

Tips for personal visits with legislators

Source: Greater Philadelphia Cultural Alliance

Personal visits can be one of the most effective methods of communicating with a legislator. Your position is connected with a face, a person, and can be presented with your own choice of emphasis. The personal visit also gives you the opportunity to answer questions or find out quickly the areas where you need to provide more research information.

1. **Plan the visit carefully and be clear about what you expect to achieve by the visit.** Limit the visit to discussion of one issue. Determine which member of the legislator's staff is charged with information about that issue in case you can't meet with the legislator directly.
2. **Make an appointment.** Contact the legislator's scheduler or appointment secretary to arrange an appointment. Introduce yourself and who you represent, make it known that you are a constituent, and explain your purpose for the meeting.
3. **Confirm your appointment the day before** to be sure the legislator's schedule hasn't changed.
4. **Be prompt and patient.** Be punctual, but be prepared to wait if the legislator is late or interrupted. If interruptions or schedule changes occur, be flexible and willing to meet with a member of the legislator's staff.
5. **Be positive.** If the legislator has been supportive on your issues, thank him/her for his/her support and diligence. If the legislator has not been supportive, thank him/her for meeting with you and hearing your views.
6. **Be prepared.** Know what the legislator's opinions are and if possible what their current or past positions have been. Plan your approach using this information and try to plan for the questions that might be asked. Bring paper and pen to take notes during the meeting. Write down questions that need further research, and notes to help you write thank you letters prepare future meetings, and report to colleagues.
7. **Bring information packages and business cards.** Legislators may need more facts and information and may lack research on your position or issues. Provide supporting materials for your position along with information about your organization, including posters, brochures, newsletters and other promotional materials. Include contact information with the package.
8. **Know your message.** Simplify your message so you can deliver your position and a few supporting facts and experiences quickly. In most instances, you will have 15-20 minutes to meet with a legislator or staff member and make your point clear. Rehearse your message for delivery, timing, persuasiveness, and to boost your confidence. Keep in mind that you'll probably be asked to open the conversation and explain the reason for your visit—use this opportunity to outline your issue and focus your conversation. Don't let yourself be distracted from your purpose by small talk, but do utilize the flow of conversation to deliver your message
9. **Don't let yourself be intimidated.** You probably know more about your field than your legislator does. You are there to educate and bring awareness to the issue you are concerned about.
10. **Be political.** The bottom line of a legislator's politicking is satisfying his/her district. Recognize that legislators want to respond to the interests of their constituents. You provide that opportunity by educating them on another facet of their constituents' interests.
11. **Be responsive.** Be prepared to answer questions and offer to provide additional information. Information and materials you provide may benefit your position in the decision-making process.
12. **Always end by thanking a legislator for his/her time and attention.** Always follow-up your visits with a thank-you letter to show you appreciate the opportunity to talk with him/her. A thank-you letter is also an opportunity for you to remind a legislator of you and your message. In the letter, briefly summarize the discussion you had with him/her and provide additional contacts or references. If the legislator takes the action you requested, write a thank you note showing your appreciation for his/her efforts. This serves as a reminder to the legislator you are paying attention to what they are doing.