GUIDELINES FOR MEETING WITH LEGISLATORS

- **Remember that lawmakers are human beings.** Begin your meeting with a compliment, if possible. Be friendly, polite, and dress respectfully. The Golden Rule applies to lobbying, too.

- **Never be late.** It’s a sign of disrespect that will be remembered when the lawmaker considers your viewpoint. Also, they won’t wait around for you. You’re also likely to find that the member has left for another appointment.

- **Put in it writing.** Always provide a fact sheet on your issue to lawmakers and their staff. If it’s not on paper, it won’t be remembered. Plus, staffers need to write memos and floor statements for their bosses. Do the work for them.

- **Do your homework.** Know if the lawmaker has taken a stance on the issue before or if she/he has particular areas of interest or concern.

- **All politics is local.** Share how the issue will affect the lawmaker’s district and local reasons for why the lawmaker should take the stance you advocate.

- **Never lie or make up information.** A lobbyist’s greatest strength is their credibility—lose that and you’re through. If you don’t know the answer to a question, tell them you’ll try to find out and then follow up promptly.

- **There is strength in numbers and strange bedfellows.** Build coalitions as broad and deep as you can. Mention how many members you have in the rep’s district (if it’s sizeable) and the number of groups in your coalition.

- **Be a good listener.** It will help endear you to the lawmaker and give you valuable information about the lawmaker’s views and concerns. Don’t do all the talking; have a conversation.

- **Press for a commitment.** Ask the lawmaker directly if she/he will take the particular stance you support or undertake the task you’ve requested.

- **Build a relationship.** Try to get to know lawmakers and their staff. Look for common interests, backgrounds, etc. Members and staff are more likely to meet with you again and listen to your views if they know who you are and have a friendly feeling toward you.

- **Say thank you.** Always thank lawmakers for taking time to meet with you and any good stances they take on your issues. Everyone likes positive feedback.

- **Don’t forget staff.** They’re the eyes and ears—and doorkeeper—for your rep.

- **Be strategic.** Focus your efforts on persuadable “swing” votes. Don’t waste your time on avowed opponents or known allies (except to say thanks).

- **Don’t burn bridges unnecessarily.** Use confrontation as a tool, not a way of life. Lawmakers won’t always do what you want, but they might sometimes if you keep a cordial relationship.

- **The squeaky wheel gets the grease.** Don’t expect miracles. However, polite persistence pays off. And remember, the power of the ballot box is yours!

OTHER POINTERS

- **Call the district office and ask to speak with a scheduler.** Ask to set up a meeting with your legislator in his/her home district. Make sure to let the scheduler know you are a constituent and be sure to write down their name and email address so you can reference it later.

- **Try not leave the phone call without having a meeting scheduled, even if the meeting is scheduled for 3-4 weeks away.** Have multiple options for dates to meet with your legislator ready. Thursdays and Fridays are typically the best times for representatives to be at their local offices.

- **If the legislator isn’t available, ask to meet with a staffer.** The best person to meet with is the Chief of Staff or the Legislative Director.

- **You may be asked to fill out a form before they will schedule a meeting with you.** Fill it out completely and send it back as quickly as you can.

- **If you’re asked what you want to discuss at the meeting, you can say “making our elections work better,” “voting reform” or “fair and efficient elections.”**

- **Provide you contact information on and have the 2020 Legislative Priorities to give to them.**

- **Are you ready to refute opposition arguments?**
• Are you ready to “Start where they are, not where you are”?
• Do you have a personal anecdote to share?
• Do you have a couple of questions you want to ask?
• Did you bring along a “thank you” or a compliment to share?
• Is there a field trip or event upcoming to which you can invite the lawmaker?
• Did you make the “ask”?
• What did the lawmaker say/promise/question/dispute/request?
• Why does the lawmaker support/oppose/have no position on your “ask”?
• Make a note of:
  • The date, time, and location of the meeting
  • The lawmaker’s staff who attended the meeting
  • What teammates who joined you for the meeting
  • What information you shared with the lawmaker
  • What strongly held beliefs, personal experience, trusted sources, etc., that the lawmaker cited to back up their position/actions/votes
  • Mementoes, awards, photos, etc., displayed in the lawmaker’s office
• Do you owe the lawmaker any additional information?
• Did you send a follow-up letter, email, or note?
• For group visits, don’t worry if you don’t know the names of the people who’ll accompany you to the meeting. You can say that you would like a meeting for 3-5 constituents and that you’ll provide all of their names before the meeting.

THREE POINTS TO REMEMBER

1. We did our best to schedule legislative visits but we might not have succeeded in a few cases. If that is true, you can still do a drop by their office with information. You can also do an off the floor visit. This is done by going to the Senate or Assembly reception area and giving a request card (your business card) with the name of the legislator with whom you wish to speak, your name and whether you are a constituent.

2. If you did not meet with your legislator it is equally effective to make an appointment with them while they are in their district. During February 16 to 23 they will be home in their districts. Some will even be doing town halls. **Call their office, do not write**, to make an appointment and then send a follow up e-mail. Ask for the person who does the scheduling in the office. Also find out if they have any public events scheduled.

3. When you are done with the visit, did a member of your group report the results of the meeting by completing the report form at [https://nyscoc.org/our-issues/](https://nyscoc.org/our-issues/) or using the paper copy.