

How to Prepare to Meet with a Legislator



Planning a meeting with a legislator?

You should keep some things in mind to make an IMPACT!

I – Identify who you need to meet with

Finding out who you should be meeting with is probably the most crucial part of this process. Knowing who you are targeting and why will help make the most out of your visit – for you and the legislator. Knowing that you are their constituent and that they can do something for your cause will put you in a better position to make a difference.

- Identify your legislators www.openstates.org www.commoncause.org
- Do your research on your legislator. Great resource: www.legiscan.com

M – Make an appointment

Once you know who you are going to meet with, please make an appointment. Doing this will not only ensure you of a designated time to meet with the legislator, but also block in an allotted amount of time where you have their undivided attention.

- Contact the office secretary
- Inform them of whom the legislator will be meeting with and why they are meeting
- Appointments should be made 2-3 weeks ahead of time
- Be sure to have all your materials on your topic in a “leave behind” packet. Bring multiple copies for legislator and their staff and your contact information should be included

P – Prepare & practice ahead of time

If time allows, try to prepare a dialogue and practice what you'd like to say and ask ahead of time. If more than one person is going into the meeting it is also important to discuss with them what you'd like to address during the meeting so the majority of the time is not being wasted.

- Prepare your Elevator Pitch
- Practice it out loud
- Make sure your talking points are easy enough for a child to understand – the legislator may have no prior knowledge to what you are addressing
- If you have multiple people joining you at the meeting decipher who will speak and when. If one of your attendees is a constituent of a specific legislator you are meeting with, you may want to allow them to drive that specific meeting and be the speaker of the group.
- Not everyone will have a chance to share their personal stories depending on the size of your group. It's important to identify who is speaking when and where prior to the meetings.

A – Arrive on Time

Ideally, you should really arrive 15 minutes early. Legislators are busy people and often have meetings booked all day long, if you are late for your meeting you may not only lose valuable time during your appointment, they could give your spot to someone else who is there and waiting.

- Expect traffic and security checks
- Leave your house or office earlier than you think you need

C – Come dressed nicely and appropriately

A state office is somewhere you want to be taken seriously. Business attire is appropriate for a meeting and if you are going to the Capitol building it is highly recommended.

- Business attire is considered a pressed suit (jacket, pressed pants or skirt, button-up shirt and dress shoes)
- Make sure you are groomed (neat hair, makeup that's not too distracting)

T – Talk, but also listen

You should be confident and lead the conversation where you'd like, but also remember that in order to have a good conversation you must also listen. Allow the legislator to talk or answer your questions one at a time. Invite them into the conversation and engage them with questions or information that can help them act as a sponsor.

- Remember that no one should be talking for more than five minutes at a time
- Ask direct questions and press politely for a commitment
- Keep the conversation about your issue or bill, your time is limited
- If you do not know the answer to a question, be honest about it. Don't try to fake an answer.

After meeting with a legislator:

Remember to thank them

Sending a written letter to the legislator is a good way to keep your conversation fresh in their mind.

- Be professional – even if they do not agree with your position still acknowledge their time
- Thank them again
- Restate your issue and highlight what was discussed
- Follow up with any unanswered questions they may have had during the meeting
- A little bit of kindness goes further than one would think – they may not be in the position to agree right now, but that doesn't mean in the future they won't be. Keep the bridge open.

Regroup with your organization and let everyone know how it went.

- Formulate a plan to go forward with the issue or direct it from another point of view

Additional tips:

- Larger groups should pick one or two strong representatives to attend the meeting for the whole organization
- Introduce yourself right off the bat – who you are, who you are representing, and why
- “Leave behind” items are good resources to have when going into the meeting. These can be a quick fact sheet, an informational packet, an organization brochure, or a patient story that relates to your issue and most importantly your contact information
- Make specific requests – ask them to sponsor or support a bill, ask them to speak at an event, or commit to a certain cause