

Rules for Engaging Federal Policymakers

Engaging elected officials is your organization's most direct opportunity to influence policy and legislation at the federal, state, and local levels. This document key committees, members, and federal agency targets, best practices for engaging policy makers, tips for conducting meetings with policymakers, and links to additional resources.

With Whom Should Your Organization Meet?

Engaging in advocacy and lobbying activities means building relationships with more than just elected officials. Working to build relationships with executive agency leadership and staff also is critical to achieving your advocacy goals. The following is a guide to identifying key elected officials, key committees in the House and Senate, as well as federal agencies that your organization should consider when working engaging in advocacy activities at the federal level.

Key House & Senate Members and Committees:

Members (and their staff) from your region/state as well as the leadership (and staff) of the following committees should be considered priority members related to all early childhood advocacy efforts.

- Members representing your region/state
- Education and the Workforce (House)
- Appropriations (House & Senate)
- Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (Senate)

Key Agencies

In addition to the leadership (and staff) of the high-priority committees listed above leadership and key staff members at the following agencies should a priority related to all early childhood advocacy efforts.

- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
 - Administration for Children and Families
- U.S. Department of Education
 - Office of Elementary and Secondary Education

Best Practices for Engaging Policymakers¹

Engaging policymakers is most importantly about developing strong relationships. The following best practices should be employed during every opportunity to engage in federal advocacy.

¹ http://www.advocacyandcommunication.org/wp-content/themes/acs/docs/resources/DOs__and_DONTs_Advocacy-1.pdf

Relationships Matter: Don't wait until you need something to begin relationship development efforts. Identify key policymakers based on your organizational priorities.

Identify Your Targets and Supporters: In addition to the guidelines above conduct research to identify additional policymakers and staff members to whom you should be reaching out. Work to identify individuals (business or community leaders) who support your priorities and may have existing relationships with priority policymakers.

Be Prepared: Hone your message so that you are clear and succinct during all conversations and correspondence with priority policymakers and their staff.

Deliver Your Message in a Variety of Ways: Take advantage of all vehicles for engagement including, letters, emails, site visits, and in-person meetings both at home/in the member's district and in Washington, D.C.

Take Advantage of Policymaker Staffers: Don't forget to engage the staff of elected officials if you are having trouble scheduling a meeting with the policymaker – attempt to meet with the chief of staff, legislative director, or legislative assistant assigned to your issue area (in that order).

Tips for Meetings with Policymakers

Meetings with policymakers are the best opportunity your organization has to influence legislation and policy and strengthen relationships. Use the following 12 tips to ensure you are prepared for these important opportunities.

1. Identify key policymakers based on your organizations priorities to ensure that you are building relationships with individuals able to influence related legislation and policies.
2. Understand the policymaker's district (general boundaries, major cities or communities of interest, etc.) and research their personal history and voting record (suggested resources are listed below).
3. Determine what issues are important to them and ask them about their priorities.
4. Don't assume the policymaker has any base level of knowledge about your priorities – begin with the basics and remember that you are usually the expert.
5. Be prepared and be succinct.
6. Remember, a burned bridge is hard to rebuild – understand the other side of the story you are telling and be prepared to respond and neutralize. Never attack.
7. Staff of policymakers matter; they are the conduit and the gatekeeper so build relationships with them as well and treat them with respect.
8. Don't wait until you need something to begin building a relationship. Ideally your first meeting should be an introduction.
9. If policymakers request follow-up information, respond within one week or less.

10. Offer a one-page document during your meeting that provides the policymaker with key information related to your request.
11. If more than one person is joining you in a meeting make sure each of you know your role and have assigned talking points.
12. Always offer to be a resource and remember to say thank you!

More Tools and Resources

- U.S. House of Representative Members
<http://www.house.gov/representatives/>
- U.S. House of Representatives Committee Lists
<http://www.house.gov/committees/>
- U.S. Senate Members
http://www.senate.gov/general/contact_information/senators_cfm.cfm
- U.S. Senate Committee Lists
http://www.senate.gov/pagelayout/committees/d_three_sections_with_teasers/committees_home.htm
- U.S. Health and Human Services Organizational Chart
<http://www.hhs.gov/about/orgchart/>
- U.S. Department of Education Organizational Chart
<http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/or/index.html>
- Elected Official Personal History
Policymaker website accessed through the U.S. House or U.S. Senate websites
- Voting Record Resources
Project Vote Smart: <http://votesmart.org/>
League of Women Voters: <http://lwv.org/>
- Advocacy Guides and Resources
<http://www.advocacyandcommunication.org/tools-resources/>