

Tips for Talking to Policymakers Effectively

Building relationships with policymakers, such as legislators and regulators, and conveying meaningful information is both an art and a science. These tips can help you effectively deliver your message on issues that shifts their thinking or influences their decisions.

Community members' stories matter

Policymakers do want to hear about your story and what is going on in the community! You have an important message to share as a parent, service provider or educator that gives policymakers a real-world context to the complex issues they are working on. You can help them understand why your issue is important. Get to know your policymakers and their personality as much as possible. Find out what you can about their concerns, interests, beliefs and attitudes. Draw on past and current employment and community connections.

Relationship building requires repetition

Plan on more than one contact - make a call and then follow up, attend hearings and come to a meeting more than once. Repeated interactions are key and will help you build quality relationships over time.

Know the politics and the process: "It's a team sport!"

Effective advocacy is best done in a coordinated way - it involves developing a common strategy with others working on the issue. It is critical to know where your issue is in the process, and who can help you get up to speed on key, timely messages.

Think of your role

You want policymakers to see you as an expert on an issue, someone who can provide them with accurate, compelling information at key times in their decision making. Consider your credentials (personal, volunteer and professional) and use them!

Keep your message simple and respectful

Be respectful of the policymaker's time. Be brief and to the point. Use talking points as a guide, but put them into your own words so that your presentation doesn't sound rehearsed or forced. Avoid acronyms or lingo that they may not be familiar with. Most importantly, you don't have to know all the technical mechanics of the policy or program or have all the answers. Be confident in what you do know - and why it matters.

Listen

Although you have a message to deliver, listening can give you insight as to why a policymaker does/does not support an issue. Tune in to their concerns or thoughts.

Be a resource

When you meet with a policymaker, offer to be a resource to them in the future. If you are willing, share your phone or email and let them know that they can contact you if they have questions. If you don't have the answer, you can work with the staff of knowledgeable organizations to get one. Thank policymakers for taking time to talk.



V E R M O N T
EARLY CHILDHOOD
ADVOCACY ALLIANCE

CRAFT YOUR ELEVATOR SPEECH

Use the prompts below to craft your 90-second elevator speech on an issue you care about. Practice with others so you are ready to talk to legislators when opportunities arise in your community or at the State House.

Introduce yourself, include organizational affiliation and profession, and where you live/work

Briefly explain the issue and why it matters to you

Briefly share a personal or professional anecdote and data point

State what it is you are asking the legislator to support or not support and/or do for the issue

Thank the legislator for his/her time, summarize follow up or next steps
