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**Tips on an Effective Meeting With
Your Elected Officials**

*Meeting with elected officials can be a valuable opportunity to communicate important facts about policy and legislative-related issues and to help gain their support for proposed legislation.*

*Here are some tips and suggestions on how to make the most of these important meetings.*

* **An elected official’s calendar is always crowded.** So it’s important to schedule the meetings ahead of time rather than arriving unexpectedly. When scheduling an appointment, call the elected official’s office and ask for the scheduler. Make sure to specify that you are a constituent and what issue you would like to discuss. It is important to understand that, more likely than not, you will be scheduled to meet with a staff person in your legislator's office.
* **Arrive a few minutes before the scheduled appointment.** The elected official’s schedule is sure to be crowded, and their days are often hectic. Given that, it’s important for you to be flexible should they be late, or should your meeting be interrupted.
* **Treat everyone on the elected official’s staff with courtesy and respect, from the receptionist to the legislative director.** While they never cast a vote, staff play a critical role in getting legislation passed and signed into law, and respect and friendliness from you will help your issue get a good hearing.
* **Discuss issues with a staff person the same way you would your lawmaker.** If the staff seem very young, don’t worry. They may not be out of college many years, but they are very knowledgeable about the issues. Each day, staff are making important decisions about the information reaching their bosses -- and the elected officials unquestionably rely on their advice. All the more reason to relate to staff with respect.
* **Talk about your experiences.** The most powerful approach is to share with your legislator your frontline experience in relation to a particular issue, even if it is anecdotal. That said, research the issue before your meeting. And, if you can, practice your pitch as you might any presentation to ensure you make your case clearly and succinctly. A well-prepared, brief explanation can lead to a very helpful exchange, where the elected official or staff can ask follow-up questions.
* **If you are asked a question you can’t answer, the best response is to say that you don’t know, but that you will get the relevant information and convey it as soon as possible.** No one will expect you to know all the answers in a meeting, just that you will provide them as a follow-up.
* **Listen, listen, listen.** Answering questions is an invaluable opportunity to make your case.
* **Don't play politics.** Never dismiss the idea of meeting with your legislator simply because you believe, based on party affiliation, that he or she will oppose your issue. And while it's good politics to frame your issue to match the political sensibilities of your legislator, it does not make sense to walk into a meeting in a combative mood because your lawmaker belongs to the other party. Furthermore, if the elected official or staff person indicates that he or she is opposed to your issue, do NOT get combative or angry. Until an elected official casts a vote in opposition to your issue, you haven’t lost. Stay positive, friendly, and respectful. And keep making your case.
* **Don’t conclude the meeting without making your “ask,” that is, without asking directly for the support your are seeking.** If you don’t ask, you won’t get, and it’s very important that the elected official and staff understand what results you are seeking.
* **If you learn in this meeting that the elected official will support your issue, thank them for their support.** It’s more often the case that they will say they are still considering the issue, and, if that’s the case, do let them know that you are a resource for further information should they need it.
* **Leave, or e-mail, the elected official or staff member with a single-page handout that summarizes your issue.** Also, make sure that you have exchanged business cards or contact information with the relevant staff members.
* **Thank the elected official and staff for their time and for the meeting.** Their days feel very busy and crowded to them, and your courtesy will be appreciated.
* **Immediately follow up your visit with an e-mail thanking the elected official and relevant staff for the meeting and the chance to discuss the issue in question.** If they are supporting your issue, thank them for that support, and, if more information was requested, include the information with this e-mail, if possible.

*Don't forget: The first visit with an elected official or staff is the first step in building an ongoing relationship.*

*If you have any questions or need help preparing your legislative pitch and/or visit, contact ABA Sr. Public Policy Analyst David Grogan at* *dave@bookweb.org* *or 800.637.0037, ext. 7562.*