

# Visiting Policymakers

One of the most effective ways to **influence the policymaking process** and **make a lasting connection** is to visit with your policymaker in person.

## How to Arrange a Meeting with Your Policymaker:

- ♦ **Send a letter, a fax or call to request an appointment.** If you want to meet with your policymaker in the district, send the request to the district office. If you will be visiting the capitol, send the letter to that office.
- ♦ **Be sure to identify yourself as a constituent** and address the letter to the policymaker and to the attention of the appointment scheduler. Include information about who you are, the nature of your visit (identify what you want to discuss), when you would like to meet and the names of any friends or colleagues who may accompany you.
- ♦ **Call the policymaker's office after a few days to follow up on the letter.** Ask to speak with the appointment scheduler or the administrative assistant who handles appointments. Explain who you are and why you are calling and refer to the letter you sent to the office. If the legislator is unavailable at the time or will not be in the area on the date you would like to meet, the appointment scheduler may offer you another date and time or provide you the opportunity to meet with the policymaker's staff who handles the issue you want to discuss.
- ♦ **Send a letter or make a phone call confirming the appointment.**

## Got an appointment with the staff instead?

Don't be discouraged if you get a meeting with the policymaker's staff (also called a legislative aide). While policymakers make every effort to meet with their constituents, their schedules can be very unpredictable. Contrary to belief, staff play an intricate role in research and information collecting for policymakers on issues. Legislative aides are usually assigned issues in which they become "experts" for the office. The legislative aide helps to shape the policymaker's positions on issue. [Building a relationship with a staff member can be just as effective as meeting with a policymaker.](#)

## Before you go — Get to know

Learn all you can about your policymaker

- ♦ Check out his or her website
- ♦ Talk with colleagues and fellow community members to get a feel for what he or she cares about
- ♦ Discover his or her interests and key issues
- ♦ Develop messages and select a story that links his or her priorities to your request

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## Conducting a Meeting with you Policymaker or Staff

**Arrive on time.** If meeting with a staff member, be sure you have the correct contact name. Do not underestimate the power of the staff person in helping to shape the policymaker's opinion and positions on issues or a particular piece of legislation.

**Bring two or three colleagues with you.** Prior to the meeting, you should agree on what points will be made and which one each of you will discuss.

**Try to deliver your message in three minutes.** Be sure to introduce yourself and your colleagues and explain why you are concerned about the issue and why you have expertise regarding the issue. Be concise, polite, and professional. One of the most important issues to elected officials is how your work directly impacts the people who put them in office—the people who live and work in the communities they represent. Provide examples and let them know, clearly and specifically, how the policy will affect them.

**Be prepared to answer questions.** Clearly explain your interests and issues.

**Be a resource for the policymaker and his or her staff.** Offer your time and assistance if he or she wants to talk about your areas of interest and expertise in the future.

**Provide material to support your position.** Leave behind a business card and a one-page fact sheet summarizing your position.

**Follow up with a “thank you” letter.** Be sure to include any additional information you may have promised or that may be relevant to the issue.

## TELL A RELEVANT STORY

The most compelling and memorable way to educate a policymaker on an issue is to tell a brief story that demonstrates the unique impact that the policy has on an individual, program or community. Keep the story simple, positive, and on point. Whenever possible, tie the story to the policymaker's interests. If you don't personally know of a specific story, doing brief research on the policymaker's interests will allow you to ask colleagues who work more directly on the issue to provide you with specifics.