

# Meeting with your Legislator

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Personal visits are highly effective ways of helping legislators understand your position or program. Legislators welcome visits from constituents. They want you involved, even though they are busy people.

Flexibility is always important when making appointments with legislators. Be as flexible as possible when scheduling your meeting. Be prepared for schedule changes; do not take these changes personally, these changes happen everyday. Please remember that time is a valuable commodity to legislators. So with all contacts, be brief, be specific and be polite!

Tips for planning your Meeting:

## **Scheduling the Meeting**

Be flexible! Try to make it easy for your legislator to meet with you. Negotiate a time and location that works for well for them. By being flexible on time and location you will seem reasonable and have a better chance of getting a meeting.

Make your appointment in advance.

Be prepared for delays or cancellations.

## **At the Meeting**

Be on time for your appointment. Be prepared, be polite and be brief.

At the beginning of the meeting, state who you are, whom you represent, what you want to discuss, and what specific action you want your legislator to take.

Do not be surprised if your legislator does not know about your issue or program. Legislators have to know about many issues and may specialize in areas unrelated to your work. Avoid overwhelming the legislator with technical information and instead try to focus on the bigger picture.

If a legislator asks you a question and you do not know the answer, offer to find the answer and then forward the information to the legislator.

## **Before you leave the Meeting**

Try to find out where your legislator stands on your issue.

Leave a one-page fact sheet summarizing your points; include your name, address and telephone number. More detailed information should be included in attachments. Again, be careful about overwhelming the legislator with information.

*Perhaps the most critical part of your visit --- Ask your legislator for some sort of support or commitment. This support can take many forms, including:*

- Would they be willing to come out to the program operation in their district for an on-site visit?
- Would they like to sit down informally with other stakeholders who know the issue well and talk in more depth about the issue?
- Would the legislator consider for voting in favor of your group's priority legislation?

No matter what the next step is, make sure to follow-up! If your legislator needs more information, make arrangements to give them information AND ask them when you should follow-up with them. Be sure to take the legislator's business card, as well as the business card for the staff member who oversees your issue.

Try to leave the meeting knowing what your next steps should be (e.g. calling their office to set up a site visit, organizing that small informal meeting, providing additional information, etc.)

## **After the Meeting--**

Follow up the meeting with a thank you note, thanking the legislator for his or her time. Be sure to re-state your position in this note.

If the legislator asks for more information, please get this information to them.