



## How to Speak to Government Officials

*Speaking to state or local officials can be intimidating. However, there are multiple instances pertaining to department needs that require frequent contact with these representatives. State and local governments provide departments with the resources necessary to fulfill their missions. Knowing how to present information to government officials is a valuable skill that can greatly benefit a department.*

**CREATE A RELATIONSHIP:** First and foremost, as leadership in a local fire department, a Chief should have open and frequent communication with their local government. While maintaining a relationship with the state government may be a more difficult task, it is still beneficial to have some sort of representation at the state level. Keep in mind, when working with elected officials, it is important to remain neutral to political views and not to openly support any one candidate.

**CREATE A PLAN FOR PRESENTATION:** Have a presentation ready even if just a few pages. Have concrete backup for any monetary figures being presented, especially if it is a request for more department funding. Make sure department budgets are organized and available to view so that officials and the public can see exactly what is being funded and where requested funds will be utilized.

**PRESENTATION:** Information and concerns need to be presented in a quick and concise manner. Most members of state and local legislature do not have extensive knowledge of the fire service. Do not use acronyms or abbreviations for lesser known topics and make sure to give background information if necessary to expand on what is being presented. Knowledge is power, and the audience only has as much information as given to them. Stay on topic, speak clearly and calmly and be ready to answer questions. Exhibiting a confident appearance will reassure officials that department leadership is effective and create a sense of trust. Consider bringing a fellow officer along when presenting and allow them to present and answer questions as well.

**REMEMBER:** State and local governments give departments the tools to succeed. It is a Chief's responsibility to create a relationship built on trust and confidence not only from the governments but also from membership. Utilize all resources and strive to continually create a stronger and progressive department.

For more information on speaking to government officials and other "How To" guides, please contact Ms. Rhiannon Bogozzi at [rbogozzi@iafc.org](mailto:rbogozzi@iafc.org) or visit our site at [www.WhatFuelsYourFire.org](http://www.WhatFuelsYourFire.org).

