

ABCs of Meeting with your Legislators

Before the meeting

1. Research your legislators and their responsibilities. Read up on their professional backgrounds, their committee assignments, any focused membership groups to which they belong, their legislative accomplishments, etc. Most of this information is available on individual legislators' homepages. For members of the U.S. Congress, individual homepages can be found at house.gov and senate.gov.
2. Prepare your three strongest talking points. Your meeting will probably last only 10-20 minutes. Ensure that your information is accurate, and be ready to answer questions.
3. Prepare materials to bring to the meeting and leave with the legislators or their staff. Work with the Public Policy and Mobilization office on what these may be.
4. Bring a camera or phone to take a photo at the meeting. It could be used later in your newsletter.
5. Wear business attire.

During the meeting

1. Arrive on time, but don't be surprised if your meetings start late. Don't be offended if you are asked to have your meeting in the hallway or cafeteria; this is merely a result of space limitations. It is quite likely that you will meet with a staff person instead of your elected official. Staff-level meetings are extremely valuable, as legislators rely heavily on them for policy advice.
2. Be respectful. Because offices are small, loud conversations in the waiting area are not appreciated.
3. Introduce yourself, and start on a positive note. Thank those you are meeting with for their past support of issues you care about.
4. Clearly state your legislative asks.
5. Explain your position with the facts, but always use personal or local stories when possible. Legislators are most interested in how legislation will affect their districts and constituents. Never speak ill of another legislator, staff member or advocacy group.
6. Ask for an explanation if you don't understand a position or statement.
7. Get an answer. Ask the legislator or staffer how he or she will respond to the requests you make. If an answer cannot be provided immediately, ask when you can follow up to get a response.
8. Invite your legislators and their staff members to visit your site if appropriate.

9. Share your value as a resource. Offer to be a source of information on the specific issues addressed, on your work with your organization, and on children, youth, communities, and the human-serving nonprofit sector more generally.
10. Ask to take a photo with the member/staff and post it on social media thanking the member including the member's Twitter handle and any relevant hashtags.
11. Thank the legislator and the staff as you leave.

After the meeting

1. Write or call your legislators to thank them for their time. Reiterate your major points, and remind the legislators of anything they might have agreed to do.
2. Send along any additional materials that were requested, or follow up with the answers to questions.
3. Share the results of your meetings by filling out a meeting report form (to be provided) after the visit. Share insights you have gained about legislators' concerns and interests.
4. Find out when the legislators will be in your home district hosting town hall meetings or forums, and organize a group to attend.
5. Maintain communication with legislators and their staff members through letters, calls and visits when relevant.
6. Invite your legislators and their staff members to visit your site if appropriate.