

Meet Face-to-Face with Your Elected Official

This page will help you schedule, prepare, and implement a successful meeting with your elected official.

Tips for Scheduling the Meeting

Be prepared. Write down what you want to say and have it with you when you make the call. It may sound silly, and you may never even look at it, but it will definitely boost your confidence. You will need to say who you are, when you would like to meet, what you would like to meet about, and who will be in the meeting.

Speak with the scheduler. When you call, ask to speak to the scheduler. If he or she is unavailable, leave a message with your name and phone number requesting a meeting. Most likely they will return your phone call; however, if you do not hear back by the next day, call again the following day. Remember that these people are very busy, but ultimately they work for you, and it is fully within your rights to ask to see and speak to your elected official. Keep making follow-up calls until you speak to the scheduler directly. This could take eight or ten calls, so don't get discouraged. When you speak to him or her directly, ask to have a face-to-face meeting with your elected official and the staffer or staffers who work on your issues. Be ready to tell the scheduler what the meeting will pertain to. Inform the scheduler you will fax and email a request for the meeting with all of the pertinent information they require.

Meet with a staffer if you can't meet with the elected official. You may or may not be able to meet with your elected official directly, but don't be discouraged. Meeting with key staffers is of vital importance in developing a relationship with your representative. This is an excellent opportunity to start a great relationship with the staffer, or further develop your relationship. A good relationship with a staffer can open the door for a face-to-face meeting with an elected official. Get the ear of a good staffer, and you've got the ear of the official.

Reconfirm. Once you have the meeting, thank the scheduler for their time and let them know that you will be reconfirming your meeting the week before. Make a note in your planner to reconfirm your meeting the Friday before your appointment is scheduled. It is always better to be safe than sorry.

Tips for Before the Meeting

Do your homework. Find out what issues your elected official cares about. Connect what you are going to speak with them about to their pet issues.

Be prepared. Make an agenda for the meeting and practice in advance. Be brief, clear and to the point and don't be afraid to show your passion.

Take notes. Take notes on what is said and write down any commitments your elected official makes and any follow up that needs to be done after the meeting.

Inspire yourself. Prior to the meeting, do something to remind yourself why you are so passionate. It will show.

Tips for During the Meeting

Connect with your audience. Establish a personal connection with your elected official and their staffer in the meeting by asking them to share their goals and the issues they care about. Share your own vision and concerns.

Acknowledge your audience. It is rare that elected officials or staffers hear the words "Thank You" from their constituents. Always thank them for the supportive actions they have taken or just be sure to thank them for taking the time to meet with you. Praising a good staffer in front of their boss is an especially good thing.

Be concise. Summarize your request in 5 minutes or less.

Be prepared to summarize any counter-arguments. Know the other side of the coin. There may be very articulate counter-arguments. Be prepared and do your homework on any opposition. Have talking points prepared to defend your position. Never attack. If you don't know the answer or how to respond, tell the staffer or official you will get them further information.

Don't be a zealot. Fair, balanced and thoughtful conversations will keep the door to your member's office open even if you don't find common ground. Always leave with a thank you and a commitment to follow up with relevant information.

Don't be a know-it-all or talk down to a staffer. Many staffers are young and may not know about your issue. Be professional and helpful, not condescending.

Make the issues real. One of the most powerful ways to speak about an issue is to have someone there who has been directly affected and can tell their experiences. Another possibility is to tell the story of a specific family or to show a video during the meeting that puts your elected official in the shoes of others for a few minutes and makes the issues real.

Paint the big picture and the small picture. For example, one person could tell their story about how the issue has affected her/him personally (the small picture); then, someone else could flesh out the current national or global statistics and impact (the big picture).

Tips for After the Meeting

Know your next steps. In the meeting, ensure that the next steps for follow up are clear (what you will do next, what the elected official will do next) and that you know which staffers to contact for follow up.

Send a thank you note. After the meeting, send a prompt thank you note and list of next steps.

Source: *RESULTS Educational Fund's Activist Milestones*