

TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL MEETING WITH A LEGISLATOR

- **Make an appointment:** Don't just show up and expect to be seen. Be flexible with your scheduling.
- **Do your homework:** Know your legislator's record (if any) on your issues and/or similar issues. Know who and what area they represent and whether his or her committee areas involve your issue.
- **Be prepared and organized:** Try to have a written agenda to follow for the meeting. Decide ahead of time who in your group will lead the meeting, who will address what issues, who will speak when and for how long, etc. Role play or rehearse a meeting together in advance of the actual meeting if you can.
- **Be understanding of the demands of the Legislature:** A legislator may be late, have to cut a meeting short, come in halfway or even be unable to attend unexpectedly sometimes through no fault of his or her own. Be understanding and flexible.
- **Take seriously and be respectful of whomever you meet with:** Use a legislator's correct title ("Senator" or "Assemblyman/woman/member"). Do not underestimate the importance or influence of staff members; treat those meetings the same as if they were with the legislator.
- **Have something written to present:** In addition to any other materials, provide a brief, one-page synopsis of your issues and what you are seeking. Bullets are best.
- **Be clear and concise about what you want:** Legislative meetings are usually between 10 - 15 minutes long in Albany and can be slightly longer in the district office. In either case, because you may not know going in how long the meeting will last, make your pitch clear, concise, crisp and compelling. Make it plain why you are meeting, what you hope to accomplish and what you want the legislator to do.
- **Don't assume the legislator knows anything about your issue:** Don't use lingo, acronyms or abbreviations (for example, LGBT). Speak at a very basic level, but be quick to jump ahead if you are told that the person with whom you are meeting is familiar with the issue.
- **Constituents are golden:** Make every effort to include one of the legislator's constituents in your visiting team and make sure the legislator knows that a constituent is present. If there are no constituents, at least try to show why what you are requesting is in the interest of his or her constituency.
- **Make it personal, but not too personal:** Personal stories can be very meaningful and powerful, and are one of the most important things you can contribute to a legislator's decision-making process. But don't make your issue a personal "ax to grind."
- **Don't attack, but don't gloss over:** Corner a legislator at your own risk; they have the home field advantage. Professionalism and a sense of committed determination usually go further than name calling or attacks. Still, don't be intimidated or afraid to bring up tough issues, question a legislator on past votes or positions taken or ask for a definitive answer.
- **Don't be afraid to say that you don't know:** Be as responsive as you can but, if necessary, say you will get back to the legislator or staffer with the answer to a particular question. If it seems more information would be useful to address a point, volunteer to send it along.
- **Specify follow-up:** Indicate how the meeting will be followed up on, either with a call, another meeting, etc., and/or what follow-up you expect from the legislator in terms of a letter, call, course of action, etc. Ask for the name of a specific staff member who should be your contact for follow-up.