



Five 'P's for lobbying a member of Congress

Members of Congress are employed by you. To do their jobs, they should know what you think about the issues they address. By following these five steps, you can be an effective advocate and make sure your representatives have the information they need.

PLAN

Pick an issue. Decide what issues you want to discuss. Your meeting may be short, so you will need to limit your agenda.

Make an appointment. The most effective way to obtain a meeting with your member of Congress is to submit a written request, as far in advance as possible, to the scheduler. Include the issue you would like to discuss, so arrangements can be made with the appropriate staffer if the member is unavailable. Also, try to offer several options for meeting times. Feel free to follow up with a phone call. Do not be discouraged if you can only meet with a staff person: staff members are very knowledgeable, and they advise the members of Congress.

PREPARE

Develop an outline. Figure out how to make your point quickly and concisely. You do not need to be an expert on an issue to lobby: you just need to have a basic understanding of the arguments on both sides of the issue and an opinion.

Research. Make sure you research your member's stance on the issue. Have they stated an opinion on the issue? Have they ever voted on legislation that deals with the issue? Are they involved in advocating for or against the issue in their community?

Practice. Practice what you will say and how you will say it.

Be prompt. When you respect their time, they will be more inclined to respect yours. Your time will be limited, so make sure you are able to use all of it.

PRAISE

State that you are constituent. Introduce yourself and make sure to point out any personal, professional, or religious ties you

have with your member of Congress.

Stay positive. Compliment the member on issues he or she has supported or actions they have taken that you appreciate. The more they feel like you appreciate their work, the more likely they will listen and want to help you in the future.

PRESENT

Be concise and specific. Explain your issue. Tell your member of Congress why the issue is important and what the member can do to help. Make sure the member knows how addressing the issue in the way you've suggested will benefit the people of their district. Be prepared to answer questions on the issue. If you do not know the answer, tell the member you will follow up with that information. If there is a specific bill dealing with the issue, tell the member how you would like them to vote. If the member disagrees with your position on the issue, be respectful while providing factual support for your position.

Provide background and supporting materials. Provide the member with publications from your organization or other background material on the issue you have discussed. Particularly useful may be a summary with bulleted key points and data: lengthy material likely will get lost.

Be gracious. Thank the member for taking the time to meet with you. Mention again any action you would like your member to take, and tell your member that you look forward to staying in touch.

POST-MEETING

Send a thank you note. Follow up with a thank you letter that summarizes what you discussed at the meeting.

Stay in touch. Keep your member updated on the issue. Send them additional information on the issue you discussed and always copy the appropriate staffer. Also feel free to send them information on other issues that are important to you and any relevant community events. And of course, visit your member of Congress again: the more contact you have, the more influence you can wield.