

HOW TO MEET WITH YOUR LAWMAKER

In-person meetings with your delegates and senator have the strongest effect of all lobbying techniques—and your delegates and senator will want to see you!

Before the visit, find out what you can about your legislator, such as how he or she has voted on any similar legislation and any special expertise or interests he or she has.

Ground rules for meeting with your legislator:

- Always make an appointment to visit your legislator, rather than just dropping in.
- Always be polite, even if they disappoint you.
- Be on time, even if they are not.
- Designate a spokesperson. This person should be smooth and know the facts, and will do most of the talking. The other attendees should give a minute or two of personal perspective (e.g., “I’m a nurse at Gritty City General Hospital and I’ve seen...”).
- Go with a group of people who represent different segments of your community.
- Practice your presentation beforehand, and know the facts.
- Dress nicely, present yourself professionally, and act with respect (e.g., address the legislator as Del./Sen. [last name]).
- Present the facts in an orderly, concise, positive manner; stick to the issue - don’t get side tracked.
- Don’t use jargon or rhetoric.
- Be persuasive and smooth.
- Don’t be overly pushy. This should be a friendly exchange. Remember that you are trying to build a long-term relationship.
- Don’t pre-judge their position.
- Be sure to thank them for past support.
- Listen to their views; don’t just talk. Ask what their concerns are.
- Never lie. If you don’t know the answer, promise to get back to them. Don’t promise what you can’t deliver, though.
- Remember that legislators will usually do what’s in their interest (e.g., will something cost them or gain them votes?).
- Have a sense of humor.
- Leave something: a fact sheet, press clippings, a novelty and your contact information.
- Keep emotions under control.
- Never criticize other legislators or colleagues.
- Ask for favorable consideration. Get a commitment if possible.
- If the legislator is already on board, ask what they can do to help pass the bill, and if they can influence their colleagues (e.g., on the committee the bill is being reviewed by).
- Thank the legislator for his/her time and courtesy.
- Fill out a report form about the meeting.
- Send a thank you letter after the meeting. Follow up on any questions you could not answer and/or send any materials they requested or seemed interested in.

Don't be intimidated:

- Legislators want to meet with their constituents.
- Most legislators are very personable.
- Legislators like to talk to people.
- Most legislators are not experts on the issue.
- Do your homework. No need to be a technical expert, but the better prepared you are, the better you are at achieving your goal!

Sample meeting agenda:

1. Introductions

a. Go around the table and have everyone introduce themselves, what group they are with, and what city they are from (especially if they live in the legislator's district). If the number is large, attendees representing organizations should mention how many constituents are members of their organization.

b. Brief schmoozing if there is time. Research the legislator's background, hobbies, etc. beforehand, and mention any common ground (e.g., "I hear you watch *The Wire*. I love that show!"). Introductions and schmoozing should be as brief as possible.

2. *The spokesperson should take it from here, except where otherwise indicated.* Give a brief statement of why you're there (e.g., "We're here to ask you to support Sen. Madaleno's bill to keep the Maryland Guard in Maryland.").

3. Thank the legislator for meeting with you.

4. Mention community support for the issue.

5. Talk about the issue

a. Explain what the problem is. You're not there to provide all the facts, but a quick presentation of two to three points will do.

b. Explain why it's important to you personally. (Each person at the meeting should do this)

c. Give the legislator fact sheets.

6. Explain the solution

a. Mention the bill (title, number, and quick synopsis) that solves the problem, or at least is a step in the right direction.

b. Mention the sponsors, co-sponsors, and other lawmakers supporting the bill.

c. Present postcards and petitions (if you have them) asking the legislator to support the bill.

7. Request for support

a. Ask the legislator exactly where he/she stands. Ask if he/she will vote for the bill on committee or on the floor. Ask the legislator if he/she will talk to legislators on the committee.

b. If the legislator is supportive, reinforce this commitment. Thank him or her for the commitment, ask what he or she can do to help pass the bill and influence colleagues (e.g., on the committee the bill is being reviewed by). Ask what you can do to help the legislator pass the bill (e.g., who to pressure, and what would be most effective).

c. Most likely, the legislator will be vague. If this is the case, ask again if he or she will vote for the bill. If the legislator is still vague, don't keep asking – you won't get an answer.

- d. If the legislator is noncommittal or hostile, ask what the concerns are, and write these down.
 - e. If the legislator needs more information, note what to send, and do it after the meeting.
 - f. Look for opportunities to follow up.
8. Wrap-up and thank the legislator for his/her time. Leave on a friendly note, with a firm handshake, even if you are turned down.

Materials to bring to the meeting:

- Fact sheets
- Copy of the bill
- List of co-sponsors in the House and Senate
- Petitions
- List of coalition members and endorsements backing the bill
- Organization information
- Press clips and letters to the editor
- Press releases and prior testimony

After the meeting:

- Write a short report on how it went (see following sample sheet).
- Send a thank you letter ASAP after the meeting. Enclose information on the issues you discussed, and ask/remind the legislator again to support your position. Follow up on any questions you could not answer and/or send any requested materials

Candidate Meeting Report Form

Please fill out thoroughly

Date:

Your Name:

Citizens attending meeting:

Legislator's name:

Legislator's district:

Is the legislator on the bill's committee? (yes / no)

Is the legislator the bill's committee chair? (yes / no)

Name of any legislative staff present:

Where does the legislator stand on the issue? (*circle one*)

1. Very supportive; says he/she will champion the bill.
2. Supportive; says he/she will vote for the bill (on committee if applicable, otherwise on the floor)
3. Noncommittal.
4. Expresses reservations; likely to vote against the bill.
5. Openly hostile; will likely fight the bill.

Comments on the legislator's position:

Any other issues discussed?

Follow-up needed? (*if so, list*)

General demeanor of legislator:

How receptive did the legislator seem to meeting again in the future? (*circle one*)

1. Very receptive
2. Somewhat receptive
3. Noncommittal.
4. Not receptive at all.

Other comments (*write on back if necessary*):