
Session 10

TIPS FOR MEETING WITH DECISION-MAKERS

When you are discussing your needs with decision-makers (school principals, city council members, members of Congress, etc.), there are several qualities that they appreciate. Those who demonstrate them make a better impression.

Brevity - In order to be effective, your presentation must be short. You should always, of course, introduce yourself and state who you represent, the extent of your interest and involvement with a particular issue and why you believe there is a need for some specific legislation or policy to address the problem. Develop 2-3 points you want your listeners to remember. **Provide the decision-maker with a one page summary of your project and the changes you're asking for in a clear format (see example on pg. 99).**

Accuracy - Always give accurate information. The credibility of your testimony depends on accuracy. If you cannot supply documentation to support your claim, it is best to not make the statement. Since most of the issues you will be supporting will require repeated interaction with legislators, administrators, or staff, it is best to start with a correct base of information. If you do not proceed in this manner, it is possible that you will be confronted with a skeptical attitude hereafter, which will be very difficult if not impossible to turn around.

Preparation - Be prepared. Anticipate questions. Before you go to the meeting, organize your thoughts and **practice your presentation before giving it to decision-makers, and practice answers to possible questions.** If they ask you a question you don't know the answer to, just say so and ask if you can provide the answer later. Remember that the burden of proof is on you, and in order for you to be effective, you must establish your position with clear and convincing evidence.

Courtesy - Be polite, not demanding. Too often, advocates of a particular issue alienate decision-makers, even though they may have been in agreement with the advocate's position. This change in attitude often occurs because the advocate was rude, hostile, or confrontational. Might does not make right.

Follow Up - Meet with as many decision-makers privately as you can. Because you do not get much time in formal meetings (such as city council meetings) to explain your position, you may need a legislator's undivided attention to make your point. When contacting an office to schedule a meeting, ask to speak with whoever handles the decision-maker's schedule. **It is customary to request a 3-minute meeting and can often take up to six weeks to meet with the decision-maker because of their busy schedules.**

Appreciation - Thank decision-makers. Too often, we ask them to act in our interest but we then fail to express our appreciation. When the decision-maker does something for you, respond accordingly with a note of gratitude.