



ADVOCACY
Toolkit

*If you're not at the table,
you're on the menu.*



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THE IMPORTANCE OF *Advocacy.*

As members of the recreational marine industry, we are fortunate to sell products that create lifelong memories for our customers; however, the success of our industry is not guaranteed, and it is imperative we make every effort to facilitate a strong selling environment in the face of a volatile market and government intervention. Advocacy is precisely the tool that the MRAA uses to ensure that you, a Marine Dealer, have a seat at the table and will not be subjected to policies and regulations that will have a negative impact on your business. However, the MRAA cannot do it alone. We need individuals like you to help get engaged and forge relationships with your Members of Congress and Representatives in the State Legislature.

This toolkit is meant to help MRAA Members understand the nuances and importance of advocacy while giving you the tools to forge relationships with your elected officials and begin building a relationship. For you to grow your influence, it is imperative to scale advocacy and government affairs efforts, which MRAA can help you do as the voice for marine retailers.



Jeff Strong
MRAA BOARD CHAIR

Matt Gruhn
MRAA PRESIDENT

THE IMPORTANCE OF *Advocacy.*

“We at Indian Lake Marina have been very impressed with the hard work, dedication, and personal touches that MRAA Advocacy has provided us over the years. During the COVID-19 Pandemic, Marinas in Pennsylvania were not listed as essential, and we were told to close. After reaching out, the MRAA Advocacy team helped me draft a letter to Governor Wolf highlighting why we are essential, including economic and tax data about recreational boating in PA. A day after submitting, we received a letter giving us the green light to operate our marina business fully!”



Brandon Mick

General Manager, Indian Lake Marina



“There is an old saying when it comes to politics, if you are not at the table, you are on the menu, and the recreational boating industry has found itself on the menu more than once. This underscores the importance of advocacy and government relations, as we must be forging relationships with legislators and decision makers to ensure we can maintain a favorable business and boating environment. So I encourage you to get engaged and work with the MRAA Advocacy team, as they are dedicated to helping you make these connections and fight for the interest of dealers on Capitol Hill and in State Legislatures throughout the country.”

Joe Lewis

General Manager, Mount Dora Boating Center & Marina

GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS 101: *Advocacy Vs. Lobbying*

The MRAA Government Relations Team advocates on behalf of Boat Dealers nationwide on a variety of issues, providing input on proposed regulations that may pose threats to your everyday business operations, fighting impediments to boating access, or supporting policies that will make boating safer or create a more friendly environment for small businesses.

Advocacy is the process of stakeholders using their voices to make policy and decision makers at the local, state, and national level aware of the issues that impact them. Advocacy is all about education. **Lobbying**, however, is the use of methods and tactics to influence the trajectory of particular pieces of legislation or regulatory proposals. Lobbying is all about influencing outcomes.

Advocacy Examples

- » Sharing with a Member of Congress or State Legislature how a proposed piece of legislation will negatively impact your business or the recreational boating industry.
- » Educating a policymaker about the effects a policy has on their constituents or your business.
- » Inviting a Member of Congress or State Legislator for a site visit so they can learn more about a Marine Dealership, your business, and understand how they can help.
- » Attending a BoatPAC Reception, Event, or Webinar, and making personal financial contributions to the BoatPAC.

Lobbying Examples

- » Asking a Member of Congress or State Legislature to vote for or against, or amend, specific legislation.
- » Circulating a “call to action” such as a sign-on letter or Boating United Action Alert to MRAA Members that requests a policymaker take action on introduced legislation or pending regulations.
- » Preparing materials or organizing events to support lobbying activities.
- » Leveraging BoatPAC funds to support members of Congress on both sides of the aisle who are champions for the recreational boating industry so they can stay on Capitol Hill and support you and your business.

In order for the MRAA to be successful in our Government Relations efforts, it is imperative we leverage a strategy that balances advocacy and lobbying. Getting MRAA members engaged in advocacy is a key first step in a successful lobbying campaign, as this will allow us to connect with elected officials and familiarize them with our industry and your business.

MRAA ADVOCACY *Opportunities*

As a business owner the MRAA understands that your time is at a premium, so we seek to provide you with a variety of advocacy opportunities to get engaged regardless of how much time you can dedicate. As retailers, it is imperative that our voice is included among the multitude of stakeholders in the recreational boating industry. Between manufacturers, distributors, and end users, retailers are just one group of stakeholders within the industry, and for that reason we must take advantage of every opportunity to raise awareness of the issues impacting marine retailers with our elected officials. Below is information about a variety of advocacy opportunities offered by the MRAA. From supporting the BoatPAC to engaging at the American Boating Congress to becoming a Dealer Ambassador or Diamond Ambassador, there is a level of engagement tailored directly to you.

American Boating Congress

- » The American Boating Congress (ABC), which takes place annually in Washington, D.C., is the recreational boating industry's preeminent advocacy event. This event brings together leaders of the recreational boating industry to receive updates on pressing policy issues, hear from members of Congress and administration officials, and then wrap up with a day on Capitol Hill, meeting with YOUR members of Congress. ABC offers attendees the opportunity to not only network and expand their relationships within the industry, but build a greater understanding of the importance of advocacy and highlight what is at stake. If you are interested in learning more about ABC 2024, scan the QR Code.



Boating United

- » Boating United (BU) is the recreational boating industry's shared advocacy platform and is used to send Action Alerts and updates to stakeholders throughout the industry. This action center will allow you to communicate directly with your legislator on key issues the MRAA is actively working on. Aside from completing the call to action yourself, you can amplify your impact by sharing these calls to action with your customer network – as this will broaden the pool of constituents that your elected official hears from. To sign up for BU Action Alerts, scan the QR code.



MRAA ADVOCACY

Opportunities Cont.

BoatPAC

- » BoatPAC is the recreational boating industry's Political Action Committee and is run by the MRAA, the National Marine Manufacturers Association (NMMA) and the Association of Marina Industries (AMI). Members of these three trade associations, and their families, support the BoatPAC with donations. These donations are then used to support champions of the recreational boating industry in Congress. If you would like to learn more about the BoatPAC, you can start by scanning the QR Code and getting prior approved.



Dealer Ambassador

- » The MRAA Dealer Ambassador program is designed to provide opportunities for MRAA members who are interested in getting engaged in our advocacy efforts. Dealer Ambassadors are crucial for our industry's advocacy success as they can leverage their voices and positions in the community to provide input on important legislation and regulatory proposals. Dealer Ambassadors are part of MRAA's grassroots engagement network and are alerted to advocacy opportunities in their State and region. These include, but are not limited to, testifying on State Legislation, authoring Letters To The Editor, Op-Eds, and other media opportunities, hosting a legislator for a tour, and more. If you would like to sign up as a Dealer Ambassador, or have some questions about the program, please reach out to Chad Tokowicz at Chad@mraa.com.

Diamond Ambassador

- » The MRAA Diamond Ambassador Program is focused on putting YOU in the driver seat of MRAA's advocacy efforts and is a way for you to help directly fuel our advocacy efforts and success. The Diamond Ambassador membership requires the purchase of a Bronze, Silver or Gold membership, plus an additional \$1,000 for each retail rooftop. This contribution goes directly to supporting MRAA's advocacy efforts. If you would like to step up today and become a Diamond Ambassador, reach out to Mike Sayre at Sayre@mraa.com today!

BUILDING

Relationships

Building relationships with the elected officials in your community should be a top priority for you as a constituent and as a business owner. The elected officials in your area rely on support from folks like yourself to keep their jobs, and therefore are usually willing to meet with their constituents to better understand how to support them. Furthermore, as a business owner who employs even more constituents, your elected officials may be even more willing to connect and support you as they know that these may result in votes for them from your staff as well. Lastly, it is always important to build relationships in non-crisis periods, or in times when we do not need to engage on regulation or legislation. Forging these relationships in non-crisis periods pays dividends, as we can then leverage this relationship when we need to act on a specific policy proposal. This section of the Advocacy Toolkit will walk you through how to find out who your legislators are, how to conduct outreach and introduce yourself, and how to invite them to do a tour of your dealership.

Who are my Elected Officials?

Finding out who represents you on Capitol Hill or in your State Legislature or General Assembly can easily be done using the [“Find and Contact Elected Officials”](#) tool from USA.gov. Simply type in USA.gov/elected-officials to access the tool. All you must do is input your address, and it will show you who your Elected Officials are at a Local, State, and Federal level. When putting in your information, make sure to use the address of your dealership or business, and not your home address. This is important as your home and business may be in two different districts.

ELECTED OFFICIAL DEALERSHIP *Visit Guide*



Now that you know how to find out who your elected officials are, it is time to begin building relationships with them and helping them to understand the importance your business has in the community. Inviting elected officials to your place of business, showing them your service center, or getting them out for a boat ride are examples of how to forge these relationships. Visits like these will allow the elected official to learn more about your business, pain points, and what policies and issues will impact you most. Since you are a constituent, it is in the best interest of the decisionmaker to act in ways that will benefit you, as your support for them may be on the line. Visits to your dealership are a perfect opportunity for you to connect with your Local, State, or even Congressional representative, and this section will walk you through how to set up a visit. MRAA is here to help through every step of this process, so reach out if you would like our assistance!

Timing of the Visit

The timing of the visit is important to consider as you will want to make sure you invite the elected officials to your business at a time when you can focus on them and give them a proper tour in a safe environment. Additionally, it is important to consider weather if you are planning a boat ride, as it should be a safe and comfortable experience for the elected official and their staff.

Who to Contact?

When reaching out to your elected officials to set up a dealership visit you will likely reach out to their scheduler or a staff member. For your member of Congress, they should have a “Contact Me” section on their website, and under that it should say “Scheduling Requests,” which will contain the information you need to set up a dealership visit. For your state representative, simply click through to their website from the USA.gov page. Once you are on the website for your state representative, their email should be listed and you should use this to send the invitation.

OUTREACH

Checklist

The below checklist should be used to help keep you on track and make sure your visit goes smoothly. While these are all relatively simple steps, they are all extremely important and care should be taken to ensure you are completing each of these items.

<i>Timeline</i>	<i>Action Item</i>
AT LEAST one month before you would like the visit to occur.	<input type="checkbox"/> Invite sent to Congressional, State Representative, or Local Official staff.
Within one week of sending the invitation via email	<input type="checkbox"/> Follow up phone call to ensure the invitation was received and reviewed by the scheduler.
Two weeks before visit.	<input type="checkbox"/> Follow up to confirm the elected official, or a staff member, is able to attend.
One day before visit.	<input type="checkbox"/> Follow up with your contact or the staff attending the event to ensure they are still coming.
Within one week post-visit.	<input type="checkbox"/> Send handwritten thank you note to attendees.

INVITATION

Template

Use the below email template and letter template to conduct your outreach. The letter should be attached to the email and is a more formal invitation than the email, which is just an introductory note. Feel free to change up the letter as you see fit to best reflect your business and what you would like to focus on during the visit.

Email Body

Dear [**Scheduler Name**],

Please see the attached request from [**Your Name**] inviting [**Member of Congress/ State Representative/Local Official**] on [**Proposed Date**] to visit [**Business Name**] and learn more about the business of recreational boating in [**City or Town**].

Recreational boating and outdoor recreation as a whole are an important economic driver in [**City or Town**] and we would love for [**Member of Congress/ State Representative/Local Official**] to join us at [**business name**] for a tour of our facilities [**if applicable, and a boat ride on [insert name of waterbody] after the tour**]. [**Business name**] has been operating in [**City or Town**] since **XX** and currently employs **XX** employees and is a staple in [**city or town**]'s outdoor recreation economy. We would love to host [**Member of Congress/ State Representative/Local Official**] for a tour and to highlight the importance of a strong recreational boating economy.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

[**Name**]

[**Title**]

[**Business Name**]

[**Phone Number**]

Letter to be attached

[Date]

The Honorable [NAME]
United States [Senate/House of Representatives]
[Office Address]

ATTN: Scheduler

Dear Senator/Congressman/Congresswoman [Last Name]:

On behalf of all of us at [Business Name], I am writing to invite you to visit Dealership in [City/Town] this [Month/Week].

During your visit to our dealership, you will have the chance learn more about the business of recreational boating, the challenges facing our workforce, and see firsthand the positive economic impact recreational boating has on our local community. Additionally, you will be able to talk with staff and learn more about how recreational boating in [City/Town] serves our community.

As you may know, outdoor recreation is a major economic driver in [State] as a whole and supports **XX** Jobs, at **XX** businesses and generates **XXX** in annual economic impact. [\[Data found here\]](#). It is no secret that recreational boating and outdoor recreation as a whole are an important economic driver in [Town/City], and we encourage you to visit our dealership to learn more about the business of boating firsthand.

At [Business Name] we have been serving customers since **XXXX** and take pride in putting and keeping customers on the water. Since starting our business, we have helped more than [number] of customers experience the joy of recreational boating and are dedicated to continuing to share our love of recreational boating with the community. Despite the success of our business, we are constantly facing challenges as a small business owner and invite you to come and learn more about our pain points and discuss potential policies to support small businesses and the outdoor recreation economy. Additionally, we would love to discuss workforce challenges in the recreational marine industry and provide you an opportunity to understand the diverse set of skills we employ at [business name], and the value these roles bring to the community at large.

We hope you can join us for a visit soon and look forward to hearing from you about next steps. Thank you in advance for considering our invitation and for all that you do on behalf of the recreational boating industry and the communities that rely on this important pastime as a major economic driver.

Sincerely,

[Name]

[Title]

[Business Name]

[Phone Number]