



# United for Lung Health

Advocacy Day 2008 | Washington, D.C.

## How to Meet with Elected Officials Face-to-Face

### Steps to a successful citizen lobbying visit with an elected official

When conducting a face-to-face lobbying meeting with a legislator, it is important to be well prepared. Before you make any connection, plan what you are going to say. Keep your message simple and to-the-point. Know your request (for example, vote for a specific bill) in as few words as possible. If a group of people is making a constituent visit, it is often helpful to assign different roles and practice the visit in advance.

- **Make introductions** and be clear who is a constituent in a meeting. Legislators are most responsive to the people who can keep them in office – their constituents – so always attempt to have some constituent representation in any meeting.
- **Provide brief, clear statements** about the problem and your solution. Think about your key points in advance and have the whole group making the visit agreed to communicating them.
- **Personal stories are important** because they make the issues real and demonstrate the human impact of policy decisions. Use stories to illustrate the problem and the need.
- **It is also important to personalize your comments and provide local context.** Make a strong connection between the issue and the local community that the legislator represents. Use local examples that illustrate why your issue is important and why your position is a strong one.
- **Support your case with facts.** Don't overwhelm with numbers, charts and data, but do use them judiciously to make your point and legitimize your argument.
- **Listen carefully to your legislator's responses.** What is the person saying about the issue? What is his or her position? What questions or concerns do they have that might be answered? Pay attention to the direct and indirect statements of support or opposition.
- **Ask for their support.** If you don't directly ask your legislator if they support your position, you may never actually find out what they think and what they intend to do. **THE ASK MUST BE CLEAR.** For example, "Can we count on you to support Resolution 186 when it comes to a vote in committee next week?" After you ask, pause. Let them answer and clarify if their response is not yet clear. Once you get an answer, you will know if the legislator supports you, opposes you, or is undecided.

***If they support you:***

- **Thank them, and thank them again.**
- **Be a resource to them.** If they need additional information or help in any way, offer to make that available to them.
- **Try to move them from being a supporter to a champion of your cause.** Ask them if they will carry the bill to their colleagues, speak at a public event, write a commentary for the newspaper, to any other action which will move the legislation forward.

***If they oppose you:***

- **Thank them for their time and don't waste yours.** If they really don't support you, move on to those who will.
- **Stay cordial and friendly.** Even though you disagree on this issue, you may be in agreement on another issue. Keep the door open to working together in the future.

***If they remain undecided:***

- **Try to understand their reservations** and continue to communicate with them.
- **If they need additional information, be sure you get it to them in a timely manner.**
- **Think about whose voice is important to them** and try to mobilize it on your behalf.

Finally, remember never to whine, threaten, misrepresent facts, malign the opponent, personalize a difference of opinion, or burn bridges.

This tip sheet is Courtesy of Wellstone Action!