



Tips for Meeting with Elected Officials

Here are some tips for making your case. You can find additional advocacy resources on the Alliance website (aam-us.org/advocacy/resources) or in the “Advocate from Anywhere” section of the mobile app.

Be informed and do your homework. Read legislative updates and advocacy alerts about an issue carefully. Understand both sides of the issues. Know when a bill is in committee, if hearings are scheduled, and who the cosponsors are.

Be concise. The more simply and clearly your position can be explained, the better chance you have of getting people to listen and respond.

Be specific. Know exactly what you want your legislator to do. Do you want him/her to draft legislation, propose an amendment, vote for a specific bill?

Be honest. Do not exaggerate to make a point or answer a question if you are not sure of the facts. You can always follow up later with answers to their specific questions.

Share personal examples. This puts the issues in memorable, human terms. In addition, legislators pay most attention to personalized communication from their constituents, so it is important that a letter or e-mail express your own views and personal experiences.

Practice your visit. Try explaining your position to friends and family or colleagues before you meet with a legislator or their staff.

Be courteous, but firm and confident. Remember you have a right and duty to communicate with your elected officials.

Do not argue with your legislator or make threats. If it is clear that the person will not support your position, just give the facts and ask him or her to consider your viewpoint. Even if you disagree, you always want to keep the lines of communication open for discussing future issues.

Follow up. After you meet with an elected official, write a thank you note and remind them of the issues you discussed and any follow up actions.



Ten Rules for Engagement

- 1. “All Politics Is Local.”** Elected officials are interested in addressing the needs of their constituents. Be sure they know how your museum is serving—and supported by—the community.
- 2. Remember Your Manners.** Always say please and thank you. Thank them for taking the time to meet with you and to listen to your concerns. Always thank them for their help in securing local, state or federal grants.
- 3. The Squeaky Wheel Gets the Grease.** Vocal advocates raise awareness and get results. If you do not make the case, lawmakers will not know that museums are important to their constituents.
- 4. To Change Public Policy, Take the Long View.** Public policy changes are often going to be incremental and dramatic policy shifts take time. It took nearly 10 years for The Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids to get Congress to prohibit the advertising of tobacco products to kids.
- 5. Politicians Are People Too.** They have hobbies, families, and favorite causes. By learning about them as people, you might find new ways to connect and build a relationship.
- 6. Tell the Truth.** Do not make things up. Give them the facts, even if they might hurt your case. It is important to maintain your credibility as a trusted source for information.
- 7. Treat the Staff with Respect.** The staff for elected officials are a valuable part of the team. They advise their members and work hard for little pay. They can be a great internal champion for your cause and, someday, they may run for office themselves.
- 8. Make Advocacy a Habit.** Don’t rely on one visit a year to make the case for your institution. Keep in touch with your elected officials and their staff. Invite them to visit your museum and make sure they are on your mailing list and/or your media list. Connect with them on social media.
- 9. Reward Good Work.** If your elected officials do good things for your museum, tell everyone. Put it in your newsletter, honor them at your next event, and share it with the media.
- 10. Enlist Others to Help.** Volunteers, visitors, teachers, and supporters can all bolster your advocacy efforts. Trustees can be especially important in this area. Get started by putting advocacy on your museum’s next board meeting agenda.