

Quick Tips for Conducting Legislative Visits

So you have your visit scheduled, your allies ready, and an important issue to push...what's next?

Before the Visit: Preparation is Key

- Prepare a packet of clear and concise materials. Usually a one-page fact sheet on the issue and legislative proposal and a brief description of your organization/ally organizations will suffice.
- Develop message points to convey during the visit. Use a mix of statistics and real-life stories to illustrate the problem and the solution that is needed.
- Discuss who is going to say what. Everyone should know what point(s) they are going to cover and in what order so that the visit will flow smoothly.
- Know the status of the legislative proposal you will be advocating and at what point the legislator will have a chance to vote on the measure. Is the legislation being heard in a particular policy committee? Is the legislator a member of that committee? Has the legislation reached a vote on the floor?
- Anticipate questions that may be asked during the visit. Common questions that arise repeatedly include: What is the fiscal cost of the solution you're advocating? Who are the other supporters? Who are the opponents? Be prepared to respond to these questions.
- Find out the background of the legislator you're meeting with. For example, if the legislator was a teacher prior to serving in the Legislature, how might that impact your issue? You can find short biographies on the legislator's website.
- If possible, get a sense of the legislator's past engagement on the issue. How has the legislator voted on past similar issues? Is the legislator a co-author on the proposal already?

During the Visit: Communication is Key

- Be flexible. Many things may arise during your scheduled visit – the legislator may be late, you may end up meeting with a staffer instead, the meeting may be cut short. Realize these unexpected events are the nature of the process, and you may have to adjust accordingly.
- Communicate clearly and concisely. Lay out the message points you've prepared to highlight the issue and the solution you're advocating. Have individuals convey personal and real-life stories to illustrate the issue.
- Make a specific "ask." What is it that you want the legislator to do for you? Make sure to convey your specific "ask" and confirm any commitments made.

After the Visit: Follow-up is Key

- Debrief with your group. Write notes of what was discussed and what was agreed upon.
- Respond to any questions that remained unanswered during the visit. Did you get a question that you didn't know the answer to? It's okay to say "I don't know, but I'll get back to you." Just make sure you do.
- Send a thank you note after your first or a very important meeting.
- Follow-up with the legislator or staffer when the bill comes up for a vote. Remind them of the meeting and any commitments made, and ask for his/her support of your position.
- Invite the legislator to local events so that you can continue building a strong relationship, and illustrating the issue's impact on the community.