 emails last session.

Representative Springer defines “effective communication” as when someone contacts him and has clearly thought out their position. He wants those who contact him to be able to not only define the problem they’re addressing, he also wants to know why their proposed answer is the best and who is against what

they're proposing. Every good idea has someone who is against it for one reason or another.

Findings

Based on my literature review, surveys, and interviews, I found some underlying themes that influence the effectiveness of constituent communications to their legislators. Constituents who deliver a well thought out, respectful message offering insight and advice are taken more seriously than those who call or email with a snap judgment. According to my survey results, the single most effective means of communicating with your legislators is to meet with them in person. If you want to convey a message, it would be wise to arrange an in-person visit to your representative either at their office or for coffee. This kind of communication brings you face to face with those responsible for representing you and provides you with a great opportunity to develop a working relationship. The next most effective means of communication are phone call, emails, with the exception of form emails, and hand-written personal letters. If you want to get your legislators attention, write them a personal email or call them with a message that you have carefully thought through.

When talking to your representative about issues, it is important that you have a strong understanding of not only the issue at hand, but your legislator's stand on the issue as well. If you ask your legislator to vote something down that they have authored, you are unlikely to be successful. A better tactic might be to arrange a visit with your legislator so that you can hear their point of view and offer yours. It is also advisable to learn who opposes any ideas or solutions you

would like to present. This way you give your legislator a chance to look at all options and determine an argument or course of action.

Prior to researching this topic, I conducted a literature review. Based on the studies I came across in my literature review, I was a little surprised to find that email is considered to be such an effective form of communication. It is apparent that as email has become a more commonplace, acceptable, and useful part of our daily lives. So long as emails are as well thought out as a letter, they are just as, if not more, effective. In fact, the ability of email to be timely is a great advantage, as seen in my interviews. For example, Alperin and Shultz, in their study, came to the conclusion that email was not an effective method of communication with state representatives because it came across as rushed, informal and impersonal. Hand written letters and in-person visits were rated more highly. In my study, while in-person visits were still rated as more effective than emails and testimony given at a hearing was a close second, email communication was rated as just as effective as hand written letters and phone calls and slight more effective than typed letters. (See TABLE 1.0)

As seen in the literature review, Sheffer's study in Illinois in 2000 also found email to be a lesser form of communication, contrary to my findings in the state of Washington. While Sheffer initially assumed that email would be an influential tool, this hypothesis turned out to be untrue. Sheffer writes, "Legislators expressed a sense of caution about responding to constituent e-mail. That caution presented itself in several forms, including a reluctance to change personal political agendas and a delay in responding to certain e-mails." As in

other works, Sheffer was sure to note that one of the chief problems with the use of email as an effective communication tool was difficulty in sorting emails from constituents and non-constituents. These problems seem to have faded away for the most part, as email based communication becomes more and more prevalent. To me, this means that given the changing acceptance of various media for constituent communication, it may not be the method that informs efficaciousness, but the message.

This can be seen from responses to my open-ended survey question regarding definitions of effective communication. While specific methods of communication were rarely mentioned in responses, the desire for a clear, concise and well thought out message in any medium was readily apparent. In fact, so long as constituents were non-threatening and could provide a reasoned argument it appears as though so long as form letters or email are not used, the communication will be read and evaluated and generally responded to in a manner as thoughtful as the one the constituent employed.

There are several ways in which constituents communicate with legislators who represent their districts. Please rate each of the following on its effectiveness.

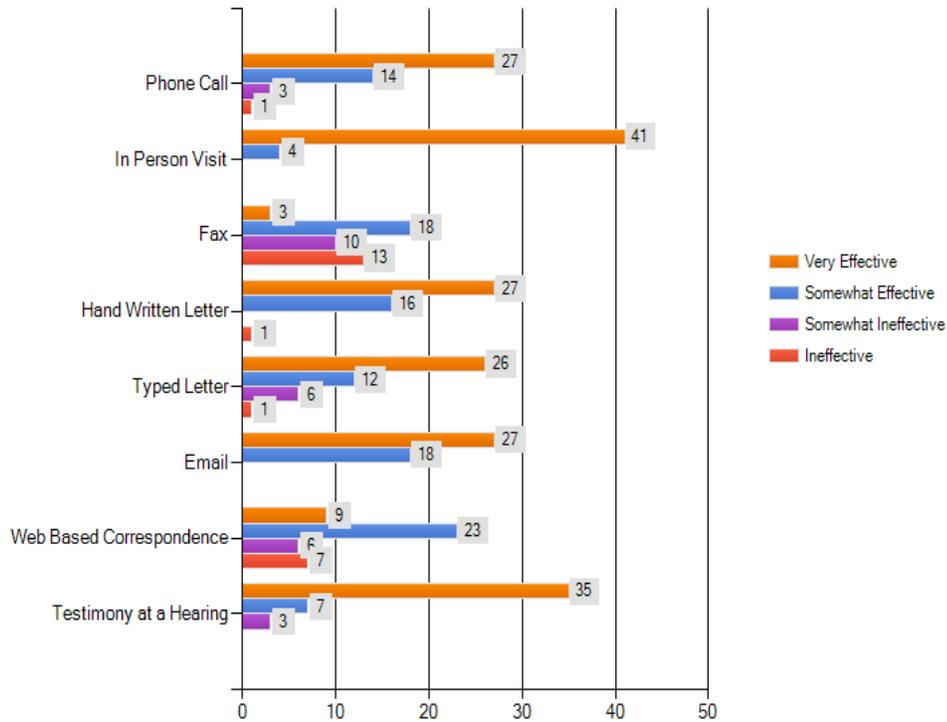


CHART 2.0

While in-person visits are clearly seen as the most effective means of legislative communication and testimony at hearings is a close second (Chart 2.0), what is most important is a constituents ability to concisely and clearly state their message. This was also seen in my interviews. Representatives O’Brien, Orcutt and Springer all had similar definitions of effective communication, each without specifically relying on any given medium. O’Brien defined effective communication as “getting the message across.” Orcutt defined it as someone getting their point across so that what they need can be determined. Springer defined effective communication as someone getting ahold of him and explaining a clearly thought out position on an issue. Each of these definitions is not media

reliant. They are instead content reliant and work better once a relationship has been established.

Discussion and Areas for Future Research

While this research has been a good start, if I were to conduct this study again, I would attempt to find a time of year to get responses in that would not interfere with the legislative session. While I carefully planned my survey release time to be after the regular session had ended, it happened to fall into the special legislative session as announced by Governor Gregoire. While I did receive many responses to the survey, I also heard that a few potential respondents were too busy trying to determine the state's budget to be able to respond. Another thing I would change in this process would be to consolidate the response process. I offered respondents multiple ways of giving me survey answers. Only two respondents out of 46 total respondents opted for completion methods other than using the surveymonkey.com tool that I created. One chose to answer over the phone while I filled in the tool and the other answered the questions in an email. Finally, I would work to redefine "web-based correspondence." I had intended "web-based correspondence" to mean use of tools like Facebook, twitter and LinkedIn for constituent communication. After reviewing my survey answers, however, I learned that at least one of my respondents classified emailed form letters as a type of web-based correspondence. As has been seen, this may be the most ineffective method of communication available in Washington, barring threats. It seems to me that given the new found acceptance of personal email as an effective form of constituent communication in Washington, web-based

correspondence through social networking sites may become a serious and relevant form of communication.

In the literature review, the assumption was made that communications will become more heavily reliant on constituent emails in the near future, if for no other reason than the fact that “the state legislative budget does not include a line item for members’ technology needs beyond Microsoft Office and Outlook” (Barko, 10). While emails were not rated as the most effective means of constituent communication, the results of the survey and interviews conducted clearly demonstrate this trend. Where emails were a reality for some “computer types” (Frantzich, 1986, p.133), but not for the general public in 1986, emails are now readily available to all constituents. Even those without a home computer can access the internet free of charge at their local library.

Frantzich (Frantzich, 1986) also explains that a message from a constituent stands a far better chance of making a strong impact on a member of Congress and his/her position on a topic BEFORE the Congressional member has made a public statement declaring their stance on said topic. This tendency is explained by Robert B. Cialdini (Cialdini, 2009) in further detail. This was echoed in my interview with Representative Orcutt when he explained that ineffective communication is when constituents contact the representative to ask him to pass a bill in its entirety and vote down any amendments without having first checked out whether or not he has sponsored any of those amendments.

Stayner determined that individuals can act alone at different points in time and “rely on the cumulative input to make an impact” (Stayner, 2007, p.

160). Forms of individual “attitude-expression” on the rise include: petition signing, email chain letters, colored ribbons or wristbands, blogging, v-logging (video logging) and SMS texting. While this is true and constituents are using things like email chain letters and online petitions when contacting legislators, the survey results, especially those in the open-ended section asking respondents to define effective communication, speak against this. Respondent felt that email chain letters and online petitions were actually a very ineffective means of communication.

The survey results correspond well to the advice given on the various websites viewed as part of the literature review. The Washington State Legislature’s advice to constituents, asking that they be well prepared, specific and concise and keep from berating their legislators, is precisely what survey respondents considered effective (Washington State Legislature, 2010, Guide to effective participation, para.16). The Wisconsin State Arts Board was also in line with survey findings. Especially in writing on their site that “perhaps the most effective way of getting your views across to your legislator is through a personal visit” (Wisconsin State Arts Board, 2009, content no longer available). The Christian Life Resources site advised constituents to write a letter instead of sending an email whenever possible because “though e-mail is convenient, letters hold more weight to your legislator” (Christian Life Resources, 2009, Tips for legislative communication, para.1). Survey results do not back this up. According to respondents, the difference in effectiveness between emails and letters is so minimal that constituents should choose the method with which they are most

comfortable. The site also recommend that letters be specifically crafted for each representative to whom it will be sent. This is evidenced in survey results, again especially with the open-ended definition section.

If I were to pursue this topic further, I would look more deeply into the use of technology in legislative communications. I would like to survey legislative websites and social networking sites in order to determine whether or not legislators actively communicating with constituents in cyberspace were able to cultivate relationships with constituents which might provide for more meaningful and effective dialogues. I would also like to study effective legislative communications from a different angle. Rather than asking again what methods of communication are more effective for constituents when contacting legislators, I would be interested to learn which methods of communication from legislators were most accessible and effective for constituents.

Conclusion

In conclusion, effective communication can be conducted through many different media. Personal contact and well thought out messages are key elements to effective communication. In order for representative democracy to function properly, it is imperative that constituents understand how to effectively communicate with their representatives. Based on my research, constituents in the state of Washington should work on clear, concise and non-threatening communication when talking to their legislators. Regardless of the medium used for communication, the key to effectiveness is to clearly state an issue and be capable of explaining proposed outcomes or concerns. The most effective method

of communication is to take time out of your day and go to visit your legislator. This will allow your legislator to get to know you as a person and also ask questions for clarification as needed. Go to your meeting prepared with your speaking points, or better yet, a one-page paper outlining your arguments/ideas, as mentioned by one of the survey respondents. Your legislators are people who deal with a high volume of communications each day. The more clear, concise and understandable your communication is, the better they can serve you.

Should you not be able to meet your representative in person, the next most effective means of communication is to give testimony at a hearing about the bill that you are interested in. This is a formal process that provides legislators with valuable perspective on timely issues. If this doesn't seem to suit your needs, your next favored options are to either call your representative, send them a handwritten letter or write a well-thought out email and send that to them. According to survey responses, each of these are equally effective methods of communication amongst respondents and, if you are clear and concise, you will get your message across.

There are a few methods of communication that should be avoided. Threatening messages and disrespectful language will be detrimental to the effectiveness of your correspondence. Threats are taken seriously and will do nothing to encourage your legislator to back your issue. Also, form letters are considered very ineffective amongst those surveyed and interviewed. Your legislators want an individual message from you. This helps them to understand exactly what effect certain measure might have on their constituents and allows

them to make an informed representative decision. Form letters do not demonstrate that you, as a constituent, have spent time thinking about the issue and its effects on you. It only shows that you have clicked the send button on someone else's website or in response to some organization or other's email. Your communication is more effective when you take the time to sit down and either discuss your ideas with your legislator in-person or over the phone or send them a letter or email that you have personally crafted.

Bibliography

Alperin, D. and Schultz, D. (August 2003). *E-Democracy: Legislative-Constituent Communications in Minnesota and Wisconsin*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Philadelphia Marriott Hotel, Philadelphia, PA. http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p62554_index.html (retrieved October, 2009)

Barko, Julie (2008). *E-Constituent Relationship Management for State Legislators*. George Washington University: Institute for Politics, Democracy and the Internet. http://www.ipdi.org/uploadedfiles/CRM_June17.pdf (retrieved October, 2009)

Christian Life. (<http://www.christianliferesources.com/?/giving/legislatorstips.php>) (retrieved October, 2009)

Cialdini, Robert B. (2009). *Influence: Science and practice*. Pearson: Arizona State University.

Dillman, Donald A. (2000). *Mail and Internet Surveys: The Tailored Design Method*. (2nd ed). New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc.

Facebook. (<http://www.facebook.com>) (retrieved November, 2009)

Frantzich, Stephen E. (2005). *Citizen democracy: political activists in a cynical age*. Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Frantzich, Stephen E. (1986). *Write your congressman: constituent communications and representation*. New York: Praeger.

Hester, Randolph, T. (2006). *Design for Ecological Democracy*. Cambridge, MA and London, UK: MIT Press.

Hill, Kevin (1998). *Cyber politics: citizen activism in the age of the Internet*. Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield.

Johnson, Dennis W. (2004). *Congress online: Bridging the gap between citizens and their representatives*. New York and London: Routledge.

Katz, James Everett (2008). *Handbook of mobile communication studies*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Knowledge as Power. (<http://www.knowledgeaspower.org>) (retrieved November, 2009)

LinkedIn. (<http://www.linkedin.com>) (retrieved December 2009)

McNair, Brian. (2007). *An introduction to political communication*. New York and London: Routledge.

Milbrath, Lester W. (1960). Lobbying as a communication process. *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 24, No. 1, pp. 32-53. Oxford University Press on behalf of the American Association for Public Opinion Research.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2746664>

Moveon.org (<http://www.moveon.org>). (retrieved December, 2009)

Narro, A. , Mayo, C. and Miller, A. 2008). *Legislators and Constituents: Examining Demographics and Online Communication Tools*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the NCA 94th Annual Convention, San Diego, CA.
http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p259573_index.html (retrieved 10.10.09)

Nimmo, Dan and Swanson, David L. (1990). *New directions in political communication*. Newbury Park, London and New Dehli: Sage Publications.

Patton, Zach (2008, August). Tech Comes of Age: Improving Service, Enhancing Value, Creating Community. *Governing*. pp. 62.3

Pew Research Center's Internet and American Life Project.
<http://www.pewinternet.org>. (retrieved November, 2009)

Porter, Owen H. (1974). *Legislative Experts and Outsiders: the Two-Step Flow of Communication*. *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 36, No. 3 (Aug., 1974), pp. 703-730

Publisher(s): Cambridge University Press on behalf of the Southern Political Science Association.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2129252>

Richardson, Lilliard E., Jr. and Cooper, Christopher A. (2006). E-mail Communication and the Policy Process in the State Legislature. *The Policy Studies Journal*, Vol. 34, No. 1. pp.113-129

Rosenblatt, Alan. (2002). *Representing the 20th Century Constituent*. The Future of E-Governance Workshop. Campbell Public Affairs Institute: Maxwell School of Syracuse University.

Usefulness: 3

Rubin, R.B., Rubin, A.M. and Piele, L.J. (2005). *Communication research: Strategies and sources* (6th ed). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Stayner, James. (2007). *Modern political communication*. Cambridge, UK and Malden, MA: Polity Press.

Severin, Werner J. and Tankward, James W. (2001). *Communication theories: Origins, methods, and uses in the mass media*. Longman: University of Texas at Austin.

Sheffer, Mary Lou. *State Legislators' Perceptions of the Use of Email in Constituent Communication*. (2003). Louisiana State University.

Szecsco, Tamas. (1986). *Theses on the democratization of communication*. International Political Science Review / Revue internationale de science politique, Vol. 7, No. 4, Politics and the Media (1986), pp. 435-442. Sage Publications, Ltd. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1601035> (retrieved October, 2009)

Walk-a-mile. (<http://www.walkamile.org>) (retrieved November, 2009)

Walters, Johnathan. (2009, April). O Citizen, Where Art Thou. *Governing*. pp. 60-62.

Washington State Legislature. (<http://www.leg.wa.gov/legislature>) (retrieved October, 2009)

Wisconsin State Arts Board. (<http://arts.state.wi.us/STATIC/advocacy.htm>) (retrieved October, 2009)

Yiannakis, Diana Evans. (November, 1982). *House Members' Communication Styles: Newsletters and Press Releases*. The Journal of Politics, Vol. 44, No. 4 (Nov., 1982), pp. 1049-1071. Cambridge University Press on behalf of the Southern Political Science Association
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2130673>

Young, Walter, D. (1981). *The Voices of Democracy: Politics and Communication in Canada*. Canadian Journal of Political Science / Revue canadienne de science politique, Vol. 14, No. 4 (Dec., 1981), pp. 683-700. Canadian Political Science Association and the Société québécoise de science politique
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3229772>

Appendix A

Research

In order to find relevant articles, websites, and books, I searched through online databases such as JSTOR and “communications and mass media complete” and “social sciences full text” at The Evergreen State College, The Evergreen State College Library stacks, and received assistance by visiting the Washington State Library in Tumwater, WA. I used the techniques of finding up to date articles that are relevant to my topic and then searching through the sources utilized by those authors, running multiple queries in databases looking for specific word combinations such as “constituent communication” and “legislative communication” and seeking out information on various internet sites, either cited in works I had already sourced or found through internet searches when querying the same terms I had used when trying to find articles in databases.

Up to the minute articles and publications were difficult to find. However, I was able to tap into a wealth of information through my research that enabled me to successfully present my research as a worthwhile addition to this body of knowledge, especially to legislators and residents within the state of Washington.

The vast majority of the studies on effective legislative-constituent communication were done by researchers interested in the effectiveness of varying methods of contacting Congressional Representatives and Senators. As will be seen later, there were a few publicized studies conducted that examined effective methods for communication with state legislators, but these studies are rapidly becoming outdated. These kinds of studies have also not been recently

conducted in the state of Washington. After extensive research on my own and consultation with research librarians at The Evergreen State College and The Washington State Library, I was unable to find an article, essay or thesis conducting the research that I proposed. This bespeaks a need for a more thorough examination of effective communication within the legislative branch of the state of Washington.

In order to better understand the field of legislative and constituent communications, I begin with a brief sojourn into former views of what constituted the norm in political communications between voters and elected officials. Much of the information I was able to glean was not specifically oriented towards state legislatures. Most of the books and publications seemed to center primarily around Congressional communications. While these helped me to gain insight into the larger picture of legislative communications, I found the articles on specific state legislatures to be the most useful to my research and analysis.

Appendix B

Survey Tools

COVER LETTER AND CONSENT FORM FOR ONLINE SURVEY

Dear Participant,

Thank you in advance for participating in my survey. I am a graduate student at The Evergreen State College. In order to complete my studies, I am conducting research that will go into my graduate thesis. I am working with my thesis advisor to conduct a research project titled, "Effective Constituent Communication with the Washington State Legislature." The purpose of this research is to determine, based upon responses by Washington State legislators and their direct staff, what method of communication is most effective from constituents.

The information you provide will be used for research material in my final thesis paper. The survey is 14 questions long and will take approximately ten to fifteen minutes of your time. There will be no compensation of any kind available for your participation, which is completely voluntary. At your request, I will provide you with a copy of the final draft.

Any risks to you are minimal, and would likely be nothing more than mild embarrassment from sharing your opinions about effective constituent communication. . It is possible you may be frustrated by the questions asked or the time needed to participate. Your participation on this project is completely voluntary and you can opt out of the project at any time. Your identity will be kept strictly confidential. As mentioned above, I will use your responses only as resource material for my thesis paper on effective constituent communication with the Washington State Legislature. If you have any questions about this project or your participation in it, you can call me at 360.349.4104. My email address is: milles26@evergreen.edu.

The person to contact if you experience problems as a result of your participation in this project is:
Eddy Brown, Academic Dean at The Evergreen State College, Library 2002, Olympia, WA 98505; Phone 360.867.6972.

By completing and submitting this survey, as a participant, you are providing your informed consent.

Thank you again for your time and participation!

Sincerely,

Leslie Wolff
The Evergreen State College
Masters in Public Administration Program

SURVEY FOR RESEARCH

Page: Effective Constituent Communication

1. How often do you personally use the following forms of communication when working on legislative business?

	answered question				46
	skipped question				2
	Frequently	Intermittently	Rarely	N/A	Response Count
In Person Visit	56.5% (26)	26.1% (12)	15.2% (7)	2.2% (1)	46
Web Based Correspondence	37.0% (17)	30.4% (14)	23.9% (11)	8.7% (4)	46
Phone Call	80.0% (36)	15.6% (7)	2.2% (1)	2.2% (1)	45
Fax	0.0% (0)	6.7% (3)	75.6% (34)	17.8% (8)	45
Typed Letter	32.6% (15)	37.0% (17)	28.3% (13)	2.2% (1)	46
Hand Written Letter	13.3% (6)	33.3% (15)	44.4% (20)	8.9% (4)	45
Email	91.3% (42)	6.5% (3)	0.0% (0)	2.2% (1)	46

2. There are several ways in which constituents communicate with legislators who represent their districts. Please rate each of the following on its effectiveness.

	answered question				45
	skipped question				3
	Very Effective	Somewhat Effective	Somewhat Ineffective	Ineffective	Response Count
Phone Call	60.0% (27)	31.1% (14)	6.7% (3)	2.2% (1)	45
In Person Visit	91.1% (41)	8.9% (4)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	45
Fax	6.8% (3)	40.9% (18)	22.7% (10)	29.5% (13)	44
Hand Written Letter	61.4% (27)	36.4% (16)	0.0% (0)	2.3% (1)	44
Typed Letter	57.8% (26)	26.7% (12)	13.3% (6)	2.2% (1)	45
Email	60.0% (27)	40.0% (18)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	45
Web Based Correspondence	20.0% (9)	51.1% (23)	13.3% (6)	15.6% (7)	45
Testimony at a Hearing	77.8% (35)	15.6% (7)	6.7% (3)	0.0% (0)	45

3. During the 2010 Legislative Session, was constituent correspondence for each of the following lighter than usual, heavier than usual or about the same as usual?

	answered question				46
	skipped question				2
	Heavier than Usual	Lighter than Usual	About the Same as Usual	N/A	Response Count
Phone Call	35.6% (16)	13.3% (6)	48.9% (22)	2.2% (1)	45
In Person Visit	32.6% (15)	17.4% (8)	47.8% (22)	2.2% (1)	46
Fax	13.0% (6)	15.2% (7)	52.2% (24)	19.6% (9)	46
Hand Written Letter	8.7% (4)	23.9% (11)	65.2% (30)	2.2% (1)	46
Web Based	44.4% (20)	2.2% (1)	42.2% (19)	11.1% (5)	45

3. During the 2010 Legislative Session, was constituent correspondence for each of the following lighter than usual, heavier than usual or about the same as usual?

Correspondence	Lighter than usual	Heavier than usual	About the same as usual	Other	Count
Typed Letter	10.9% (5)	32.6% (15)	54.3% (25)	2.2% (1)	46
Email	73.9% (34)	0.0% (0)	23.9% (11)	2.2% (1)	46
Testimony at a Hearing	17.4% (8)	13.0% (6)	60.9% (28)	8.7% (4)	46

4. If you were to contact a legislator who represented you, which correspondence method would be your first choice?

	answered question	skipped question	Response Percent	Response Count
				46
				2
Phone Call			19.6%	9
In Person Visit			43.5%	20
Fax			0.0%	0
Hand Written Letter			2.2%	1
Typed Letter			6.5%	3
Email			26.1%	12
Web Based			2.2%	1
Correspondence				
Testimony at a Hearing			0.0%	0

5. By your estimation, how effective is your legislative website? answered question 46- skipped question 2

Response	Percent Response	Count
Very Effective	32.6%	15
Somewhat Effective	56.5%	26
Somewhat Ineffective	4.3%	2
Very Ineffective	6.5%	3
N/A	0.0%	0

How would you describe what "effective communication" means to you in reference to constituent communications with legislators?

Response
Count

38

answered question 38

skipped question 10

Response Text

1 Communication that accurately conveys information in a manner calculated to be considered in connection with or to influence the outcome

Mar 19, 2010 10:26 PM
2 concise thought without threats Mar 19, 2010 10:27 PM
3 Points being short and to the point
Mar 19, 2010 10:29 PM
4 Effective communication states the facts of the issue and what needs to be done to change it or solve the problem
Mar 19, 2010 10:41 PM
5 To me, effectiveness is based on how fast I can respond, how legible it is (or if on the phone, how easily understood). I include form letters from websites as "Web Communications."
Mar 19, 2010 10:41 PM
6 Talking directly to the legislator about the issues. Mar 19, 2010 10:53 PM
7 Conveying the constituent's point of view and, if necessary, persuading me to support that point of view
Mar 19, 2010 10:55 PM
8 Timely, cogent and clearly-expressed concerns that attract legislators' attention to specific issues currently before the legislature
Mar 20, 2010 12:09 AM
9 Constituents must be sure that their legislator hears their concern. Personal contact is the best way of doing this. Constituents should ask their legislator if they can meet for coffee and talk, either in district or in Olympia. Frequent communications should be established and maintained.
Mar 20, 2010 2:45 PM
10 A precise communication that can be read quickly but expresses their point. Definitely not a form letter.
Mar 21, 2010 3:15 PM
11 Expressed in a way that legitimate concerns (not fear based) are heard. Communication must be civil. To the point- not rambling and long.
Mar 23, 2010 12:19 AM
12 A meaningful, personal letter written by someone with direct experience or concerns in how an issue might impact them.
Mar 23, 2010 3:58 PM
13 the ability of the constituent to succinctly describe the problem, why their solution is best, and who might be opposed to their solution
Mar 23, 2010 7:49 PM
14 Email, clearly written, respectful Mar 28, 2010 6:59 AM
15 feedback. Mar 29, 2010 3:51 AM
16 A one on one visit to hear exactly what their problem/views are - e-mails are also very effective.
Mar 29, 2010 4:51 PM
17 making an effort to present a cogent argument for/against an idea under the purview of the state legislature.
Mar 30, 2010 6:30 PM
18 Effective communication allows both the constituent and the Representative to effectively and openly convey their opinions
Mar 31, 2010 7:02 PM
19 NOT a form letter. Something that is concise and to the point--no one has time to read long letters. Always include complete contact information (address, phone, email). Always spell check your letters. Do not use threatening language.
Apr 2, 2010 7:15 PM
20 conveying a message. Apr 2, 2010 7:53 PM
21 something that clearly states an opinion about an issue or a bill and is in a format that can be easily given to the senator
Apr 2, 2010 9:25 PM
22 personalized messages are very important Apr 2, 2010 9:43 PM

23 Short, to the point. Constituent only Apr 2, 2010 10:18 PM

24 That which is likely to get a reply from the legislator. Apr 2, 2010 10:36 PM

25 clear message whether in-person, phone or e-mail. a clear message will have a specific purpose and relate to a specific bill or budget item.
Apr 2, 2010 10:46 PM

26 Email, its easier to respond too. Apr 2, 2010 11:02 PM

27 When a constituent is able to quickly and concisely relay their concerns or requests in a respectful manner.
Apr 2, 2010 11:04 PM

28 Effective communicatin comes from building a relationship with a legislator. Just spending some time emailing them or meeting with them helps a legislator remember you more. Because we recieve thousands of emails a week it's difficult to process all of those. but if we recognize the name and the person it is easier for us to remember what you are trying to communicate to us.
Apr 2, 2010 11:58 PM

29 clear and concise presentation of the facts and arguement. Apr 5, 2010 3:55 PM

30 cogent and timely, relevant to specific matters before the legislature, using accurate information
Apr 5, 2010 8:29 PM

31 Ease of use, ability to find most any needed piece of information. Apr 5, 2010 9:22 PM

32 Able to persuasively communicate an argument for or against an issue. Apr 5, 2010 9:38 PM

33 Clear and concise requests, how proposed legislation would directly effect the constituent also included.
Apr 8, 2010 10:18 PM

34 A letter or email that is written by the constituent (not a form letter, or "on behalf of" the constituent) and which clearly and courteously identifies a problem or concern regarding a specific issue and requests a response.
Apr 15, 2010 4:16 PM

35 Communication that is clear, to the point, and articulated in such a way that allows the Representative to know what the constituent thinks, wants, feels, and gives the Representative a clear line of questioning to which he can respond if necessary. Also, form e-mails from organizations are LARGELY ineffective.
Apr 15, 2010 9:09 PM

36 Make personal contact. Have a one page written sheet to provide to them. Have follow up.
Apr 15, 2010 9:40 PM

37 That the end result is the constituent being empowered with information. If they have a question or want information, they get an accurate response. If they have a action reqeust, it is followed up on to the degree possible.
Apr 15, 2010 10:52 PM

38 When someone comes in, states the problem or issue and offers a solution, then answers questions I have of their situation/problem/solution.
May 19, 2010 3:16 AM

Gender Identification

	answered question	35
	skipped question	13
	Response Percent	Response Count
Female	42.9%	15
Male	57.1%	20

Occupation

answered question	35
skipped question	13
Response	Response

Gender Identification

	Percent	Count
Legislator for the Senate	11.4%	4
Legislator for the House	34.3%	12
Staff for a Member	54.3%	19

How long have you held this position?

	answered question	35
	skipped question	13
	Response Percent	Response Count
0-2 Years	20.0%	7
2-4 Years	25.7%	9
5-10 Years	37.1%	13
More than 10 Years	17.1%	6

Age Range

	answered question	35
	skipped question	13
	Response Percent	Response Count
20 or Under	0.0%	0
21-30	25.7%	9
31-40	5.7%	2
41-50	31.4%	11
51-60	11.4%	4
61-70	25.7%	9
Over 70	0.0%	0

Which option best describes the district that your office represents?

	answered question	34
	skipped question	14
	Response Percent	Response Count
Eastern Washington	20.6%	7
Western Washington	76.5%	26
Central Washington	2.9%	1

Which option best describes the district that your office represents?

	answered question	34
	skipped question	14
	Response Percent	Response Count
Urban	23.5%	8
Suburban	47.1%	16
Rural	29.4%	10

7. What is your highest level of education?

	answered question	35
	skipped question	13
	Response Percent	Response Count
Less Than High School	0.0%	0

7. What is your highest level of education?

High School/GED	0.0%	0
Some College	20.0%	7
Two Year Degree	2.9%	1
Four Year Degree	25.7%	9
Some Graduate School	14.3%	5
Graduate Degree	37.1%	13

Interview Tools

CONSENT FORM FOR INTERVIEW

I, _____, hereby agree to serve as a subject in the research project titled “Effective Constituent Communication with the Washington State Legislature.” It has been explained to me that its purpose is to gather information about which methods of communication are most effective when constituents contact their Washington State Legislative Senators and Representatives.

I have been informed that the information I provide will be used for a thesis paper by Leslie Wolff for a Masters of Public Administration Thesis. I also understand that my confidentiality will be waived, and that my interview responses will be documented and may be included in the final version of Leslie Wolff’s thesis.

I understand that the risks to me are minimal, and would likely be nothing more than mild embarrassment from sharing my opinions about effective constituent communication.

There will be no compensation of any kind available for my participation. Leslie Wolff has agreed to provide, at my request, a copy of the final draft of her paper. I understand that if I have any questions about this project or my participation in it, I can call Leslie Wolff at 360.349.4104, or email her at:

milles26@evergreen.edu.

Likewise, the person to contact if I experience problems as a result of my participation in this project is Eddy Brown, Academic Dean at The Evergreen State College, Library 2002, Olympia, WA 98505; Phone 360.867.6972.

I understand that my participation in this project is completely voluntary, and that my choice of whether to participate in this project will not jeopardize my relationship with The Evergreen State College. I am free to withdraw at any point before or during the survey and potential follow-up interview. I have read and agree to the foregoing.

Signature _____

Date _____

COVER LETTER FOR INTERVIEWS

Dear Participant,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in an interview. I am a graduate student at The Evergreen State College. In order to complete my studies, I am conducting research that will go into my graduate thesis. I am working with my thesis advisor to conduct a research project titled, "Effective Constituent Communication with the Washington State Legislature." The purpose of this research is to determine, based upon responses by Washington State legislators and their direct staff, what method of communication is most effective from constituents.

The information you provide will be used for research material in my final thesis paper. This five question interview will take approximately fifteen minutes of your time. There will be no compensation of any kind available for your participation, which is completely voluntary. At your request, I will provide you with a copy of the final draft of my thesis.

By participating in this interview, you are agreeing to have your confidentiality waived. Your responses will be documented and may be included in the final version of my thesis. Any risks to you are minimal, and would likely be nothing more than mild embarrassment from sharing your opinions about effective constituent communication. It is also possible you may be frustrated by the questions asked or the time needed to participate. Your participation on this project is completely voluntary and you can opt out of the project at any time.

As mentioned above, I will use your responses as resource material for my thesis paper on effective constituent communication with the Washington State Legislature.

If you have any questions about this project or your participation in it, you can call me at 360.349.4104. My email address is: milles26@evergreen.edu.

The person to contact if you experience problems as a result of your participation in this project is:

Eddy Brown, Academic Dean at The Evergreen State College, Library 2002, Olympia, WA 98505; Phone 360.867.6972.

Thank you again for your time and participation!

Sincerely,

Leslie Wolff
The Evergreen State College
Masters in Public Administration Program

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

6. What method of communication is most effective from constituents?
7. Tell me about the last time you contacted a member who represented you.
8. What is the most memorable constituent communication you have received?
9. Was it effective? Why or why not?
10. Please define what “effective communication” means to you.

PHONE INTERVIEW SCRIPT

Hello. This is Leslie Wolff from The Evergreen State College.

Can I have a few moments of your time?

Thank you.

I am a graduate student at The Evergreen State College. In order to complete my studies, I am conducting research that will go into my graduate thesis. I am working with my thesis advisor to conduct a research project titled, “Effective Constituent Communication with the Washington State Legislature.” The purpose of this research is to determine, based upon responses by Washington State legislators and their direct staff, what method of communication is most effective from constituents.

The information you provide will be used for research material in my final thesis paper. This five question interview will take approximately fifteen minutes of your time. There will be no compensation of any kind available for your participation, which is completely voluntary. At your request, I will provide you with a copy of the final draft of my thesis.

By participating in this interview, you are agreeing to have your confidentiality waived. Your responses will be documented and may be included in the final version of my thesis. Any risks to you are minimal, and would likely be nothing more than mild embarrassment from sharing your opinions about effective constituent communication. It is also possible you may be frustrated by the questions asked or the time needed to participate. Your participation on this project is completely voluntary and you can opt out of the project at any time.

I will use your responses as resource material for my thesis paper on effective constituent communication with the Washington State Legislature.

I'm going to give you some contact information now. Do you have a pen?

If you have any questions about this project or your participation in it, you can call me at 360.349.4104. My email address is: milles26@evergreen.edu.

The person to contact if you experience problems as a result of your participation in this project is:

Eddy Brown, Academic Dean at The Evergreen State College, Library 2002, Olympia, WA 98505; Phone 360.867.6972.

Do I have your permission to continue with the interview?

Thank you.

1. What method of communication is most effective from constituents?
2. Tell me about the last time you contacted a member who represented you.
3. What is the most memorable constituent communication you have received?
4. Was it effective? Why or why not?
5. Please define what "effective communication" means to you.

Appendix C

Response Table Analysis

While I know that these findings are not statistically valid, I thought future researchers may be interested in deeper analysis of responses along demographic lines. Therefore, I ran a Response Table for each of the questions and looked at direct results on my question. This should provide some insight to Washington State constituents when trying to determine the best way to get ahold of their particular Senator or Representative. Out of the 33 respondents, 14 were gender identified as women and 19 as men.

Answer Options	Female	Male
Phone Call		
Very Effective	6	11
Somewhat Effective	7	7
Somewhat Ineffective	1	0
Ineffective	0	1
In Person Visit		
Very Effective	11	18
Somewhat Effective	3	1
Somewhat Ineffective	0	0
Ineffective	0	0
Fax		
Very Effective	0	2
Somewhat Effective	6	6
Somewhat Ineffective	5	5
Ineffective	3	5
Hand Written Letter		
Very Effective	9	8
Somewhat Effective	4	10
Somewhat Ineffective	0	0
Ineffective	1	0
Typed Letter		
Very Effective	8	10
Somewhat Effective	2	6
Somewhat Ineffective	3	3

Ineffective	1	0
Email		
Very Effective	7	12
Somewhat Effective	7	7
Somewhat Ineffective	0	0
Ineffective	0	0
Web Based Correspondence		
Very Effective	3	2
Somewhat Effective	6	11
Somewhat Ineffective	2	3
Ineffective	3	3
Testimony at a Hearing		
Very Effective	10	14
Somewhat Effective	3	3
Somewhat Ineffective	1	2
Ineffective	0	0

RESPONSE TABLE 1.0

As can be seen from the above table (RESPONSE TABLE 1.0), both men and women look upon in-person visits as the most effect means of constituent communication. This method is followed closely by testimony given at a hearing.

The next filter I used to gauge responses was occupation. (RESPONSE TABLE 1.1) Respondents were asked whether they were Senators, Representatives or staff for the legislature.

Answer Options	Legislator for the Senate	Legislator for the House	Staff for a Member
Phone Call			
Very Effective	2	5	10
Somewhat Effective	1	4	9
Somewhat Ineffective	0	1	0
Ineffective	0	1	0
In Person Visit			
Very Effective	3	10	16
Somewhat Effective	0	1	3
Somewhat Ineffective	0	0	0
Ineffective	0	0	0
Fax			

Very Effective	0	2	0
Somewhat Effective	1	1	10
Somewhat Ineffective	1	3	6
Ineffective	1	4	3
Hand Written Letter			
Very Effective	0	7	10
Somewhat Effective	3	2	9
Somewhat Ineffective	0	0	0
Ineffective	0	1	0
Typed Letter			
Very Effective	1	7	10
Somewhat Effective	2	2	4
Somewhat Ineffective	0	2	4
Ineffective	0	0	1
Email			
Very Effective	2	7	10
Somewhat Effective	1	4	9
Somewhat Ineffective	0	0	0
Ineffective	0	0	0
Web Based Correspondence			
Very Effective	0	2	3
Somewhat Effective	1	6	10
Somewhat Ineffective	2	1	2
Ineffective	0	2	4
Testimony at a Hearing			
Very Effective	2	8	14
Somewhat Effective	0	2	4
Somewhat Ineffective	1	1	1
Ineffective	0	0	0

RESPONSE TABLE 1.1

Out of the 33 respondents three were Senators, eleven were Representatives and 19 were staff. 67% percent of the Senators found phone calls to be very effective, 46% of Representatives did as well and 53% of staff. Each of these was the majority. In-person visits were also rated very highly amongst all three demographics with 100% of Senators, 91% of Representatives and 84% of staff members finding in-person visits to be very effective. Faxes were more widely dispersed. One Senator found faxes to be somewhat effective, one found

them somewhat ineffective and one found them ineffective. The majority of Representatives, at 40%, found them to be ineffective. The majority of staff members, however, found faxes to be somewhat effective (53%). Each of the Senators who responded found hand-written letters to be somewhat effective. The majority of Representatives and staff members found them to be highly effective. Typed letters had similar results, with the majority of Senators (67%) finding them somewhat effective and the majority of Representatives finding them very effective, 64% and 53% respectively. The majority of all three demographics found email to be a very effective method of communication (Sen. 67%, Rep. 64% and staff 53%). 67% of Senators found web-based correspondence to be somewhat ineffective, while 55% of representatives and 53% of staff members found it to be somewhat effective. Finally, the majority in all three occupations found testimony at a hearing to be very effective (Sen. 67%, Rep. 73% and staff 74%). Again, in-person visits were considered the most effective means of constituent communication with testimony at a hearing coming in second. Email was also highly rated, getting the same response as testimony at a hearing from Senators and coming slightly behind it for the other two demographics. Overall, respondents were very similar, with Senators more readily dismissive of hand-written letters, web-based correspondence and faxes than other respondents.

I asked respondents about their highest level of education. (RESPONSE TABLE 1.2) Of the 33 participants, all of them had attended college. 7 of them had attended “some college.” One received a two year degree. Eight received a four year degree. Four had attended some graduate school and had obtained a

graduate degree. When running this question as a Response Table of my research matrix, the following results were generated.

Answer Options	Some College	Two Year Degree	Four Year Degree	Some Graduate School	Graduate Degree
Phone Call					
Very Effective	4	0	5	1	7
Somewhat Effective	3	1	3	3	4
Somewhat Ineffective	0	0	0	0	1
Ineffective	0	0	0	0	1
In Person Visit					
Very Effective	6	1	7	3	12
Somewhat Effective	1	0	1	1	1
Somewhat Ineffective	0	0	0	0	0
Ineffective	0	0	0	0	0
Fax					
Very Effective	0	0	0	0	2
Somewhat Effective	4	0	4	2	2
Somewhat Ineffective	3	0	2	1	4
Ineffective	0	1	2	1	4
Hand Written Letter					
Very Effective	5	0	3	1	8
Somewhat Effective	2	1	4	3	4
Somewhat Ineffective	0	0	0	0	0
Ineffective	0	0	0	0	1
Typed Letter					
Very Effective	5	0	4	1	8
Somewhat Effective	1	1	2	1	3
Somewhat Ineffective	0	0	2	2	2
Ineffective	1	0	0	0	0
Email					
Very Effective	6	1	5	1	6
Somewhat Effective	1	0	3	3	7
Somewhat Ineffective	0	0	0	0	0
Ineffective	0	0	0	0	0
Web Based Correspondence					
Very Effective	2	0	1	0	2
Somewhat Effective	4	0	4	3	6
Somewhat Ineffective	1	1	0	0	3
Ineffective	0	0	3	1	2

Testimony at a Hearing

Very Effective	5	1	8	2	8
Somewhat Effective	1	0	0	2	3
Somewhat Ineffective	1	0	0	0	2
Ineffective	0	0	0	0	0

RESPONSE TABLE 1.2

Those with some college, four year degrees and graduate degrees most often found phone calls to be very effective. Those with some graduate school most often found them to be somewhat effective and the respondent with a two year degree found phone calls to be a somewhat effective method of communication. Each demographic represented in the education question rated in-person visits as a very effective means of communication. Faxes were rated somewhat effective amongst the majority of respondents with some college, a four year degree and some graduate school. Respondents with a graduate degree split down the middle, voting faxes to be either somewhat ineffective or ineffective. The participant with a two year degree rated them as ineffective. Hand-written letters were rated very effective by respondents with some college and with graduate degrees. Those with two year degrees, four year degrees and some graduate school rated them as somewhat effective. Typed letters were rated as very effective by respondents with some college, a four year degree or a graduate degree. The respondent with a two year degree rated them as somewhat effective and the majority of respondents with some graduate courses completed rated typed letters as somewhat ineffective. Web-based correspondence was not rated as very effective by the majority of any of the groups. Those with some college, a four year degree, some graduate school or a graduate degree tended to rate it as somewhat effective at 57%, 50%, 75% and 46% respectively. Perhaps

the most popular very effective response was for testimony at a hearing. Each group rated it as very effective. Five of the seven with some college, the one two year degree respondent, all eight of the four year degree respondents, half of the four some graduate school participants and eight of the 13 graduate degree respondents found testimony at a hearing to be a very effective method of constituent communication.

I asked respondents to tell me how many years they had spent in their current position and ran a Response Table (RESPONSE TABLE 1.3) based on that response against my guiding research question.

Answer Options	0-2 Years	2-4 Years	5-10 Years	More than 10 Years
Phone Call				
Very Effective	5	4	5	3
Somewhat Effective	2	4	5	3
Somewhat Ineffective	0	0	1	0
Ineffective	0	1	0	0
In Person Visit				
Very Effective	6	8	10	5
Somewhat Effective	1	1	1	1
Somewhat Ineffective	0	0	0	0
Ineffective	0	0	0	0
Fax				
Very Effective	1	0	0	1
Somewhat Effective	3	3	4	2
Somewhat Ineffective	2	2	3	3
Ineffective	1	3	4	0
Hand Written Letter				
Very Effective	2	3	7	5
Somewhat Effective	5	6	2	1
Somewhat Ineffective	0	0	0	0
Ineffective	0	0	1	0
Typed Letter				
Very Effective	3	3	8	4
Somewhat Effective	3	4	1	0
Somewhat Ineffective	1	2	2	1

Ineffective	0	0	0	1
Email				
Very Effective	3	4	8	4
Somewhat Effective	4	5	3	2
Somewhat Ineffective	0	0	0	0
Ineffective	0	0	0	0
Web Based Correspondence				
Very Effective	2	0	1	2
Somewhat Effective	3	6	6	2
Somewhat Ineffective	1	2	1	1
Ineffective	1	1	3	1
Testimony at a Hearing				
Very Effective	7	6	7	4
Somewhat Effective	0	2	2	2
Somewhat Ineffective	0	1	2	0
Ineffective	0	0	0	0

RESPONSE TABLE 1.3

Overall, most participants found in-person visits to be very effective, more so than any other options. Beyond this commonality there were some rather large disparities in other response categories. For example, respondents in their first two years of their position were far more likely to find phone calls very effective. Those newest to the field also unanimously found testimony at a hearing to be a very effective method of constituent communication. As a whole, respondents serving for more than two years still found in-person visits to be very effective. Demographic patterns began to show up in responses from participants who had served for five or more years. Those serving for five or more years were far more likely than those serving for less than five years to select written methods of communication as effective. Respondents serving for five or more years, on average, rated not only hand-written letters and typed letters higher than those less experienced in the field, they also rated email more highly.

Respondents were asked to classify the districts they served as being part of Central, Eastern or Western Washington. (RESPONSE TABLE 1.4)

Answer Options	Eastern Washington	Western Washington	Central Washington
Phone Call			
Very Effective	4	13	0
Somewhat Effective	3	10	1
Somewhat Ineffective	0	1	0
Ineffective	0	1	0
In Person Visit			
Very Effective	6	22	1
Somewhat Effective	1	3	0
Somewhat Ineffective	0	0	0
Ineffective	0	0	0
Fax			
Very Effective	0	2	0
Somewhat Effective	2	10	0
Somewhat Ineffective	3	6	1
Ineffective	2	6	0
Hand Written Letter			
Very Effective	2	14	1
Somewhat Effective	5	9	0
Somewhat Ineffective	0	0	0
Ineffective	0	1	0
Typed Letter			
Very Effective	2	15	1
Somewhat Effective	2	6	0
Somewhat Ineffective	2	4	0
Ineffective	1	0	0
Email			
Very Effective	4	14	1
Somewhat Effective	3	11	0
Somewhat Ineffective	0	0	0
Ineffective	0	0	0
Web Based Correspondence			
Very Effective	0	4	1
Somewhat Effective	3	14	0
Somewhat Ineffective	2	3	0
Ineffective	2	4	0

Testimony at a Hearing

Very Effective	4	19	1
Somewhat Effective	2	4	0
Somewhat Ineffective	1	2	0
Ineffective	0	0	0

RESPONSE TABLE 1.4

Of the 33 respondents, seven were from Eastern Washington, 25 from Western Washington and one from Central Washington. In both Eastern and Western Washington, phone calls were rated as highly effective. Central WA rated them as somewhat effective. It is difficult to extrapolate anything from the Central Washington figures, however, as only one respondent was from a central district. Western Washington and Eastern Washington numbers were similar to one another. On the whole, those representing Western Washington rated more item as very effective than their Eastern counterparts. This may be slightly skewed, however, because of the large number of respondents from Western Washington.

I next asked participants to classify their district as urban, suburban or rural. (RESPONSE TABLE 1.5) Out of the 33 respondents, seven were from urban areas, 16 from suburban and ten from rural.

Answer Options	Urban	Suburban	Rural
Phone Call			
Very Effective	2	8	7
Somewhat Effective	3	8	3
Somewhat Ineffective	1	0	0
Ineffective	1	0	0
In Person Visit			
Very Effective	6	14	9
Somewhat Effective	1	2	1
Somewhat Ineffective	0	0	0
Ineffective	0	0	0

Fax			
Very Effective	1	1	0
Somewhat Effective	1	6	5
Somewhat Ineffective	1	6	3
Ineffective	4	2	2
Hand Written Letter			
Very Effective	2	12	3
Somewhat Effective	4	4	6
Somewhat Ineffective	0	0	0
Ineffective	1	0	0
Typed Letter			
Very Effective	3	11	4
Somewhat Effective	2	3	3
Somewhat Ineffective	2	2	2
Ineffective	0	0	1
Email			
Very Effective	4	8	7
Somewhat Effective	3	8	3
Somewhat Ineffective	0	0	0
Ineffective	0	0	0
Web Based Correspondence			
Very Effective	2	2	1
Somewhat Effective	2	10	5
Somewhat Ineffective	1	3	1
Ineffective	2	1	3
Testimony at a Hearing			
Very Effective	5	11	8
Somewhat Effective	1	4	1
Somewhat Ineffective	1	1	1
Ineffective	0	0	0

RESPONSE TABLE 1.5

Respondents were asked to place themselves into an age category. Of the 33 who responded to the demographics portion of the survey, nine were between 21 and 30, two were between 31 and 40, eleven were 41 to 50 years old, four were between 51 and 60 and seven respondents were between the ages of 61 and 70. No participants were under 21 and no participants were over 70. Rural respondents were more likely to choose phone calls, in-person visits, testimony at

a hearing and email as very effective. No rural participants found faxes to be very effective. While in-person visits were still most highly favored by suburban participants, hand-written letters and typed letters were found to be very effective as well. In fact, suburban respondents placed hand-written letters slightly under in-person visits and the same amount of them thought that both typed letters and testimony at a hearing were very effective. Urban respondents favored in-person visits followed closely by testimony at a hearing. In all three demographic groups, email was never found to be somewhat ineffective or ineffective and seemed to be split evenly between very effective and somewhat ineffective.

I next ran an age range Response Table against my thesis question.

(RESPONSE TABLE 1.6) Respondents were asked to place themselves into an age category. Of the 33 who responded to the demographics portion of the survey, nine were between 21 and 30, two were between 31 and 40, eleven were 41 to 50 years old, four were between 51 and 60 and seven respondents were between the ages of 61 and 70. No participants were under 21 and no participants were over 70.

Answer Options	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	61-70
Phone Call					
Very Effective	4	2	5	2	4
Somewhat Effective	5	0	5	2	2
Somewhat Ineffective	0	0	0	0	1
Ineffective	0	0	1	0	0
In Person Visit					
Very Effective	7	2	10	4	6
Somewhat Effective	2	0	1	0	1
Somewhat Ineffective	0	0	0	0	0
Ineffective	0	0	0	0	0
Fax					

Very Effective	0	0	1	0	1
Somewhat Effective	5	0	4	1	2
Somewhat Ineffective	3	0	2	2	3
Ineffective	1	2	3	1	1
Hand Written Letter					
Very Effective	3	0	7	2	5
Somewhat Effective	6	2	3	2	1
Somewhat Ineffective	0	0	0	0	0
Ineffective	0	0	0	0	1
Typed Letter					
Very Effective	4	0	6	2	6
Somewhat Effective	2	2	2	2	0
Somewhat Ineffective	3	0	2	0	1
Ineffective	0	0	1	0	0
Email					
Very Effective	4	1	6	2	6
Somewhat Effective	5	1	5	2	1
Somewhat Ineffective	0	0	0	0	0
Ineffective	0	0	0	0	0
Web Based Correspondence					
Very Effective	1	0	3	0	1
Somewhat Effective	6	1	2	2	6
Somewhat Ineffective	1	0	3	1	0
Ineffective	1	1	3	1	0
Testimony at a Hearing					
Very Effective	7	2	9	3	3
Somewhat Effective	2	0	2	1	1
Somewhat Ineffective	0	0	0	0	3
Ineffective	0	0	0	0	0

RESPONSE TABLE 1.6

The majority of each age range found in-person visits to be very effective. Those in the 61-70 age range found them to be as effective as email and typed letters. Those in the 51-60 age range found them to be the most effective with testimony at a hearing following. Participants between 41 and 50 years old also found them to be most effective followed by testimony at a hearing. Those between 31 and 40 found in-person visits to be as effective as testimony at a

hearing and phone calls. Participants between 21 and 30 found in-person visits and testimony at a hearing to be equally effective with nothing else achieving a majority.