

Fact Sheet: In-Person Meetings with Elected Officials

Face-to-face meetings are very important. This is because elected officials can't ignore people that are right in front of them talking about a problem. It also helps them put a "face" to a certain bill or law. If they can think of you and your story when they are deciding whether or not to support a law, it could affect their decision about the law.

Remember that members of Congress have offices in Washington, D.C., and in their home states. You can choose which location works best for you. You can find out how to make an appointment on the website of the elected official.

Some elected officials have a page on their website to make appointments. But, for most elected officials, you will need to call or email them. Plan to make your appointment at least 2 weeks before you want to meet.

What should I expect at a meeting?

Here are some tips for what to expect at an in-person meeting, and how you can prepare:

- Meetings are usually about 15 to 45 minutes long. Try and find out how long a meeting will be beforehand so you can plan ahead for what you want to say.
- You probably won't meet with your elected official directly. Instead, you will meet with a staff member who will report back to your elected official.
- Learn everything you can about the law or problem you are talking about before the meeting. Also learn about what other people might say to argue against your opinion.
- If you have any handouts, charts or pictures that will help you explain your opinion, bring a few copies with you. You can give them to the people you're talking to and have one for yourself to look at.
- Arrive at the meeting place about 10 minutes before the appointment time. Try to dress nicely.

Elevator speeches

It may be a good idea to prepare an **elevator speech** before you meet with your elected official. An elevator speech is a short speech that you have memorized in case you get a moment with an elected official. For example, riding the elevator with them. Elevator speeches help you remember your most important points. They're also good to fall back on if your meeting is very short.

Here is what you should include in an elevator speech:

- Your first and last name
- Where you live
- Your school, workplace, or some other part of the community you belong to
- Bring up the law or problem you are advocating for. Talk about how the issue affects you or the people around you.
- Tell them WHY you and others need the policy you support.
- Thank the legislator for listening to you

Try to keep your speech under 1 minute long, and be sure to practice beforehand. Think about bringing a written document with the information on it. Then you can give the document to your elected official so they can read it and learn more later.

Example: Elevator speech

Here is an example of an elevator speech Sally might give to her Representative:

Hi, I'm Sally Jones, and I'm from Normaltown, California. I'm a member of the Stop the Bees Community Group. I'm here today because I would like you to support the Beekeeping Act that will give money to build a new bee colony away from our city centers. Right now, there are so many bees all over towns across the United States. I know I was afraid just to leave my house to come here and meet you. Everyone I've talked to fears for their safety against the bees. Building this bee colony will give us back the safety that all Americans need, so we won't need to feel afraid to leave our houses anymore. Please support the Beekeeping Act to give us our safety back. Thank you for your time.

What should I do during a meeting?

- Introduce yourself to your elected official or their staff member: tell them who you are and where you live.
- Try to start by complimenting something your elected official has done recently that you support. This helps make the person you're talking to more open to your ideas.
- Be ready to answer questions and discuss your points in detail.

Other things to keep in mind:

The person you are talking to may disagree with what you have to say. This can be frustrating. Since your goal is to get them to change their mind, make sure that you don't raise your voice or make it seem like you are arguing with them. If you do this, they might not listen to what you are saying. Try and focus more on why you support what you do rather than telling them why they shouldn't support what they do. Always try to end the conversation on a positive note.

After a meeting, always send a thank-you email. This lets your elected official know that you appreciate their time, and helps them remember what you talked about.

Example: Sally visits Representative Smith's office

Let's say that Sally goes to visit Representative Smith, to talk about the bee problem. Here is an example of a good meeting between Sally and Representative Smith:

Sally: Hello, Representative Smith. My name is Sally Jones, and I'm from Normaltown.

Representative Smith: Great to meet you, Sally.

Sally: It's great to meet you as well. I wanted to start off by telling you how much I appreciated your support for the Free Cereal for Everyone Act. I know it's helped my family to much to have a steady source of breakfast food.

Representative Smith: Of course. It is the most important meal of the day, after all.

Sally: I wanted to talk with you about the Beekeeping Act. Are you aware of this bill?

Representative Smith: I have heard about it, but please remind me.

Sally: The Beekeeping Act would put money towards building a bee colony for the bees. I'm sure you're aware that there are bees all over town, and it is making many members of our community feel unsafe. I have a list of names for you of over 500 community members who say the bees have left them feeling scared to go outside. Just last week, my nephew was attacked by the bees. For the safety of us and our children, it's so important that the bees are built another place to live. They can't keep flying all over town like this.

Representative Smith: I understand your concerns, Sally. But the bees also give us important things, like honey. I'm not sure I can support a law that would make all the bees leave.

Sally: I agree, making sure we have honey is an important thing. But right now, the government is spending so much money on health care for people who are being hurt by the bees. Building the bees a new place to live will save all that money. Then we can use that money to buy honey.

Representative Smith: What if we build this bee colony and then the bees don't want to use it?

Sally: I have talked with many expert beekeepers, who told me that if the colony was built, the bees will definitely use it. The reason so many people are getting attacked by the bees right now is actually because the bees are angry about not having their own place to live. Here is a written document of what the beekeepers had to say.

Representative Smith: Hmm. That is a good point. I will think more about this issue.

Sally: Thank you for your time today. Please consider supporting the Beekeeping Act.