



Advocacy Tips for Communicating with Decision Makers

When is the best time to communicate with your Legislators? When a bill is referred to a committee they are on just before the committee is going to take action or vote, and when it is about to hit the floor for a vote.

In Person Meetings

In person meetings are the most effective form of advocacy. Here are the steps and tips:

Schedule an appointment

- Call the office, state your name and who you are representing, and ask to schedule an appointment. They will often give you an email address of the person who schedules appointments, but also be prepared to schedule the appointment on the spot. Be as flexible as you can about the dates and times.
- If you are a constituent, let them know.
- Don't be offended if they schedule you with a staff instead of the actual Legislator. Sometimes that is better because they are the experts in their specific issue area(s).
- If don't hear back within a few days, follow up. Be persistent, but courteous.

Prepare for the meeting

- Expect to meet for about 15 minutes, but be prepared for less time.
- Research and be able to answer questions.
- Prepare your talking points.
 - Keep it brief. Only have 3 or 4 talking points that lead up to your "ask"/goal. Your ask can be as simple as "can we count on your support?"
 - Be specific by including the name and number of the bill, regulation, etc.
 - Personalize your point with a local story.
 - If there are multiple people attending, figure out who will be the main speaker and when others will get to speak. Keep the group small, no more than 5 people.
 - Back up your talking points with short fact sheets that you leave behind.

At the appointment

- Dress professionally (preferably in a suit).
- Be on time, but not more than a few minutes early.
- If you're meeting in the California State Capitol, the rooms are very difficult to find, so find the office earlier and come back for the appointment.
- If don't know the answer to one of their questions tell them you don't know but will find the answer and follow up.
- Thank them for their time.

After the appointment

Promptly email or mail a thank you to each person you met with. Include any answers or resources they asked for during the meeting.

Phone Lobbying

Phone lobbying is particularly important when legislation is moving quickly through the process. Here are some helpful tips:

- Figure out what you're going to say before you call, write a script or bullet points.
- Know the name and # of the bill.
- Ask to speak with the staff person responsible for the legislation you are calling about.
- Give your affiliation if you are working on behalf of a particular organization.
- If you are a constituent, mention it.
- Be concise (they usually only take a tally, so details are not necessary).
- Be courteous and thank them for their time.

Example Script: *"Hello, this is Jane Doe. As Senator Smith's constituent, I am calling to let you know that I fully support AB 1234, which would expand health care coverage for children. I urge Senator Smith to vote yes. Thank you."*

Letters to your Legislator

- Only send letters to your Legislators. Begin by stating that you're a constituent.
- Include your home address (since this shows you are actually a constituent) and other contact info so they can respond.
- Keep it to one page.
- Be accurate (include the correct title and name, check for typos)
- Include a personal story.
- Include a call to action.
- Be respectful and say thank you.

Example Letter Outline:

Date

Name and address of Legislator

Subject (ex: "Re: Support for SB 123 (Smith): Mental Health Services")

Dear [Official Title] Name,

First paragraph:

- I am a constituent
- I am writing to oppose/support (your issue/bill number and name)

Second paragraph

- Include a personal story about why this issues/bill is important to you, how it affects you, your organization, or your community.

Third paragraph

- Ask them to respond to let you know how they will vote or address your issue
- Always say thank you.

Signature block

- Include your full name, address, phone, email address, and hand written signature.

Other Events

You can also invite your Legislators to attend an event your hosting or give a speech. You can also present an award to them.

Attend their town hall meetings and other events and ask questions.