

TIPS FOR MEETING WITH YOUR ELECTED OFFICIALS

From your local town council to your senators and representatives in Washington, meeting with your elected officials is important to advancing bicycling and walking— and it’s easier than you think! Constituent meetings are perfectly legal and should be an integral part of any advocacy strategy. It’s also democracy at work! Constituent meetings provide the opportunity to build relationships with members of City Council and can be scheduled for any number of reasons ranging from a simple briefing on the organization to asking the member to support specific issues and vote on specific legislation.

BEFORE THE MEETING

Pick Your Team

- Decide who you will take with you. Aim for 3-6 people. More than that many can be overwhelming.
- Pick a diverse team. A leader of an advocacy organization, someone from the business community (bike shop or running store owner), a leader of another related club, or someone representing an environmental or health organization.
- If you know someone with a personal connection to the Councilor, bring them! They will be your best “in”.
- Choose one person to “chair” the meeting.
- Choose another person to be note taker for the meeting, keeping careful notes of what the Councilor says.

Request an Appointment.

- Send your request for a meeting in writing via fax or e-mail and follow up with a phone call to your elected official’s office.
- Make sure to let them know you are a constituent. If you do not live in the City Councilor’s district, someone who does and is going with you should make the call.
- When scheduling your meeting, let them know who you are and what you want to talk about. Also tell them who you will be bringing with you (i.e. a small group from the biking and walking community).

Do Your Homework

- Research the City Councilor’s previous positions on your issue. Try to find at least one positive thing they have done for biking and walking that you can thank them for.
- Know what committees the City Councilor serves on, their interests, and background to help you craft your pitch.
- Get your facts and talking points straight before the meeting. Try to have no more than 2-3 main points and decide who will say what beforehand. Bring some literature to leave behind. A one-page fact sheet on your issue and a brochure from your organization is ideal.

DURING THE MEETING

Be Professional

- Dress nice! You don't need to go out and buy anything new, but show your respect and dress as professionally as possible. Iron your shirt and polish your shoes. First impressions matter!
- Be polite. Even if the City Councilor isn't.

Thank, Introduce, Inform

- Start your meeting by thanking them for their time (and previous support if any). Make sure you know and double check how much time they have for your meeting so you can get your points and ask in during the allotted time.
- Briefly introduce your team: name, organization, how many members your organization represents, and where you live if you are in their district.
- Tell them why you are there. What specific bill are you interested in? State your 2-3 talking points.
- Connect biking and walking to their district. How does biking and walking impact their constituents and communities. Can you point to any examples?
- Stay on topic. You have limited time—make it count!
- While attentively listening, strive to keep the City Councilor on topic. Drifting into stories and small talk is a classic tactic to divert or avoid commitments.

Ask!

- Ask your City Councilor for their position on the issue. Also ask what concerns they may have. Pay careful attention to their language and examples as these will give you important insights on their priorities and how you might angle your issue or request. Address their concerns if you can.
- Make your ask! Be sure to ask your City Councilor to do something while you are there: co-sponsor a bill, support a piece of legislation, appear at or participate in an event, meet with you again (as needed) etc..

Be Honest

- If you are asked something you don't know the answer to, offer to get back to them with more information. Your future credibility is at stake.

Get a Photo and Thank Again

- Ask if you can get your photo with them that you can include in a print newsletter, social media, and/or website.
- When the meeting is wrapping up be sure to reach some closure.
- If there is an event coming up in the months or year ahead, be sure to invite them.
- Thank them again for their time and attention.

AFTERTHE MEETING

- Send the City Councilor a handwritten thank you note and any follow-up material you said you would provide.
- If you've asked your City Councilor to take action and they were undecided, make sure to follow up with them on your request.
- Follow up again if needed. Some City Councilor hope that you won't! They know that leaving you unsatisfied is better than saying "No" so don't let them off easy – follow through!
- Invite the City Councilor and staff to future events—ribbon cutting, bike to work day celebration, or a big bike ride.