

## Meeting with Legislators and Staff

Why lobby: The best policy in the world isn't going anywhere if it's not supported by human relationships based on repeated interactions."

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- **YOU ARE SPECIAL** - Many people don't dedicate this kind of time and energy to a cause, or travel to Washington or local offices to meet with their elected officials.
- **YOU ARE INFLUENTIAL**- Your voice is heard because officials know you are a mover and a health professional.
- **IT WORKS** - It's the most likely thing to change the mind of a member of Congress. ("Policy influence" ratings: #1 meeting a constituent, #2 other lobby visits, #3 personal phone calls, #4 personalized letter or email, #5 Letter to editor, #6 post-cards or petitions.)
- It takes effort, demonstrates high level of commitment to a cause (not just pointing and clicking).

### Preparation

- Know about your senator or representative: positions on key issues, committee assignments.
  - [www.govtrack.us](http://www.govtrack.us): provides basic information on Members of Congress, voting records, etc. as well as links to useful other websites such as CommonSense and OpenSecrets
  - <http://capwiz.com/fconl/directory/congdir.tt> Friends Committee on National Legislation's website for background on Members' votes, staffers, PAC's, committee assignments.
  - League of Conservation Voters: [www.lcv.org/scorecard](http://www.lcv.org/scorecard)
- Know the issue. Be able to state reasons for your own position (and read what your opponents say to prepare)
  - [www.govtrack.us](http://www.govtrack.us): recent bills on the issue
  - Go to organizations who work on your issues
- Plan your speaking roles. Decide ahead of time who will say what. Better not to have more than 4-5 people speak during a lobby meeting. You can bring more for support - make sure you know how many can fit.

Recognize that you will be speaking with an aide. That's OK. They will convey your views to their "boss" (as they say on the Hill). And they may look young, but don't be put off. They are significant.

### You can't get what you don't ask for

- Know what you want to get out of the meeting. Most important: ALWAYS HAVE AN ASK!
- Asking provides real accountability, AND something to follow up on.
  - Clearest asks are usually to vote a certain way or to cosponsor a bill. That is lobbying.
  - For our visits on Clean Power Plan, we're not asking them to vote on a specific bill; we are expressing our health-based concerns and our support for an existing policy, the Clean Power Plan and the upcoming Ozone Rule, both of which come under the Clean Air Act. Please ask what they support or don't about the bill and ask if they will consider being more supportive.

## How to decide on your ask? Prioritize! Don't have too many asks.

- Decide before you meet.
- Make your ask focused and specific. Ex: sponsor a bill, vote for a bill, consider a position change, write an op-ed.
  - Champion ask: Would you write an opinion editorial on the health impacts of climate change and the benefits of the Clean Power Plan
  - Moderate ask: Would you be willing to put out a statement on the public health benefits of clean energy
  - Conservative ask: - We understand that we may disagree on the mechanisms to reduce carbon pollution. We ask that you do not co-sponsor legislation that would block the Clean Power Plan.
- Base it on their track record. Don't waste time on something they agree on already.
- Sometimes you have to work incrementally and ask for a change in position.

## Maximize your Visit

- Opening thank you: Set a positive tone by thanking them for a recent vote or if none then thanking for the visit.
- Setting the tone: Be concise, courteous, but firm. Be honest but don't argue. Offer your viewpoint and ask for consideration of it.
- Follow the 50/50 rule: you listen 50% of the time. What are the legislator's priorities? What does the member think about our issues? What voices do they need to hear from?
- Identify yourself as a CONSTITUENT. Tell stories and make the issue local.
- Briefly describe your role in the COMMUNITY in a way that suggests how many other constituents you might represent or be able to reach.
- Identify any RELEVANT EXPERTISE – especially your health credentials, experience and communities you serve.
- Stay on message: Briefly state ONE ASK or provide opportunity for a discussion about ONE position.
- Briefly present REASONS that support your ask.
- Say THANK YOU.

*Remember: As a staffer stated, "I've got five lobby visits I have to do in a day. For each 20 minute meeting, I have ten minutes to write up the results and recommend action or pass it along to someone else. If I don't get it done in ten minutes, then it goes to the bottom of my inbox. And, sadly, often I just don't follow up." YOU GET 20 MINUTES.*

## Outcomes

- You may not get an answer, and that's ok. Follow up on the ask if it was specific.
- Staff person may not feel comfortable speaking on behalf of the legislator, but will convey information.
- If you don't have an answer to a question of theirs, that's ok too. It's your opportunity to follow up.
- It's all about follow-up. It's an ongoing process. You don't clinch the deal in one meeting.

## Follow up

- Evaluate and determine next steps. Fill out report to organizers
- Send a thank you note and include the ask one more time.
- If you promised information, send it ASAP
- Send information that would be useful to your legislator at least four times a year.
- Follow up every contact with a phone call.
- Be helpful, keep it friendly. Remember: It's all about building a relationship.

## Homework:

- 1) Find out what committees your Senators and Representative are on.
- 2) What is their position on the Clean Power Plan? (some made statements on 8/3/15 the release date)
- 3) Have they taken any votes for or against amendments to the Clean Power Plan or the EPA as a whole?

<http://www.psr.org/resources/building-advocacy-skills.html> (full lobbying presentation and other skills)