

Legislators are elected to represent you...

Having a face-to-face meeting is a very effective way to build a relationship with your elected official. Remember that legislators are elected to represent constituents like you. Most lawmakers welcome the opportunity to meet with the people they represent and constituent lobbying is a proven way to effectively influence public policy.

When calling, clearly state your concern and ask if your legislator would be willing to meet with you personally. Ask to meet in your district rather than at the statehouse. This will likely be more convenient for both your legislator and for you. Be courteous and respectful when requesting a meeting, but do not be intimidated. And remember that in most cases the legislator that you contact will be interested in the information with which you are able to provide him/her.

For information on how to request a meeting with your legislator please see the OEC fact sheet titled "Calling Elected Officials."

Preparing for your meeting

Once you have scheduled a meeting with your legislator take the time to do some research! The more you know before the meeting the more comfortable you will be and the more likely you are to come across as credible and persuasive during the meeting. Here are some questions to research before your meeting:

What is the legislator's background (i.e. birthplace, religion, previous career, education)?

What issues are most important to the legislator (based on his/her background and current activities or on recent media stories)?

On what committee(s) does the legislator serve?

How might the legislator's position on this issue differ from your own and why?

Based on this information, which arguments can you use to best convince the legislator to support your position on the issue about which you are meeting?

For more information contact:

Keith Dimoff, Deputy Director at keith@theoec.org, Jack Shaner, Public Affairs Director at jack@theoec.org, or 614-487-7506.



The roles

If you are meeting with your legislator as a team of citizen lobbyists, decide before your meeting which role each participant will play.

The Leader

The leader is the person who should schedule and confirm the meeting. The leader should set the tone of the meeting by making introductions and asking most of the questions.

The Tracker

The tracker is responsible for making sure that the conversation stays on topic. If the leader or legislator goes off on a tangent, the tracker should try to move the conversation back to the primary topic.

The Observer

The observer should say little during the meeting aside from introducing him or herself at the beginning of the meeting. For the rest of the meeting, he or she should write down what the legislator says and any other details that may be relevant. The observer should also write up a written report for the OEC.

The meeting

Arrive on time

Be on time and patient for the meeting. The legislator will likely be very busy and may be late or experience interruptions during your meeting. You will probably only get to meet with your legislator for a maximum of about 20 minutes. Try to be flexible about interruptions and to keep the meeting flowing as best as possible. Also be prepared to summarize your main points in 1-5 minutes in case you find out that the legislator will need to leave sooner than expected.

Connect with the legislator

Based on your knowledge of the legislator, share a piece of information that will help him/her connect with you personally (i.e. mention a common hobby, interest or acquaintance) when you introduce yourself. Be friendly and polite throughout the meeting and dress appropriately.

Tell the truth

The best way to build a long-term relationship with your legislator is to establish yourself as a credible source of information about your issue.

Be sure to provide accurate information during your meeting and if you are asked a question to which you do not know the answer, be honest and promise to get back to him/her after you have found the answer (and be sure that you do).

Anticipate opposition

Consider what arguments the legislator might have already heard from your opponents. Be prepared to refute the opposition.

Leave something behind

Provide the legislator with written information that backs up your arguments, perhaps a list of myths and facts about the issue or articles/editorials from your local newspaper.

Request action

Ask the legislator to take a specific action on your issue (i.e. will you vote for/vote against/cosponsor this bill?) and be sure that he/she replies to your request before the meeting's end.



Think long term

No matter how your meeting goes or what action your legislator takes on a certain issue, do not burn any bridges. While you may never sway your legislator on one issue, you may find that down the road you will be able to work with that same legislator on a different, equally important issue.

Follow up

Send a thank you note after your meeting. If the legislator requested additional information, try to include it along with the note. Later, check to see what action the legislator took regarding your issue. If he/she supported your position, call or write a personal note to say thanks. If he/she did not support your position, call or write a note to ask for an explanation of why.

Debrief immediately

Write down the details of the meeting ASAP! If the information is not written down it is likely to be quickly forgotten. The OEC has a form available for your use, but any written record will do. E-mail, fax, or mail the report to: oecc@theoec.org, (614) 487-7510, or 1207 Grandview Ave, Suite 201, Columbus, OH 43212.

Resources

The following websites can help you prepare for your meeting by providing information about the legislator with whom you will be meeting:

The Ohio Environmental Council (OEC)

www.theoec.org

The Ohio General Assembly

www.legislature.state.oh.us/

Ohio Senate Committee list

www.senate.state.oh.us/committees/

Ohio House Committee list

www.house.state.oh.us/jsps/Committee.jsp