

# Have an In-District Meeting

Meeting with your legislator's local office is a great way to leverage your expertise and your voice as a constituent to get their attention and action on issues most important to you. It puts a face to the constituency that cares about the issue, allows for a richer and more informative conversation, and helps to build a relationship with the staff to ensure that your concerns are more top-of-mind. And it's much easier than it can seem—remember that they meet with people all day and they know it's their job to be in touch with and represent their constituents.

Here are the best practices for having a successful meeting:

## Prepare for a Successful Meeting

- Call your local office to let them know you're a constituent and ask for the appropriate staff to send a meeting request. If it takes a few phone calls to pin down a date/time, don't shy away from doing that—you can be assertive as long as you're collegial
- Write up a brief handout of concise talking points to help keep you and others on track in the conversation. This should lead and wrap your concrete ask of the legislator.
  - Identify your key message with 1-2 sentences that clearly identify what you want the legislator to do and why. If the legislator or their staff only remember one thing from the meeting, it should be this message.
- If others are joining you for this meeting, be sure to come together ahead of the meeting to select the roles/speaking parts for each person and to do a walkthrough of the meeting.

If you cannot meet with the legislator but can meet with staff, do not be discouraged. A meeting with the staff is your best bet in many cases. While the legislator is paying attention to a multitude of activities, the staff member is the one more closely following and informing the legislator's approach to a specific policy. In fact, establishing a rapport with them should be a core goal of the interaction.

## During the Meeting

- Thank the staff for their time and express appreciation for something positive the legislator has done recently. (This can be especially effective if it's an issue you can connect with the bill or topic at hand.)
- Introduce yourself as a constituent, explaining your scientific expertise, and noting any professional/personal connections you have to the legislator or staff member.
- Stress how the issue will affect your state or district. If possible, tell a concise personal story that highlights your experience with the issue and why you care about it.
- If you don't know the answer to a question, be honest and say you don't know and that you'll get the answer for them following the meeting. (This can be a positive thing, because it offers a very clear reason for to keep the conversation going after the meeting.)
- Wrap the meeting by reiterating your specific request for the legislator, thanking them for their time, and asking if there is anything you can do to support the them to do the action you are asking for.

## COMMON FLOW FOR THE MEETING

Estimate for 30 mins, but be prepared if you only get 10–15.

- **5 mins:** Introductions and collegial small talk
- **10 mins:** Explanation of the bill/issue— what is it, why it matters, how the legislator can help. Make a specific ask of the legislator, to take an action or to tell you what stance they take.
  - For example, “Will you oppose the X bill and other similar legislation that suppress the use of science in policymaking, to ensure that we benefit from the latest scientific information about health and safety?”
- **10 mins:** Questions/Open discussion
- **5 mins:** Wrap up—repeat the specific ask, thank them for their time, exchange contact info and next steps for follow-up
- **1–2 days later:** Follow up e-mail/card/letter

## After the Meeting

- You can create a “leave behind”—no longer than 1 single-sided page—that restates the points you made during the meeting and provides information for the office to get back in contact with you.
- A day or two after the meeting, send the office a thank you letter or e-mail that reiterates your key points and answers any outstanding questions. Always thank the legislator for their time, even if the meeting did not go well.

## Additional Tips to Embrace and Pitfalls to Avoid

- No single participant should talk for more than five minutes at a time.
- Identify a local angle. How does the issue affect the legislator’s district or state?
- Learn about your legislator in advance. Ask yourself:
  - What kind of constituency does the legislator have—rural, urban, suburban?
  - Who or what influences this legislator the most—labor, business, farmers?

- What is their background: upbringing, education, wealth, stated interests, and other relevant previous experience?
- What sort of ties does the legislator have to state or local organizations you are connected with?

- Be confident, but refrain from lecturing. There’s no one “right” way to talk with an elected official. Use these guidelines, but trust your instincts, be flexible and have fun.
- The legislator may hijack the agenda or waste valuable time by bringing up unrelated issues. While it is important to be cordial and flexible, this is a meeting for you to relay your concerns to an elected official. Quickly acknowledge and address their issue and redirect the discussion back to the agenda. Don’t let them take you off-course for more than a moment.

For more details on how to request a meeting with your elected officials go to <http://www.ucsusa.org/action/get-a-meeting-with-your-legislator> and [www.ucsusa.org/callyoursenators](http://www.ucsusa.org/callyoursenators).

---

# **[** Union of **Concerned Scientists**

FIND THIS DOCUMENT ONLINE: [www.ucsusa.org/WatchdogToolkit](http://www.ucsusa.org/WatchdogToolkit)

*The Union of Concerned Scientists puts rigorous, independent science to work to solve our planet’s most pressing problems. Joining with citizens across the country, we combine technical analysis and effective advocacy to create innovative, practical solutions for a healthy, safe, and sustainable future.*

---

### **NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS**

Two Brattle Square  
Cambridge, MA 02138-3780  
Phone: (617) 547-5552  
Fax: (617) 864-9405

### **WASHINGTON, DC, OFFICE**

1825 K St. NW, Suite 800  
Washington, DC 20006-1232  
Phone: (202) 223-6133  
Fax: (202) 223-6162

### **WEST COAST OFFICE**

500 12th St., Suite 340  
Oakland, CA 94607-4087  
Phone: (510) 843-1872  
Fax: (510) 843-3785

### **MIDWEST OFFICE**

One N. LaSalle St., Suite 1904  
Chicago, IL 60602-4064  
Phone: (312) 578-1750  
Fax: (312) 578-1751