

# Tips for Meeting with Legislators



*"Nothing impresses elected officials as much as citizens willing to make a personal visit. Individuals or groups who make the effort to speak their mind - in person - are worth platoons of lobbyists. That there are people in the district willing to take the time to present their views in person is a very powerful message." – Audobon Activist Newsletter*

## Meeting Goals

Specific meeting goals may vary according to the issue for which you'll be advocating, but you should always aim for the following during each legislative visit:

1. Educate policymakers about the Breast Cancer Fund and our mission of preventing breast cancer by identifying and eliminating the environmental causes of the disease.
2. Advocate for policies that will reduce the public's exposure to toxic chemicals.
3. Convince the decision-maker to support your position.

## Meeting Checklist

Follow our checklist of activities to make your meeting as effective as possible.

**Task**

1. Contact Breast Cancer Fund staff for information regarding legislative goals.
2. Get relevant information about the targeted legislator.
3. Do your homework.
4. Schedule the meeting.
5. Create a meeting agenda.
6. Prepare for your meeting.
7. Develop materials to distribute during meeting.
8. Conduct an effective meeting.
9. Follow up.

### 1. Contact Breast Cancer Fund staff for information regarding legislative goals.

- E-mail us at [info@breastcancerfund.org](mailto:info@breastcancerfund.org).
- Staff can connect you with the most current resources for current legislation, including talking points, fact sheets and bill updates.
- Staff can also connect you with other Breast Cancer Fund staff who can help you organize an educational event or media event surrounding your legislative activities.

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2. **Get relevant information about the legislator.** Much of this data can be found on the legislator's Web site.
  - Locate your legislator at [www.breastcancerfund.org/locatelegislators](http://www.breastcancerfund.org/locatelegislators).
  - What is the legislator's district? Is it a rural, urban or suburban district?
  - How long has he/she been in the legislature?
  - What is his/her background: upbringing, education, financial assets and previous experiences?
  - What issues does he/she identify as priorities?
  - What committees does he/she sit on?
  - What is his/her voting record on related issues? Votesmart.org is a good resource to find previous votes.
  - What are the political influences in his/her district – labor, business, farmers?
  
3. **Do your homework.** You don't have to be the world's foremost authority on the subject, but you will need to demonstrate basic knowledge of and compelling reasons to support the initiative.
  - If it is a piece of legislation, you should know:
    - The bill number and its status in the legislative process,
    - What committees it has been referred to, and
    - Which groups are supporting and opposing the bill.
  - Familiarize yourself with the opposition's arguments; develop reasonable responses to them.
  - Personalize the issue; know how the issue affects people in the district.
  
4. **Schedule the meeting.**
  - Call to schedule the meeting. Depending on legislator's accessibility and time of year, you may need to schedule anywhere from two weeks to two months in advance.
  - Send written request for a meeting to the legislator's scheduler. Always be sure to follow up a written request with a phone call to confirm receipt.
  - If a legislator is unavailable, ask to speak to the chief of staff, legislative director or the staff member who tracks the issue.
  
5. **Create a meeting agenda.**
  - Limit your agenda to one topic and let the scheduler know what the meeting is about.
  - Sample Agenda:
    - Introductions
    - Thank you for past support
    - Update on organization/activities
    - Issue/campaign update
    - Legislator's feedback on campaign
    - Ask the legislator for a firm commitment
    - Create follow-up opportunities
    - Thank legislator and/or his/her staff

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## 6. Prepare for your meeting.

- When possible, have three or four other constituents join you at the meeting. Together you'll enhance your clout by conveying the extent of concern throughout the legislator's constituency.
- Assign a group leader to open, facilitate and close the meeting.
- Assign each person a role to play: e.g., note-taker, leader(s) for each topic of discussion, etc.
- Brief all constituent participants a day or two before the meeting.
- Call the legislator's office to confirm the meeting.

## 7. Develop materials to distribute during meeting. You may contact the Breast Cancer Fund for materials and assistance at [glee@breastcancerfund.org](mailto:glee@breastcancerfund.org).

- Prepare a brief one-page fact sheet or position paper:
  - Keep it simple, short and straightforward;
  - List the names, addresses and phone numbers of each person attending the meeting;
  - Summarize the agenda items;
  - Highlight specific action requests; and
  - List co-sponsors and supporters.
- Bring other appropriate literature to support your issue, such as:
  - Press clippings
  - Reports and studies

## 8. Conduct an effective meeting.

- Never keep the legislator waiting; arrive 5 to 10 minutes early.
- Great the legislator with a firm handshake.
- Project an image of self-confidence and be assertive in your delivery.
- Get right to the point and stick to it.
  - Be cordial, but remember your time is limited.
  - Don't let the legislator sidetrack you from the issues you want to discuss.
- Ask the legislator for a firm commitment.
  - Do your best to get a direct answer/commitment.
  - If the legislator says "I'll get back to you" or "I'll think about it," arrange a time to check back.
- Make an effort to determine the reason a legislator is not supporting your position.
  - Why won't they co-sponsor/sign on/vote yes on your bill?
  - Don't take rejection personally.
- Maintain your credibility.
  - If you don't have an answer, it's OK to say so and follow up with a written response.
  - Don't promise anything you can't deliver.
- Take notes.

## 9. Follow up.

- No matter the outcome of the meeting, always follow up.

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- Get any additional information that was requested.
- Write/send a thank-you letter to the legislator and staff.
- E-mail/fax/call the Breast Cancer Fund with a meeting report addressing the following:
  - Which legislator's office did you visit?
  - Did you speak with the legislator and/or staff?
  - What was their general rapport? Did they listen carefully? Were they engaged in the conversation? Did they have any questions?
  - What were the key points/themes? For example, concerns with the bill's approach and/or language.
  - What materials did you give them?
  - What's their position on the bill?
  - Did they have any follow-up questions?
- Get to know the legislator's staff.
  - Often, your relationship with the legislator's staff is as important as the one you establish with the legislator.
  - Thank staff whenever they have helped or assisted you.



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