

Tips & Tricks for Legislator Meetings

How do I find out who my legislators are?

You can find out which legislative and congressional district you live in and who your legislators are by plugging your residential address into this website: <http://app.leg.wa.gov/DistrictFinder/>

DOs and DON'Ts of Legislator Meetings

Most legislators are responsive to constituents and want to be helpful if they can. You are someone who is impacted by an issue they will be considering, so your perspective and experience can help inform them. If you follow the below tips, you should be able to have a productive meeting with your legislators and be on your way to establishing a good working relationship and advancing your issue.

DOs

- ✓ Do make an appointment in advance
- ✓ Do be on time (if not early)
- ✓ Do your homework and know your issue and have your story and ask prepared
- ✓ Do thank them for taking time to meet with you
- ✓ Do thank them for considering your viewpoint
- ✓ Do provide the legislator with a persuasive argument
- ✓ Do keep it simple and brief
- ✓ Do let the legislator know why you care about the issue and how it impacts you
- ✓ Do stay on message
- ✓ Do provide an "ask" that is clear and actionable
- ✓ Do be open minded and listen to what your legislator has to say
- ✓ Do cultivate a relationship with both the legislator and their staff
- ✓ Do follow up with a thank you message and any additional information that was promised
- ✓ *Virtual session* – Do test your technology in advance
- ✓ *Virtual session* – Do have a 'plan b', such as a written statement, in case technology falters
- ✓ *Virtual session* – Do designate a point person to take lead in your group
- ✓ *Virtual session* – Do consider sending a list of meeting participants in advance to save time from lengthy and potentially bumpy virtual introductions.

DON'Ts

- ✗ Don't go off message or discuss unrelated issues
- ✗ Don't be argumentative or confrontational
- ✗ Don't engage in partisan critiques
- ✗ Don't be overly technical or use too many statistics
- ✗ Don't make up information – if you don't know the answer you can offer to follow up
- ✗ Don't lose track of time
- ✗ Don't "waste an ask" – you want them to say yes to your legislative ask, not something else
- ✗ Don't get frustrated if you end up meeting with staff instead of a legislator
- ✗ Don't threaten them ("If you don't vote for this bill, I won't vote for you in the next election")
- ✗ Don't talk about campaign donations

Advocacy is a Marathon, Not a Sprint

Remember, advocacy takes time. While you might have an amazing meeting with one legislator and get them to not only say they'll vote for your bill but will also be a champion and sponsor, you might have another meeting with a legislator who is skeptical or comes from a different perspective. Be patient, don't give up, and continue to work with your legislators. It can take multiple years to get a bill through.

There is a Spectrum of Support

While votes ultimately come down to YES or NO, there is a spectrum of support that you should keep in mind when working with a legislator. A legislator may initially say no, but you might be able to nudge them toward being a silent no or going neutral, or you might get them to support and help with a component of a bill even if they won't support the full bill.