



LEGISLATIVE VISIT RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

Building Your Message Step-by-Step

BASIC

1. Be on time or a *little* early (some offices are not spacious and you may crowd the waiting area with groups scheduled before you).
2. Turn off your cell phone's ringer.
3. **Don't argue. Period.**
 - a. Stay calm – losing your cool will not win over the legislator.
 - b. Don't stretch the truth to make a point. Your integrity and authenticity as an advocate are your strongest assets. A discovery that you have been untruthful damages you and the entire advocacy effort.
4. Show respect. Yes, the legislator is a public servant – just don't treat him like one. Many have made great personal sacrifices in order to serve. No matter how well you know the issue or how passionate you are, **DO NOT** lecture legislators of "take a tone" in a meeting. Make your points forcefully, passionately, knowledgeably *and* respectfully.

ADVANCED

(Adapted from *News for a Change: An Advocate's Guide to Working With the Media*, Lawrence Wallack, et al, Sage Publications, Inc., 1999)

Learn to think on your feet by practicing "pivot phrases" to use when it seems that your meeting is getting off track from your message points.

When you hear: Personal Responsibility Argument

Respond: Sure, parents are responsible. But, parents need help to [insert policy solution]

When you hear: Joe did it without government intervention argument

Respond: His story is very tragic/compelling, etc. but, it's just not typical. Let me share a more typical story [end with policy solution]

When you hear: A no-win scenario or false choices Argument

Respond: Actually, neither option is workable. Let me tell you what is [policy solution]

When you hear: How do you feel about your personal tragedy?

Respond: I feel angry that Congress still hasn't taken the steps needed to prevent this kind of tragedy happening to others.

EXPERT

"Should you accept this mission..." Legislative visits are serious business within an advocacy campaign. Expert advocates know that a visit is not a conversation – **not really**. Visits should be planned, strategic opportunities to deliver specific message points to advance the issue. Re-frame, Rephrase, and Repeat but don't Relax!