

Face to Face with Your Legislator



Your elected officials want to meet with you in person because they represent you and value your opinion. (Also, because they think meeting with you may help them get reelected.) You want to meet with them to persuade them to vote on the pro-conservation side of a piece of legislation that concerns you, and to help establish a strong relationship with them. Of all lobbying techniques, a face-to-face meeting offers the best chance of getting a commitment on an issue from a legislator.

It is not difficult to arrange a meeting with local elected officials. If you are in a small group, you will probably meet in their offices. Larger groups may want to reserve a public meeting room in the local library, or invite them to your organization's office. You don't have to travel to Washington D.C. to meet with your U.S. representative; most come home every other weekend and will arrange meetings at their district office. However, when you are in Washington D.C. on business or pleasure, don't miss the chance to visit your representative and your senators.

Setting Up the Meeting

1. **Get an appointment.** Call the legislator's office and ask to speak with the scheduler. Introduce yourself as a constituent, starting with where you live. Explain what topic you wish to discuss with the legislator. Ask for a 30-minute meeting (you probably will not get that long). If the legislator is absolutely unavailable, request a meeting with a staff person.
2. **Prepare for the meeting.** Research the voting record of your legislator before you visit. This will help you determine what approach would work best with her. Know the facts around your issue and be prepared to make a pitch of five minutes or less.
3. **Who should attend?** Small groups are generally best. Think about who will help you make your best case—perhaps someone with a special angle or viewpoint. If you are bringing other community members along with you, gather for a pre-meeting nearby (like a coffee shop) to coordinate what you are going to say and to appoint spokesperson to lead the meeting.
4. **Confirm the meeting.** Make a few check-up calls to verify the time slot and make sure the legislator's schedule hasn't changed.
5. **Be on time.** Every minute you are late is a minute lost.

