

# How to lobby: Tips for citizen activists

Visiting your legislators is one of the strongest ways you can participate in and show support for our democracy. Our legislators represent us, but the only way they can know what we want is for us to tell them. Most legislators pay attention to constituents, especially when an issue moves them enough to visit in person and talk about it. The following tips will help your visit be a success:

- Be courteous to the legislator's assistant. These folks have tough jobs and, incidentally, a lot of control over the information their bosses see and hear.
- Start the meeting by introducing yourselves – everyone in your group – and thanking the legislator for taking time to meet with you. Thank the legislator for any past legislation that he/she supported in favor of your cause, and be sure to bring up any personal or professional connections that you and the legislator may share.
- When you are introducing yourselves, stress who among the group is a constituent or represents an organization with constituents in the legislator's district.
- Stay on topic! Share personal and local examples of the impact of the issues you came to talk about. Leave information. Keep the meeting short and focused.
- Make your ask. Make sure you have a clear and direct ask. (e.g., Do we have your support on S836 to protect our coast and economy from offshore oil spills?)
- Be a good listener. Let your legislator ask questions as you go along. You don't have to agree with his/her views, but you should show that you are willing to hear your legislator.
- Saying "I don't know" can be a smart move. If you don't know the answer to a question, tell your legislator that you will get that information as soon as you can and then follow up with him/her afterward. Never make up an answer to a question - giving inaccurate information can seriously damage your credibility. If the legislator needs more information, please let us know so we can make sure that someone follows up.
- If there is opposition, attempt to identify its source. It is appropriate to ask what it would take for the elected official to change his/her mind.
- Be resolute, but not argumentative. It may take several meetings by different citizens to shift a legislator's position. As your meeting begins to wind down, you can ask for a commitment of support on your issues. If he/she says no, smile anyway.
- End the visit on a positive note. Thank the elected official for their time. Ask that you be put on his/her mailing list, and leave your contact information.
- Outside the office, quickly jot down notes from the visit while they are fresh in your mind. The information you collect on a visit is as important as what you impart.
- After you return home, write a quick thank you note to the legislator, and include any needed follow-up information you said you would get the legislator.

Good luck and have fun!