



Tips for PRIA Member on Meeting with Legislators

Personal meetings, either to discuss a specific issue or just to introduce yourself as a constituent, are the most effective means of political communication. Given a lawmaker's busy schedule, however, meetings are sometimes difficult to arrange. But they are just as vital as any other extremely important business meeting. The contact can be made with the lawmaker directly or through key staff aides.

Unless you already know your lawmaker, you should write, rather than phone, to request an appointment or schedule a special event. Do not overlook the opportunity to meet with a staff aide, particularly if he or she is working closely with the lawmaker on an issue of concern to you. Further, try to schedule meetings with your lawmakers when they are visiting in the state or district. If the meeting is to discuss a specific issue, it is important to be thoroughly familiar with all aspects of the issue before the meeting.

When talking to the lawmaker, try to be concise and well-organized. Demonstrate a regard for his or her schedule. Most of all state your views firmly and be attentive to the lawmaker's positions as well. The meeting should be an exchange of ideas, not a lecture.

Do's and Don'ts of Meeting with Legislators

Meeting with your legislators should be profitable for them, as well as you and whomever you may represent. To help insure a productive session, the following suggestions may help.

Do's

1. Do -- Make an appointment by letter or phone. You may be lucky enough to just walk into his/her office and make connections, but it's not likely.
2. Do -- Get to know your legislator's aide -- they are the gateway to any meeting.
3. Do -- Outline in your call or letter the issues you wish to discuss at the meeting. Make reference to previous contacts or communications, if any. Your legislator will appreciate a chance to be as knowledgeable about you as possible.
4. Do -- Restrict your visit agenda to not more than three (3) issues and set priorities.
5. Do -- Recommend specific solutions to the issues you are discussing.
6. Do -- Make the people whom your legislator represents the frame of reference for your presentation. Your legislator will be interested in your issues/views and the issues/views of those you represent as they relate to provision of services to his/her constituents.

7. Do -- Develop your presentation so it will be direct, concise and not excessive in length. (Plan on 15 minutes.) This will help with busy schedules and will be appreciated.
8. Do -- Prepare a *brief* written account of the points you wish to make and leave it with your legislator. Document facts you may not have time to present orally.
9. Do -- Offer to provide additional information. Hopefully your presentation will inspire him/her to want additional facts--one of your prime objectives.

Don'ts

1. Don't -- Be late for your appointment.
2. Don't -- Be disappointed if your legislator is late.
3. Don't -- Be disappointed if some circumstance prevents your legislator from making the meeting. You will see an assistant (probably a legislative assistant) who will be knowledgeable about your issues and of the legislator's point of view. You can accomplish just as much under these circumstances.
4. Don't -- Overstay your welcome. You may want to come again and this impression will be lasting. Make your brief presentation and if your legislator wishes to prolong the conversation, you will be able to sense it.
5. Don't -- Try to solve all of your issues in one visit. Present only those issues (not more than three) of greatest concern to you and about which your legislator can do something.
6. Don't -- Speak solely in terms of administrative problems.
7. Don't -- Expect miracles. It has taken time to produce all of the issues that have resulted from legislation and it will take time to remedy them.

After the meeting:

1. Follow up with a thank you letter and reemphasize key points that were discussed.
2. Follow up with a note of thanks to those staff people who helped to arrange the visit or who participated in the meeting.
3. Advise your PRIA Board of Directors of any significant items that were discussed during the visit.