



Policymaker Engagement Guide

Communicating with your Legislator

It's not enough to vote! Read below to learn how to communicate with your legislator, including step-by-step guides to writing your pitch, avoiding pitfalls, and crafting your message.

Policy affects everyone!

Whether or not you're "into politics," policy can still have a huge effect on your life. However, if you don't tell lawmakers what is happening in your life, then they won't know how they're impacting you and your community.

Step 1

GET TO KNOW YOUR LEGISLATOR

FIND OUT

- Who are your state legislators? You can find out which legislative district you live in by entering your residential address here: <http://app.leg.wa.gov/DistrictFinder/>
- See your legislator's profile by visiting: leg.wa.gov
- Which legislative committees do they serve on? What organizations are they involved in?
- What have they done, believed, or fought for that might be helped by supporting your issue? For example: a position they have already endorsed or a family member who is affected by the issues you care about.

MAKE THE APPOINTMENT

- Call the Olympia office (during session) or District Office (during interim) and ask for an appointment.
- Verify meeting location. Interim-select a mutually agreeable location.
- Exchange names, email addresses and cell numbers.
- Send an email confirming the appointment, point person, a list of who will be attending, and topic.

ADDITIONAL PREPARATION

- Schedule a prep meeting with your group to prepare for the meeting. Select a point person.
- Using the Meeting Preparation Template-prepare your introduction and issue for discussion.
- If your meeting is *virtual*, test your technology in advance.
- Schedule a prep meeting with your group to prepare. Select a point person.

TIP!

Deepen your research by checking out campaign materials and searching on the web.



Step 2

THE MEETING: DIRECT, SHORT, & CLEAR

INTRODUCTIONS

- Briefly introduce yourself at the start of the meeting and establish yourself as a constituent in the legislator's district. Consider adding a few unique details to underscore the fact that your group represents a broad cross-section of the district.

PRIORITY ISSUE

- Pick your single issue for discussion.
- Do not discuss multiple issues at the same time. What are the few most important bits of background information they absolutely need to understand? Don't assume your legislators are as knowledgeable as you about your issue.

FACTS/STATISTICS

- Research a fact or statistic that backs up your ask.
- For example, if your issue is tobacco use, look up smoking rates among teenagers. Be ready to back up your fact with a credible source.

PERSONAL STORY

- Combine your fact/statistic with a local/personal story to help support your point.

BE BRIEF AND CONCISE

- Rehearse your message. Be able to tell your story in five minutes.

FIVE WORDS TO REMEMBER

- Representatives and their staff have a lot going on at once. Come up with just five words that you would want your legislator to remember.

TIPS

- If there is disagreement about an issue, give both sides fairly. Tell the whole story.
- Use the PREPARE FOR YOUR MEETING

THE ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF A SUCCESSFUL MEETING:

1. Priority Issue
2. Facts/Statistics
3. Personal Story
4. BE Brief and Concise

! ! !
SPEAK UP

Step 3

IT'S YOUR
MOMENT ★

MEETING YOUR LEGISLATOR

Making the initial contact is as easy as picking up the phone or writing an email or a letter.

Suggest a meeting place that is easy and comfortable for him/her, like a coffee shop or a casual restaurant. The initial meeting will likely last between 15 and 30 minutes.

TIPS

BE POLITE

- If the meeting is in person, arrive 15 minutes early. If virtual, log in 10 minutes early to test your technology.
- Thank your representative for meeting with you.
- Listen carefully and respectfully to what your representative has to say.
- When you do talk, stay on topic: stick to the issue at hand.
- Don't be argumentative, confrontational, or threaten them.
- Don't talk about campaign donations.

BE READY TO ADAPT

- Have your pitch practiced and ready to go.
- In case your time is cut short, start with your most important item first and then get to the rest if you can. Representatives may be running late and may reduce your appointment time.
- Prepare a written piece if your technology fails so that it can be emailed to your representative.
- Sometimes representatives like to talk about their own issues – in which case you will need to gently get them back to your issue, as the clock is ticking.

BE YOURSELF

- Always tell the truth about anything you are asked. If you don't know something, admit it. But offer to get the answer, and follow up promptly.
- Don't feel uncomfortable if you didn't —or wouldn't— vote for them. Representatives are elected to serve all of the people in the district. They want to be helpful regardless of your political affiliation or age.



“Get in good trouble, necessary trouble, and help
redeem the soul of America.”

— Congressman John Lewis.



Step 4

FOLLOW-UP: IT'S NOT ONE-AND-DONE!

KEEP YOUR REPRESENTATIVE UPDATED

- Find out how they like to receive their information: email, one-pagers, etc.
- Make sure to send along any new information, as well as periodic reminders about your issue.

IT'S PERSONAL

- Don't expect a representative to remember your name and face. Introduce yourself every time you meet. Your consideration will be appreciated.
- Keep up your contacts. After the meeting, send a short follow-up email or note thanking the legislator for her/his/their time and briefly re-stating what you talked about and why.
- Building relationships take time. Be patient, don't give up and continue to reach out to your legislators.
- Never burn your bridges. Today's competitor might be tomorrow's ally.

☆ The voices of constituents must be heard. ☆

PREPARE FOR YOUR MEETING-TEMPLATE



My priority issue is...

My noteworthy (local) fact or statistic that illustrates my issue is...

My local (personal) story that goes with my fact or statistic is...

What I want my representative to know is...

The five words I want my representative to remember are...

THANK YOU!



healthy generations
CREATING ENDURING HEALTH EQUITY

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