

TOP 10 TIPS FOR ENGAGING WITH ELECTED OFFICIALS

We appreciate that speaking with policymakers can be intimidating at times. So keep these tips in mind when engaging with elected officials.

TIP 1

KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE:

- Identify areas where you and the elected official you are meeting with can relate. For example, do you share the same alma mater, home town, similar hobbies?
- Research the legislative priorities of the elected official you are meeting with to ensure that the issue you are discussing resonates with them.
- Determine if they are more of a data-driven elected official or if they are more focused on the human toll this type of issue could have on their community.

TIP 2

DO YOUR RESEARCH:

- In order to know your audience, you must do your research.
- Review their voting history, the committees that they sit on. A legislator's voting history and committee assignments can be found on their legislative profile page.
- Check out their social media and campaign websites.
- Read recent news on them and columns that they have penned.
- Go into your meeting with relevant data or statistics to reinforce the issue you are discussing.

TIP 3

BE CLEAR, CONCISE, AND HONEST:

- Whether in person or virtually, clearly state why you are engaging your elected official-- but keep it short and sweet. Most elected officials have a limited amount of time for individual meetings.
- If they ask a question that you don't know the answer to, it's okay to say that you don't know. Let them know that you will find the answer and get back to them quickly.

TIP 4

KNOW ALL SIDES OF THE ISSUE:

- Elected officials often want to know the entire argument, meaning why would someone oppose this? Have you spoken with the opposition? Are there compromises on the table?
- If there is no possible middle ground, know the opposition's argument in preparation to dismantle it and back it up with facts. Always remain open to having conversations with the opposition.

TIP 5 FOLLOW UP:

- Even if you're able to answer every question in your meeting, follow up with a note thanking them for taking the time to meet with you. A simple note goes a long way.
- Positively shouting out an elected official on social media can also be an incredibly useful tool when advocating for your cause. Be sure to verify that you are tagging their official legislator account.

TIP 6 WHY:

- Make sure to know your *why*. Why are you opposing or supporting this issue? Why are you contacting or meeting with your elected official? Even ask the official you are meeting with why they are supporting or opposing the issue.

TIP 7 TELL A COMPELLING HUMAN-INTEREST STORY AROUND THE ISSUE:

- Every detail of the story isn't needed. A good rule of thumb: is this detail critical to the story? If not, lose it.
- If conveying your story virtually, consider including pictures that depict the issue in living color.
- Eye contact conveys sincerity and draws the listener in, as does smiling. Consider deploying both tactics when interfacing with elected officials whether in person, via phone or computer.

TIP 8 PACE YOURSELF:

- While time may be limited, be sure to speak at a pace where it's easy for your elected official to receive the message that you are expressing. Consider preparing remarks in advance of the meeting in efforts to ensure you convey all necessary points that need to be made.

TIP 9 MAKE YOUR MESSAGE STICK:

- If there is one thing you'd like the elected official to remember from your conversation, what would it be? What is the most important thing for them to remember and ultimately act upon?
- You must make your ending strong enough so that your message will make an impression long after your conversation is over.

TIP 10 SUMMARIZE:

- Do your research, make your ask, state why the issue is important, and then sum up what you have said.

To find and contact your
legislators, visit:
<https://www.ncleg.gov/>
FindYourLegislators

FOR MORE INFORMATION AND TO GET INVOLVED:

Visit: www.ncruralcenter.org/research/advocacy
Follow @RuralCounts on Twitter

