

Radical Conversations: Cultivating Common Ground

Radical Conversations: Cultivating Common Ground – What does that mean for the nonprofit community? Panelists at this year’s SKC Excellence in Nonprofit Leadership Awards shared practical tips and advice with nonprofits about how to more effectively make their voices heard by local legislature in the shifting political climate. The panel discussion, Radical Conversations: Cultivating Common Ground, was moderated by Beth Radtke, Vice President & Foundation Office Director, Commerce Bank. Panelists included Jay Hardenbrook, AARP; Barbara Bollier, Kansas State Senate; Gary Burton, Burton & Liese Government Relations and former Missouri Representative; Ken Hussey, Missouri State Alliance of YMCA’s; and David Jordan, Alliance for Healthy Kansas.

Consistent and strategic communication is a key part in forming relationships with individuals in office. Former Missouri Representative, Gary Burton, said, “If you don’t have a lobbyist, it is important you stay in touch – not just at the beginning and end of session to inquire about a bill you were hoping for.” Panelists recommended staying in touch throughout session by subscribing to mailing lists, staying connected via Facebook, and downloading vote tracker applications to your phone. David Jordan, Alliance for Healthy Kansas, added, “If meeting during session, be succinct and have an ask. Have it be specific to legislation they are considering.” Mr. Jordan went on to say that it is critical to take advantage of all opportunities, even if it means meeting with a young staffer during session. Audience members spoke up in agreement sharing that hallway meetings with legislature staff can prove beneficial when time is used effectively. Sen. Bollier’s advice for meetings during session is to create a one-pager with bullet points for your representative. Outside of session, the Senator recommended meeting one-on-one to get to know your representative and to allow them to get to know you. Ultimately, everyone has valid concerns they wish to communicate to their elected officials. As Sen. Bollier stated, “If building consensus were easy, we wouldn’t be here talking about it”.

Though the panelists represented varying backgrounds, they agreed meeting with your representative outside of session is one of the most important things you can do, especially if meeting with staffers in the hallway or creating a one-pager during session does not work for you. Following the event, Susan T. Schmidt, Nonprofit Leadership Alliance President and ENLA Award Winner, tweeted, “Best thing nonprofits do is build relationships with elected leaders outside of session. Don’t wait until January!”



Left to right: Panelists Barbara Bollier, Kansas State Senate; Gary Burton, Burton & Liese Government Relations & former Missouri Representative; David Jordan, Alliance for Healthy Kansas; Ken Hussey, Missouri State Alliance of YMCA’s; and Jay Hardenbrook, AARP.