

Meeting Your Legislator

Tips for Effective Legislative Meetings

- **Make an Appointment in Advance.**

Time is always at a premium in legislative offices. Contact the legislator's scheduler in advance to arrange a meeting. First make your meeting request in writing and follow up with a phone call. Be clear about who will be attending the meeting and the specific reason for the meeting. Legislative schedules are unpredictable so don't be put off if your meeting is rescheduled, or if you have to meet with staff in lieu of the elected official.
- **Do your Homework.**

Thoroughly prepare for your meeting. Know your talking points in advance and be prepared to make your case. If you have any questions or need more information, contact ANFP Headquarters for assistance.
- **Stay "on message."**

Effective legislative meetings should be narrow in scope. Stick to the issue, state only a few key points in support of your position, and make a definite request for action. Many meetings are ineffective because a participant strays from the key points. Have a message and stick to it.
- **Make it Real.**

Legislators want to hear your thoughts and opinions because you are a constituent. An effective strategy is to relate a compelling story about the impact of the issue on people that the Member of Congress represents. Do not overwhelm the legislator with facts and figures; this information is available in your talking papers and from the national organization (ANFP). Your story is important and you can be the only source for such rich information. Don't be afraid to humanize the issue by relating it to your local community or personal experience.
- **Know the Ask.**

Many people are afraid that it's impolite to make a direct request. Remember that the purpose of your meeting is to secure support for your issue. It is appropriate and expected that you will make a request at your meeting. The key is to make sure that your request is clear and actionable -- make a direct and specific request that is tied to pending legislative activity (if possible). For example, ask that a legislator co-sponsor a bill. You should make reference to the bill number and be knowledgeable about the status of the bill.
- **Cultivate a Relationship with Staff.**

Many grassroots advocates underestimate the important role of legislative staff. A supportive staff person can often make the difference between success and failure. Staff play an invaluable role in shaping a legislator's agenda and position on issues. Therefore, make every effort to cultivate a positive working relationship with staff. Over time, staff may even come to regard you as a helpful resource for information on your issue.
- **Follow-up.**

What happens after a meeting is almost as important as the meeting itself. Send a 'thank you' letter after the meeting that expresses appreciation, reinforces your message, and confirms any verbal commitment of support made by the legislator or staff. If you promised to follow-up with further information, do so; otherwise you lose credibility. Also, don't forget to report the results of your meeting back to ANFP Headquarters staff. This information is vital to coordinating the overall legislative strategy and evaluating the impact of advocacy efforts.

ITEMS TO LEAVE BEHIND (in this order):

- 1) Safe Food for Seniors Fact Sheet
- 2) Position Paper
- 3) The Bill (H.R. 2181)