

Tips for successful personal visits with your elected officials

There are certain protocols to remember when communicating with the legislators by phone, email, letter or in person. Here are a few communication tips for personal visits to your legislators.

Be on time: Make certain you reach your appointment on time, or a few minutes early.

Keep group small: Limit your group to 3 to 5 people. Agree in advance who will be the spokesperson (if applicable) to introduce the group and explain the purpose of the visit.

Be prepared: Be informed about your issue; know the specific number of the legislative bill and author's name. Know what you want to say. Emphasize how the issue affects you, your local and your community.

Focus on issues: Present your views politely, but persuasively. Use relevant facts. Bring an expert on the subject to support your views, if possible.

Be brief: Since legislators have extremely busy schedules, plan on getting your message across in 5 to 10 minutes at the very most. Don't get sidetracked into small talk -- make your time really count -- "visit" only after you have gotten your point across.

Be firm: Find out exactly where your legislator stands on the issue. Ask what action he or she intends to take. Don't be afraid to press for specifics.

Listen carefully: Be ready to answer questions clearly. If you don't know the answer to a question admit it — tell the legislator you will provide the answer later. Listen carefully to your legislator's viewpoint — even if you disagree.

Report back: Results of your visit are very important to your lobbyists in Sacramento. Appoint a lead person who will report back to the lobbyists.

Follow up: Send a thank you note/letter to your legislator. Also include a summary of your position plus any other new information that supports your views.