

The Art of Talking With Your Legislator

Emphasize what is known. Stop leading with unknowns, caveats, and disclaimers. What you start with is what people remember. Give those details later if need be.

Invert the standard order for reporting. Start with the main points, then give the background. Say why it matters up front.

Less is more. Stick to simple, clear messages about what's important and repeat them often.

Stop speaking in code. Choose plain language over technical terms, insider jargon, and acronyms. (Use Fahrenheit if that's what's most familiar to your audience. Human-caused, not anthropogenic.)

Tips for Lobbying

Determine who specifically has the authority to make a decision concerning your issue (e.g., Senator, Representative, Governor) and then communicate with them in a variety of ways.

- Write letters
- Call the decision-maker(s)
- Send e-mail
- Invite the decision-maker(s) to attend one of your meetings
- Write a letter to the editor
- Ask your friends and family to call or write letters
- Hold a press conference
- Meet personally with the decision maker(s)

If meeting with an elected official, take the following steps:

1. Please note that due to re-modeling at the state capitol, legislative meetings and legislator's offices will likely be in different places than years past. Please call the bill room at 360-786-7573 to locate people and hearing rooms.
2. *Make an appointment in advance.*
3. *Be organized.* Introduce yourself. If you are in a group, select one person to be the primary spokesperson for each issue.
4. *Do not assume that legislators are familiar with your issue.* Recognize that legislators have many issues before them and need to be briefed quickly.
5. *Do your homework:*
 - a. Know your issue. Present the facts in an orderly manner. Do not present purely emotional arguments, but do demonstrate the impact of your issue.
 - b. Know your legislator. Research the background of your elected official(s). What personal interest do they have in your issue?
6. *Determine the legislators' position.* Ask the decision maker(s) for some action or commitment: How will they vote? Will they take a stand for or against a proposal?
7. *Be persistent.* Ask repeatedly until you get an answer.
8. *Allow time for questions.* Encourage questions and answer them factually. If you do not know the answer, offer to find out and get back to the legislator.
9. *Be courteous.* Follow up with a thank you, in which you can restate your position.
10. *Keep in mind that decision makers have many issues to consider every day.* Very few are experts on all issues. They rely upon you to give them good, accurate information, and they are interested in the views of their constituents.