

9 Tips for Meeting with Your Legislator

1. **Have a plan** for what you would like to accomplish by the end of the conversation and most importantly what you want them to do for you (as they will most certainly ask!). Time is a valuable commodity in the State House, and it is important to show you respect that by being prepared.
2. **Know where you are in the budget or law making process** before your meeting, and tailor your meeting agenda with that in mind. In order to have any influence, you must make your request or “ask” before formal decisions are made.
3. **Who you bring into the meeting matters.** Bring staff and beneficiaries who can speak directly and personally to the positive impacts from participating in your program. Because legislators care most about what is going on their districts, it is helpful if your spokespeople are voters or, at least residents, in his/her district.
4. **Many groups meet with Legislative staff.** As legislators have very unpredictable schedules, it is common practice for community groups to meet with legislative staff if their boss cannot attend. Treat the staff member as you would your legislator as their opinion carries a lot of weight. Staff brief their bosses on constituent meetings, and recommend legislation and budget items to support.
5. **Stay on message.** Be clear about what you want your legislator to know about your program, and most importantly, what you would like them to do for you. Although you will rarely get a commitment on the spot, it is critical that you have a specific ask and leave information behind with staff that clearly communicates your request and the reasoning that supports it.
6. **Bring materials that clearly present your case for support.** Include any relevant data on the outcomes of your program and the value that your program brings to the district. Incorporate visual aids, such as tables and charts, that help you communicate your case more effectively.
7. **Bring a camera.** Elected officials are always interested in good publicity, so take pictures with your legislator and use them in press releases in the local media and your own organizational newsletter.
8. **Thank your legislator and follow-up with staff.** Be sure to send thank you notes after meetings and get the contact information for staff so that you can follow-up on any action items discussed.
9. **Keep the long term relationship in mind.** Your ultimate goal is a positive long-term relationship with your legislator and his or her staff. Even if your representative of senator cannot support you in the specific way you requested now, it does not mean he/she won't in the future. Be professional and polite, and let them know you understand their perspective, even if their position does not currently align with yours.