

## **Tips for Working with Your Government**

### **Before the meeting**

**Know your “ask”** – Before meeting with your representative, be clear and determined about what you are asking for. It’s important to have only one “ask.” Know specifically why you are going to meet with her or him and be specific about what you want done. Also, it’s important to not only familiarize yourself with the current state of the issue you would like to address, but also understand any of the history or government perspective on the issue.

**Get to know your representative** – Learn more about the representative you are meeting with. Biographical information is usually readily available on government websites. Conduct research to identify the level of knowledge or involvement your representative may have on the issue.

**Call to arrange a meeting** – Call or send a brief note to your representative’s constituency office to ask for a meeting. Outline who you are, what your organization is, what it does, what your concerns are, and what you want to address at the meeting. Be sure to call the day before your meeting to confirm the time, as schedules can sometimes change at the last minute.

**Build relationships** – Be polite and courteous with elected officials and his or her staff. The staff often manages the agenda, as well as schedules, and can be a great asset to you.

**Be prepared** – You will only have a short time to meet with your representative (usually 15 – 30 minutes). Be sure to be prepared with your discussion points, a clear ask, and supporting materials to leave behind.

**Do your homework** – Think of questions your representative might ask, and how you would answer it to tie back to your key messages.

**Define a plan of action** – Define a clear plan in advance, and stick to it as much as possible during the meeting to ensure all your points are heard. If more than one person is attending the meeting, decide who will speak to each section.

**Additional information** – You may have a lot of useful information to present at the meeting that you probably won’t have time for. Be prepared to leave behind a package of relevant supporting materials to the issue you are addressing. Materials you could provide in a leave behind package could include brochures, educational materials, media materials or briefing documents.

**Arrive early** – Arrive between 10-15 minutes before your meeting and use the time to get to know the staff and make contact with other key influencers in your representative’s office. Bring extra copies of your leave behind package to hand out to key bureaucrats you meet.

## **During the meeting**

**Stay on message** – Decide on two or three key points you want to discuss and stay on topic. Meetings can go off track quickly, and then end without having the chance to discuss the issue. At the start of your meeting, mention what you are going to focus on, then talk about those points, and summarize your concerns again at the end. Be clear, concise and assertive, without being aggressive.

**Educate** – Provide your representative with factual and specific information that supports the issue you are presenting. If you do not know an answer to a question, tell them you will find the information and get back to them.

**Engage** – Encourage questions from your representative and try to engage them into the issue you are presenting. Share your life experiences with the issue and tell your story from the heart. Ask your representative questions on the issue you are presenting and learn more about her or his understanding, experience and interest.

**Listen** – Take the time to listen to your representative. Your elected official might be trying to empathize or gain more insight into what you are trying to tell him/her.

**Your “ask”** – Be sure to conclude your meeting with a direct ask or call to action from your representative. State clearly what you want to achieve out of your meeting. Determine a plan for next steps to working together to achieve your ask.

**Engage others** – Ask your representative about who else may be interested in the issue and who else you can follow up with. Your representative may be able to help you make other connections.

**Wrap-up** – Do not go over the meeting length allocated to you, unless your representative indicates he or she would like to continue. End the meeting by setting dates to the action steps discussed. Thank your representative for taking the time to meet with you.

**Leave behind** – Present your leave behind package at the end of the meeting so when the elected official responds to your issue, he or she will have all of the facts.

## **After the meeting**

**Follow-up** – Send a thank-you letter that highlights what was discussed at the meeting and reminds your representative of next steps determined.

**Share** - Talk with your peers and compare your experiences. Contact AAMAC to share your activities, successes, and the results of the meeting.

**Monitor** – Watch for progress of the request made at the meeting.

**Communicate** – Try to establish and maintain a relationship with your representative so he or she will remember you and be responsive when you later ask for help. Continue engaging your representative with regular and routine communication and updates on the issue when appropriate.