

TALKING ABOUT THE TOOLKIT: Tips for Successful Advocacy

- **Prepare:** If you are going with a group, meet internally beforehand and decide who will play which role. Prioritize your issues, practice your key messages, anticipate likely questions and develop good answers.

Sample “roles” for an advocacy meeting:

- **Leader:** sets the tone for the meeting, establishes a rapport with the candidate/lawmaker. Is always courteous and friendly and directs the conversation. This person is “on” giving the group’s presentation.
 - **Reporter:** this person is the listener in the group. After introducing him/herself, the reporter stays in the background and focuses on remembering as much as possible, including reactions and body language. *It is recommended that the reporter NOT take notes, as it can often inhibit a more free-ranging discussion.*
 - **Expediter:** can either be a big job or a small one, depending on how the discussion is going. If a conversation seems to be going off on a tangent, the expediter might courteously interrupt with “You said a moment ago...” or “Did you mean...” The expediter should never shut down beneficial discussion, but can help guide one that is off track or getting unproductive.
- **Do your homework:** Know the legislator’s personal/professional background, committee assignments, major issues or any recent news stories in which he or she has been involved. Use Google and campaign websites.
 - **Don’t be intimidated:** Remember, he or she *agreed* to see you. You are a constituent who represents other constituents in the candidate’s district. He/she wants your vote and wants you to speak well of him/her after the meeting. Be yourself.
 - **Be brief:** Most appointments are scheduled for 15-20 minutes, and lawmakers won’t remember you favorably if you run way over. Stick to your key messages and don’t be afraid to say, “I don’t know.”
 - **Don’t monopolize:** Make your key points but don’t monopolize the conversation. This meeting is a two-way street, an exchange of information. Allow him or her to respond to your presentation and ask questions.
 - **Make the *constituent connection*:** All politics is local. Know how your issues affect the candidate’s legislator’s community. Tell a story (remember People Magazine!) to drive your point home. Show the lawmaker how his or her constituents are helped by what you are proposing.
 - **Be prompt, patient and understanding if a lawmaker is late:** If a lawmaker sends a staff person instead, take advantage of the opportunity. Staff members are important to the legislative process. He or she can become a valuable advocate.
 - **Be respectful:** If your legislator disagrees with you, do not become argumentative. State politely that you have differing opinions – *if that’s the case* - but that you hope to work together in the future. Always say please and thank you and *always* leave the door open to future dialogue.
 - **Bring your camera:** Most candidates/legislators are very happy to pose for a photo with your group. Ask if you can put it on your website or in your newsletter, if you wish to.
 - **Leave the Toolkit behind:** Good handouts are key – remember your job is to make the information in the Toolkit “come alive.”
 - **Follow Up:** Send a written thank you (no emails!), reiterating your major point(s) in the letter. Send a copy of the photo!

GOOD LUCK!