



Meeting with an Elected Official

Connecting with your elected officials about in a face-to-face meeting is a great way to develop a relationship with them and work to influence the stands they take on issues important to you. Below are some helpful tips for before, during, and after a visit.

Requesting the visit

- Make your request in writing and follow up with a call to the appointment secretary or scheduler.
- Make sure the scheduler knows that you are a constituent.
- Suggest specific times and dates for your meeting. Let the person know what issue and legislation (by bill number, if you have one) you wish to discuss.

Preparing for the visit

- **Decide who will attend the meeting.** Try to bring people who represent different groups that have an interest in the legislation.
- **Gather information.** Learn about your elected officials' record on the issue. Become familiar with the opposition's views and arguments on the issues to help you answer questions.
- **Agree on talking points.** Keep your message simple and to-the-point.
- **Plan your meeting.** People can get nervous in a meeting, and time is limited. Be sure that you lay out the agenda for the meeting beforehand, including who will start the conversation and who will make key points.
- **Decide what you want to achieve.** What is it you want your elected official to do – vote for or against the bill? Asking an elected official to do something specific will give you a benchmark for success!
- **Prepare materials to leave with the elected official or staff.** A letter or fact sheet summarizing your concerns.

During the visit

- **Make introductions** and be clear who is a constituent in the meeting. Elected officials are most responsive to the people who can keep them in office—their constituents—so always have constituent representation in any meeting.
- **Provide brief, clear statements** about the problem and your solution.
- **Personalize your comments and provide local context.** Make a strong connection between the issue and the local community that the elected official represents. Use of personal stories and local examples help illustrate why your issue is important.
- **Support your case with facts.** Don't overwhelm with numbers, charts and data, but do use them judiciously to make your point and legitimize your argument.
- **Stick to your talking points!** Stay on topic, and back it up with no more than five pages of materials you can leave with your elected official.
- **Saying "I don't know" can be a smart political move.** You don't need to be an expert on the topic you are discussing. If you don't know the answer to a question, say you'll find out. This gives you the chance to contact the elected official again about the issue.
- **Listen carefully to your elected official's responses.** What is the person saying about

the issue? What is his or her position? What questions or concerns do they have that might be answered? Pay attention to the direct and indirect statements of support or opposition.

- **Ask for support.** If you don't directly ask your elected official if he or she supports your position, you may never actually find out what the elected official thinks and intends to do. **THE ASK MUST BE CLEAR.** For example, "Can we count on you to support H.R. 154 when it comes to a vote next week?" After you ask, pause. Let the elected official answer and clarify if the response is not yet clear. Once you get an answer, you will know if the elected official supports your position, opposes it, or is undecided.
 - **If the elected official supports your position,** say "thank you." Be a resource. If the legislator needs additional information or help in any way, offer to make that available.
 - **If the elected official opposes your position,** stay cordial and friendly. Even if you disagree on this issue, you may be in agreement on another issue. Keep the door open to working together in the future.
 - **If the elected official is undecided,** ask if there is additional information needed on this issue and get it to him or her in a timely manner. Also think about whose voice it is important for the elected official to hear from on the issue and try to mobilize it on your behalf.

After the visit

- Right after the meeting compare notes with everyone in your group to confirm what the elected official committed to do.
- Each person who took part in the meeting should promptly send a personal thank you letter to the elected official. Remind him or her of anything agreed to do.
- Follow up in a timely fashion with any requested materials and information.
- Find out when the legislators will be in your home district hosting town hall meetings or forums and organize a group to attend.

Activity: Plan a meeting with a member of Congress

Using the tips provided in this packet plan for a meeting with a member of Congress and prepare an agenda. Your plan should specify a clear purpose for the meeting, identify who will make introductions, and specify which participant will say which talking point. Each person at the meeting should have something to say.