



## TIPS FOR CITIZEN ADVOCACY LOBBYING

Meeting face to face with elected representatives is still a valuable way to approach change. These meetings are most satisfying when we can meet directly with the Representative or Senator, but often are just as effective when, because of scheduling issues, we can only meet with their staff members. In general their office staff in DC or in their home offices, are at least as well informed about the issues the Congress member is informed about, and often they can be effective at getting messages moved to the top of the desk.

### These citizen advocacy meetings are effective for:

- 1- Informing and educating an elected official about a problem or issue that affects his or her constituents directly or indirectly. We often assume our members of Congress are informed about issues, when the fact is that they often are not.
- 2- Advocating for a particular piece of legislation that is being proposed and asking for their support.
- 3- Asking your Congress member to consider signing on or becoming a sponsor for a piece of legislation.  
Be sure you have the correct name and catalogue number of the legislation/bill you are asking them to co-sign or co-sponsor. If other sponsors are lined up, bring along that list. If the bill enjoys bi-partisan support, be sure to emphasize that.
- 4- Making your elected representative aware of an important vote on a bill that affects you or others in their district, and asking for their support or opposition to that bill.
- 5- Building an ongoing relationship with your elected officials.

### Before the meeting:

- 1- If you are supporting or opposing a particular bill, be sure to make an appointment with the appropriate person. If it's a House Bill, meet with your House Representative; if it's a Senate Bill, meet with your Senator. If it's a measure being sent to a particular committee for study or a decision that falls within the scope of a particular committee, try to meet with someone who serves on that committee, including the chair.
- 2- Call ahead to make an appointment to speak to the elected representative and/or their staff. Note the purpose of your visit, the organization you represent, and the approximate number of people you will have with you. Always be polite and extra kind to the secretary!
- 3- Confirm the date and time of your meeting a day or two before. Schedules can change. Confirm any changes in the number of people you will bring.

- 4- Inform any allies or friends who feel as you do and invite them to join you at this visit. Try to bring along anyone directly, personally or indirectly impacted by this issue.

**Bring along material that supports your position:**

**Assemble all the information you'll need to make a convincing case.**

- 1- Decide ahead of time what you WANT your elected representative to DO for you, and be clear in formulating your ASK. If there is a specific vote coming up, be clear about what you want. Have your succinct TALKING POINTS ready and rehearsed.
- 2- Bring a business card or sheet of paper with your contact information on it. If you represent an organization, bring along a short brochure or document that describes who they are, their history and their purpose. Let them know that you are a local resident in her district.
- 3- Bring a one-page document that has bullet point talking points that summarize the points you want to make. Add links to any reference materials that support your points. Leave it behind.
- 4- If there are printed brochures, published materials or handouts that summarize and support your position, bring them and leave them behind.
- 5- If there are whitepapers or research documents that back up your position, bring them or bring a document that lists them with links or references. Offer to leave them behind if they will be useful.
- 6- If there are local experts on this subject who agree with your position and could bring more gravitas to your argument, ask them to accompany you or bring a written statement of their support.
- 7- If you are proposing a position that other allies in the district agree with, either bring along representatives of those allies or statements that show their support.
- 8- If you are advocating for or against a certain measure or piece of legislation, be sure you identify the bill by its correct name and number. If it's a House Bill you should be meeting with House Representatives. If it's a Senate Bill you should be meeting with Senators. Bring along a list of sponsors or supporters of this Bill in the Chamber that is considering it. Indicate especially if it enjoys bipartisan support.
- 9- If you are bringing others along with you, meet ahead of time to decide on ROLES at the meeting. Who will introduce the issue? Who will tell personal stories? Who will site the statistics? Who will make the "ASK"?

**At the meeting: Be focused, polite and succinct.**

- 1- Thank the member of Congress (and/or their staff) for meeting with you.
- 2- If you supported their election or worked on their campaign, remind them of that... and your hopes for their fair representation of you as their constituent.

- 3- Explain briefly what organization you represent and how many members there are in the member's district and across the country. How many other organizations or people are you representing?
- 4- Explain WHY you (and/or your organization) are personally moved by this issue. Use stories and statistics to strengthen your presentation.
- 5- Get to the point quickly. If there is a particular piece of legislation coming up, be clear about your ASK. Do you want this official to vote FOR it or AGAINST it? Give your reasons. If there is an issue that NEEDS to be raised that hasn't been, your ASK should include their informing themselves about this. If there is an action you want them to take or an event you want them to support or appear at, be ready with all the details they'll need to decide.
- 6- If there is a vote scheduled, note the date it is expected and ask your Congress member if you may contact his office again to remind him of this before the vote.... And assure her that you'll be contacting them afterwards to find out how he/she voted.
- 7- If the answer is NO, thank them for their time and note that you are disappointed and feel this is mistake on their part. Ask if there is any other information you might supply that would change his/her position.
- 8- If the answer is YES, thank them for their time and ask if there is any way to support them as they move forward with this. Remind them of the materials you left behind that might help support their position.
- 9- End with a thankyou for their time and restate your ask. Thank them for their service on behalf of your district.
- 10- Take a photo with the Congress member and you and any members of your 'delegation'. Share the photos with the organization that asked you to visit and your local allies.

### **Followup to the meeting:**

- 1- If there are any town hall meetings or legislative forums scheduled where this member of Congress will appear, attend and try to bring along the same allies who visited his/her office. Make it a point to publicly thank him for support of your position or express again your disappointment at his rejection of your ask and inquire for a summary of his reasons. Raising the issue in public could exert more pressure.
- 2- If the matter you raised will be voted on at a certain date, call the Congress member's office just before the vote to remind him/her of your visit and restate your position and your ASK briefly. If the Congress member has agreed with your position, remind them of that, confirm that is still their position and thank them. If they had rejected your position, remind them of the reasons you asked for their support and ask if there is anything you can do to change their mind.
- 3- As soon as the vote is ended, send an email to all the allies who accompanied you on this visit, and copy the Congress member to share the result of the vote and to note which way your ASK went with this particular member of Congress. Did she vote as she promised? If the vote you

wanted did not pan out, what are the next steps you would like to organize? Should you meet to plan next steps?

- 4- If the member of Congress voted or acted as you wished, send him/her a letter of thanks and celebrate with your allies and anyone who accompanied you on that visit!
- 5- If the member of Congress did not vote or act as you wished, send a respectful letter of disappointment restating the reasons for your ask and noting that you are sharing this disappointment with others of his constituents. Consider sending a copy of this letter to your newspaper as a "Letter To The Editor".
- 6- If you represented an organization on this visit, be sure to report to them the result of the visit.

**Building a relationship with an elected official takes time** and should not be cut short because they do not comply with your wishes. Indeed it is valuable for them to understand WHEN you support them and when you don't. Remembering to thank them for following through on promises and celebrating successes with them helps to create a respectful and warm relationship, even when you don't agree.

Send congratulations if the elected official receives an award or honor or is appointed to an important committee. Send birthday greetings. Follow their website and comment on their posts, always politely.

**Become an 'expert'**. Try to be seen as someone who has detailed information about the issues you are most interested in. Ideally you will become someone the Congressional staff looks towards for information going forward. If you speak up at public meetings about your issues, the media will come to see you also as a reputable trove of information.