

Tips for a Good Legislator Meeting

BEFORE THE MEETING

STRATEGIZE: Before you meet with your lawmaker, develop a game plan with those in your group.

- **Have everyone in your group participate** + identify a lead who will speak first.
- **Know the arguments!** Make sure all team members review the bill sheet for your issue.
- **Identify who lives in the legislator's district.** This is key! *Legislators think locally.*
- **Make an "ask."** Reference your bill sheet and get your legislator to commit!

DURING THE MEETING

RELAX: You are engaging in one of the most important activities of our system of government: a dialogue with our elected representatives. And you represent votes. You know your issues and legislators. You are in control!

BE PUNCTUAL: Your legislator will probably be late. Expect that. Legislator schedules are incredibly full. But you should be prompt and prepared.

DON'T BE DISAPPOINTED IF YOU TALK TO AN AIDE: Many times, your legislator will not be available and you will meet with an aide. Aides have more time to listen than legislators, a direct line to the legislator and a say in what a legislator decides and does.

MAKE A STRONG INTRODUCTION: Make eye contact. Say who you are and why you're there. And always start with a thank-you for legislators' support of our community and attention to the issues of poverty and homelessness—even if it is in gesture only.

BE ASSERTIVE: Remain calm, confident and polite throughout your visit, but don't be timid or silent. Tell legislators what you want and why it's important to you and those you represent. You are not bothering them. Remember: You vote and they work for you.

TELL THE TRUTH: If you don't know, tell them you'll get the information and get back in touch.

SHARE REAL-LIFE STORIES: Share stories that illustrate the importance of a specific bill to real people.

BE READY FOR THE LEGISLATOR'S RESPONSE: The legislator might agree, disagree or be on the fence about your issue. Use the bill sheets in your Lobby Day packet to prepare for their response to your argument, but be prepared for three different scenarios.

1. My legislator **AGREES** with my position...

- Thank them
- Ask them to take a leadership role on the issue
- Ask them what we can do further to advance the bill
- Ask them which other legislators need lobbying/we should reach out to
- Ask them if we can count on them to help move our other bills through the legislature

2. **My legislator is UNDECIDED...**

- Present your argument as clearly and concisely as possible
- Assess the source of their hesitation and commit to following up with more information
- This is a great time/place for a client story!
- Don't push

3. **My legislator is OPPOSED...**

- Listen to your legislator's concerns and try to understand their position
- Address those concerns by sharing your position and why it is important
- Let a client speak to why the bill is so key
- Don't push—and don't work too hard to move the immovable
- Move onto a little overview of Health Care for the Homeless
- Thank them for their time

DON'T BURN BRIDGES: No matter the outcome, leave the meeting on good terms with your legislator. Even if you disagree with your legislator on this issue, they may support you on another matter in the future. Think of this as a larger exercise in relationship building.

BUILD LONG-TERM RELATIONSHIPS: Some of the most effective relationships with legislators are those cultivated over time. Your visit is moving the agency's relationship with that legislator forward.

HAVE FUN! Advocacy is important work. But it's also really fun! Come to Lobby Day expecting to learn new things, meet new people and have a few laughs!

AFTER THE MEETING

KEEP TRACK OF RESPONSES: Assign one person on your team to record the legislator's responses and commitments on the back of the face sheet. Give your sheets to your Team Captain to collect.

FOLLOW-UP: If you tell your legislator you'll get back in touch, be sure you do so. Let Joanna Diamond, Director of Public Policy, know and she'll send a note the week following your visit.

To find your legislator, go to mdelect.net or votesmart.org