

Lobbying Tips for NOW Activists

Plan Your Visit Carefully

In preparing for the meeting, you should determine the objectives of the meeting first; be clear on what you are asking of the elected official. The discussion should always be on point. Make sure that you are aware of the representative's or senator's committee assignments and any legislation that they have sponsored or cosponsored. This will help you understand whether the member may co-sponsor a bill or an amendment or take a leadership role in getting a bill passed or defeated. Most often, you will just be asking for their vote on a given bill or amendment.

Make an Appointment

Members of Congress have very busy schedules. Sometimes you have to make repeated calls and/or send frequent emails to get through to a scheduler, so that you can set up an appointment. Representatives and senators are often more accessible when there are in the home districts. Frequently, you may request a meeting with the elected official and then end up speaking to an aide. This is not necessarily a drawback, because staff members may sometimes be better informed on a given issue and often have a great deal of influence in determining an elected official's stance.

Be Presentable

Always dress in appropriate business-style attire for the meeting. Have handy all necessary items that you intend to refer to in the course of the meeting. Appear as a very organized, well-informed, and focused individual. Always be polite, even if you are meeting with an anti-feminist politician or their equally anti-feminist staff member.

Be Prompt and Patient

When it is time to meet with an official, please be punctual and patient. It is a good idea to have made contact with at least one staff member with each office of your three-member Congressional delegation. Staff members are much more accessible than the members and you may need to follow-up with additional information.

Be Informative and Make a Clear Ask

The key reason for your visit is to ask for a commitment from your elected official to do something, usually either to support or oppose a bill. One good preparation activity is to outline the points that you will make and draft some responses to anticipated questions or objections. Another method of preparation is to draft a short letter that summarizes the most important information that you want to convey and contains the "ask." Make additional copies to give to others at the meeting, including any Congressional staff members who may be present. You can also take fact sheets, statistics, and background

information to offer the representative, senator or staff person. In addition, a personal story that is emotionally compelling is an effective part of a presentation. The personal story should relate to a situation or person in the district that underlines or illustrates your case.

Be Responsive

It is always a good idea to follow up a meeting with a thank you letter, re-iterating your main points and gently reminding the member or staffer of what he/she promised to do. If they ask for more information or had a question that you could not answer, this is a good way to respond in a timely manner.

Be Political

Members of Congress want to represent what they believe to be the best interests of their home district or state. So be familiar with the home district or state. You can use [Congress's own website](#) for information on the legislation you're there to discuss: text, sponsors, status, summaries, floor votes, amendments and floor debates. You should also review the member's official website, looking at her/his sponsored legislation, statements and press releases. You can check out her/his positions on a range of issues at [ACLU](#), [AAUW](#), and [Project Vote Smart](#). You can find specific votes during the current and prior Congresses [here](#).

Finally, let your NOW allies know where the representative or senator stands on the issue you discussed. It may be that a concerted effort with more meetings, email messages or phone calls will be necessary if that member needs more "education" on the issue.

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