



T: 919.857.4699

F: 919.833.8819

19 E. Martin Street
Suite 300
Raleigh, NC 27601

www.ncconservationnetwork.org

NC Conservation Network

Tip Sheet #3: District Meetings: How & Why

Created by: Nicole Stewart, Organizer, nicole@ncconservationnetwork.org

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District Meetings: How & Why

In our last Tip Sheet, we went over how to plan and win a legislative campaign. One tip covered was to talk early with your decision makers to gauge their knowledge and interest on your issue. This Tip Sheet is devoted to one aspect of talking to elected officials: *the district meeting, which is a short, focused, in-person meeting with your legislator in their home district to discuss an issue with them.*

So why hold a district meeting?

Tip #1: It's much easier to mobilize your members or allies in the home district of their legislator rather than organize a trip to Raleigh. Having these constituents meeting their legislator in district also pulls the legislator out of the fast paced environment of the legislative building and puts them in the comfort of a local restaurant or library. The setting matters a lot. Ironically, the legislature can be a difficult place to actually get meaningful time with a legislator unless you are a full time lobbyist.

Tip #2: Meeting at home is a real way to bring your issues front and center to the elected official. It allows you the opportunity to introduce your elected official to the people who are impacted daily by the issue. If the issue you are concerned with has a site to visit, you could even take a field trip to show the elected official the area.

Tip #3: A district meeting is a great way to establish and build a relationship with your elected official. Once you've had a couple of district meetings, you should be able to call up or email your elected official and remind them of your conversations and any promises they made regarding your issue.

So, how do you go about holding a district meeting?

Tip #4: *Prepare first:* Decide who will attend your meeting. Keep the group small, but bring individuals with diverse view points who have an interest in your issue. If possible, put together an analysis of the legislator's likely position on the issue and share that with the participants. Hold a practice run-through of your meeting and determine: Who will speak first? What points will we make? Who will ask the elected official for a commitment? Decide what your goal is: Do you want their support on a bill? Do you want them to introduce legislation?

Tip #5: *Find a good location for the meeting.* Will you meet at a local café, your house, the town hall, or at the site of your issue? Pick your location strategically and thoughtfully.

Tip #6: *Before the meeting:* Call the elected official to schedule the meeting. Make sure to communicate that you represent a group of constituents. Suggest specific times and find out how long s/he will be able to meet with you. Make sure to tell him/her what the issue is that you wish to discuss and how many people will be joining you. Finally,

follow-up your phone call with an email verifying the time, location, names of individuals attending, and the issue you will be addressing.

Tip #7: *At the meeting:* Have your entire group meet early to run over your points one last time. Once the elected official arrives, introduce yourself, note any personal connections you may have to the elected official, and thank him/her for any help they have given to your issue(s) in the past. Present your views politely but persuasively. Be a good listener; let your elected official ask questions as you go along. And, be truthful; if you don't know the answer, say so and note that you'll get back to him/her (and then do).

Tip #8: *Be polite:* No matter how difficult the conversation may become. In almost every case, you don't want to burn bridges with the elected official (remember, you are meeting with him/her because s/he has the power to give you what you need to meet your goal). But, don't let the elected official evade the issue either. Press for specifics and tactfully ask what his/her position is on the issue. Be sure to make the ask "can we count on your support?" if the legislator isn't clear.

Tip #9: *End the conversation and meeting on a positive note.* Thank the elected official for their time and set a plan for following up.

Tip #10: *After the meeting:* Follow up in a timely fashion with any requested materials and/or information. Send a thank you letter; restate your understanding of the positions s/he took on the issue and thank him/her for any expressions of support.

Tip #11: The thank you note should not be the last time you communicate with your elected official. After your meeting, invite him/her to public events, send updates on the issue you discussed, and meet with him/her again when a new opportunity has risen for him/her to take a positive stand on your issue.

Tip #12: Share the information from your district meeting with other organizations and individuals working on your campaign. The more information a coordinated effort has the better decisions can be made on who to target next and how to continue with your campaign plan.

For more information:

Much of this information comes from an older training document, [Keeping Legislators Accountable](#), which NC Conservation Network staff created for our affiliates. To see the full document (a pdf), [click here](#). Please note that the document is meant to be printed out and folded in half to create a booklet (see page numbers)

To find contact information for your elected officials, click [here for the Senate](#) and [here for the House](#).

Now that you've read our tips, we'd like to ask you to **please take two minutes to complete a very short survey:**

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=oNlsdGJliwDRKCRA47xr4w_3d_3d, to let us know if this was a useful tool. Your feedback will allow us to better meet your needs as an affiliate of the NC Conservation Network. Thank you!