



## Eight Tips for a Successful Lobby Visit

Meeting with your member of Congress, your state legislator or their staff and developing a personal relationship are the most effective ways to influence the legislators' positions on an issue. Phone calls, faxes, emails and letters are all important but are not as effective as face-to-face meetings on the Hill or in your local district offices.

1. **Make an appointment.** Schedule the visit in advance; don't just show up. A broad-based delegation of constituents (five is ideal) increase the likelihood of getting a meeting with the legislator rather than a staff member. Fax the scheduler with your written meeting request (who, where, when and why) and follow up with a phone call. Use your company or organization's letterhead when faxing the request and mention that you will put a picture of your legislator meeting with you on your group's website/next newsletter. If your lobby visit is in Washington, D.C., you should ask to meet with at least the legislative assistant.
2. **Prepare for the visit.** Information on your legislator's co-sponsorship of bills and previous votes is available online. You can also find valuable personal information about your legislator on his or her home page. Have a face-to-face pre-meeting with your delegation to determine who will cover which points and who is going to "chair" the meeting to keep it on topic.
3. **Be punctual and positive.** Be on time, and thank the staff person for his or her time. Even if you disagree on most issues, compliment the member for a vote or action you appreciated. Building a rapport with staff is important in developing a long-term relationship.
4. **Focus the meeting.** Briefly introduce the individuals of the group, the organizations you represent and the topic you wish to discuss. It is important to talk about only one issue and to stay on this topic. Remember, you don't have to be an expert on an issue; members meet with you because you election them.
5. **Listen and gather information.** Ask for your legislators' view on an issue. Be patient and passionate; don't react angrily if you don't get the response you want. Stay calm and be polite always.
6. **Make a specific request.** Rather than something generic like "I want you to support mental health," a more effective ask is to request support for a specific bill or legislative action. Give several brief points why your member should support this legislation. Avoid a long philosophical debate about the issue; be concrete.
7. **Follow up.** Tell the staff person you will get back to him or her if you can't provide information about an issue on the spot. If the staff person is unfamiliar with a bill or is unsure about the legislator's position, as for follow-up correspondence. Leave one or two pages of relevant material.
8. **Express your thanks.** At the end of the meeting, thank the staff person or the member for his or her time. Send a thank you letter soon after your visit, repeating your "ask." This letter helps build a relationship over time with a member or the staff person

