

Tips for Successful Advocacy Meetings

Meeting in person with elected officials and/or legislative staff is the most effective means of political advocacy. Here are some important "do's" and "don'ts" to ensure that your lobbying meeting is successful and effective.

DO

- ✓ **Make an appointment in advance.** Time is a premium in legislative offices. Contact the legislator's scheduler to arrange a meeting. Provide the names of those who will be in attendance and the reason for the meeting. Legislative schedules can be unpredictable so don't be disappointed if your meeting is rescheduled or if you have to meet with staff. Oftentimes staff can be even more important as they are the experts on the issues.
- ✓ **Your homework.** Prepare carefully and thoroughly for your meeting. Take the time to "know" your legislator by reviewing past votes or statements on the issue, his/her party's position, and committee assignments. Finding opportunities to make personal connections are also important as "ice-breakers." Develop an agenda that all meeting participants clearly understand. Know your talking points in advance and research opposition arguments and be prepared to counter those arguments.
- ✓ **Stay "on message."** Effective meetings are narrow in scope. State only a few key points and make a definite ask. Meetings become ineffective when participants move away from the key message..
- ✓ **Go local.** Legislators want to hear the thoughts and opinions of their constituents. Legislators have many resources to get the national/state perspective. Local statistics, constituencies and personal stories resonate..
- ✓ **Make a clear, actionable request.** Make sure that your request is timely, clear and actionable by the legislator. Making a specific request gives you the opportunity to evaluate the legislator's response.
- ✓ **Cultivate a relationship with staff.** Many people underestimate the important role of staff. A supportive staff person can often make the difference between success and failure. It is important that staff come to regard you as a helpful resource for information on your issue.
- ✓ **Follow-up.** Follow-up after a meeting can be as important as the meeting itself. Send a thank you note that expresses appreciation and reinforces your message and any commitments made by the legislator or staff. If you promise during the meeting to get back in touch with additional information, be sure that you do so. Failure to follow up on your promise will call your credibility into question.

DON'T

- ✓ **Go "off-message" or discuss unrelated issues.** Deliver a unified message - mixed messages or discussing unrelated subjects undermine your ability to secure support.
- ✓ **Make disparaging comments.** Discuss the merits of the policy or issue and avoid polarizing comments. You are working on behalf of an issue, not a partisan group. Be careful not to alienate legislators or staff.
- ✓ **Threaten.** Discourtesy ensures that your arguments will be discounted — and puts your future effectiveness at risk..
- ✓ **Be late.** Time is a valuable for busy legislators and staff. Punctuality = professionalism and underscores your commitment.. It is always best to arrive early, calm nerves and collect your thoughts.
- ✓ **Take offense about meeting space.** If the Legislator's office or other meeting space is full, you may be asked to meet in a lobby, corridor or other public space. This is simply a reality of available space. You may even be asked to meet as your Representative is in transit to a meeting or outside a committee meeting.
- ✓ **Get too comfortable.** Advocates are sometimes surprised by the courteous reception they receive. Don't mistake this respect for agreement and don't let a comfortable exchange stop you from making your request. Don't mistake "concern" for your issue with support.