



# Tips and Tricks for Effective Legislator Engagement: Refined Strategies from 25 Years of Experience

In today's fast-paced legislative environment, connecting with policymakers requires more than just good intentions and a clear message—it demands strategic, informed engagement. Over the past two decades, we've navigated countless interactions with legislators and their staff, learning what resonates, what gets results, and what common pitfalls to avoid. This white paper compiles our top tips and practical insights for effective legislative engagement. Whether you're a seasoned advocate or new to the process, these tried-and-true strategies can help you build relationships, communicate more effectively, and ultimately drive change through policy.

## 1. Prepare in Advance

### ■ Do your homework.

Policymakers are busy people, so doing your homework before meeting with them is essential. Make sure that you are making good use of their time. Research their voting record, statements, and positions on your issue or similar issues. Identify any public comments they've made that align with or oppose your proposal. Are they known for prioritizing public health, economic development, or education? Know what their priorities are, as well as where their constituents stand on the issue—and be prepared to provide credible data, stories and testimonials that reflect this.

### ■ Timing is everything.

Timing can make or break your meeting. Plan strategically for when your issue is most likely to capture their attention, which may vary based on the legislative calendar or political climate. If they're gearing up for reelection, for instance, they may be cautious about supporting controversial issues. If they're leaving office, they may be more willing to champion a legacy project. The optimal time may be during recess, when legislators are more likely to be in-district, or during a committee session where your issue is on the agenda.

### ■ Get to know their staff

Staff members can be invaluable allies. They manage the policymaker's schedule, provide briefings, and often shape their perspective on issues. Building a good rapport with the staff allows for smoother scheduling, more effective messaging, and insider insights. Treat staff members with the same respect as you would the legislator—they are often deeply influential behind the scenes.

### ■ Consider the messenger.

Legislators often respond better to real stories from real people. Bring someone with you who can speak directly to the issue, such as a constituent, community leader or someone with lived experience. This not only makes your case more compelling but also adds a layer of authenticity and relatability to your message.

## 2. Know Your Audience

### ■ Think about what they value.

Legislators have various priorities, including public safety, economic health, community development and reelection. Tailor your message to appeal to these priorities. If the proposal benefits local businesses or reduces costs for constituents, highlight these points.

### ■ Focus on impact.

Policymakers are most interested in how policies will affect their constituents. When possible, bring survey data, testimonials or case studies from constituents that demonstrate support for your issue. Use visuals, such as charts or infographics, to convey impact in a digestible way.

### ■ Talk about why your work matters.

Data alone rarely resonates. Share stories about real people who are impacted by the issue. Use storytelling to humanize your proposal and make it relatable, focusing on individual experiences, benefits and challenges.

### ■ Don't overestimate their knowledge or interest.

Legislators deal with a multitude of issues, so even if your proposal is critical, they may not be well-versed in it. Avoid jargon and use clear, straightforward language. Be prepared to provide a brief primer on your issue that highlights why it matters and what's at stake.

## 3. During the Meeting

### ■ Be prepared to wait.

Legislative schedules can be unpredictable. Be ready to meet with staff if the legislator becomes unavailable, and respect their time constraints. Meeting with staff members can still be valuable and sometimes more productive.

### ■ Stick to your message.

Have two or three key points that you want the legislator to remember. Reinforce these points throughout the meeting, and look for ways to illustrate them with examples, analogies or compelling stories.

### ■ Answer their questions.

Anticipate tough questions and prepare clear responses. If you're asked something you don't know, don't guess—say you'll follow up with the information, and make sure to do so. Prompt follow-up demonstrates your reliability.

### ■ Determine the desired outcome.

Have a clear goal in mind—whether it's securing their support for a bill, requesting a public endorsement, or simply introducing them to your issue. Frame your pitch around this goal and “sell” it throughout your meeting.

### ■ Leave something behind.

Provide a concise, one-page fact sheet that summarizes the key points of your proposal. Include your contact information and offer to answer any follow-up questions. This material will serve as a reference for the policymaker and their staff.

## 4. Relax

### ■ Engage with confidence.

Approach meetings with a positive, friendly and helpful attitude. Remember, you have information that the policymaker may not have, and your perspective can support them in making an informed decision. Smile, stay approachable, and be open to dialogue.

### ■ Policymakers need you too.

Policymakers rely on informed stakeholders to provide them with insights into how policies impact the community. Recognize the value you bring to the table, and keep in mind that you're helping them as much as they can help you.

# How SE2 Can Help

For those looking to deepen their engagement strategy, SE2's PowerMap™ process provides a unique solution to uncover and activate connections within a policymaker's network of influence. PowerMap helps you identify not only key decision-makers but also the broader network of influencers, stakeholders and allies who shape their perspectives. By leveraging this process, your organization can engage strategically and increase its impact within the legislative arena.

### Want to Learn More? Contact Us:

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