

# Fall **ADSWatch**

## Mock Congressional Meeting Training

### HELPFUL TIPS TO CONSIDER FOR LEGISLATIVE MEETINGS



#### **Before the Meeting**

##### • **Breathe and Stay Calm**

- It can be intimidating to meet with legislators, but do not stress.
- You, regardless of who you are, absolutely deserve to be in the room. Our legislators are in office to serve us — remind yourself of that if you get nervous.

##### • **Everyone is Human**

- Everyone that is present during the legislative meeting is a human, and it's important to remember that. It can be difficult, particularly during tense meetings, to remember this, although we may not see eye to eye on every issue.
- Respecting the humanity of everyone in the meeting can help keep tensions from boiling over and potentially derailing the meeting.

##### • **Do Your Research**

- If possible, research the legislator and any staffers that you will be meeting with online and on social media.
  - For legislators, you want to look at their official campaign website, recent news/press, positions on policy priorities, previous voting records on legislation, bills they have sponsored, issues they are passionate about, etc.
  - For both legislators & staffers, try to research any general information that you can find. You may discover that you went to the same school or like the same sports team.
- Findings from your research can help you make a more human connection with the legislator and/or staffers, can help establish some semblance of common ground and can provide insights on what they prioritize and get energized around.

##### • **Create a Plan**

- Assign and explain meeting roles to each meeting participant. Folks can stick to one role for every meeting or switch up their roles for each meeting. Meeting roles include:
  - *Facilitator*: starting the meeting, doing a round of introductions, keeps the meeting on track and moving forward, ending the meeting
  - *Note-taker/Timekeeper*: taking notes during the meeting, including – who was in the meeting, what was discussed during the meeting, overall impression of the meeting and any follow-up needed (if applicable)
  - *Storyteller*: shares their experience in connection to the specific policy priority being discussed, can be your personal story but does not have to be (be wary of sharing other people's stories without their permission)
  - *Fact-Knower*: shares the data and any other helpful information in support of the specific policy priority being discussed.
  - *Social Media Magician*: getting a photo of the group at the end of the meeting (or screenshot if the meeting is virtual), posting the photo on social media and tagging the legislator to thank them for the meeting and for their support
- Determine the flow of the meeting
- Figure out: what the group will be discussing during the meeting, who will be speaking, speaking order, etc.
- Ensure that the meeting participants have talking points on the policy priorities being discussed during the meeting
- Have clear ask(s) ready
- Anybody in the meeting could make the ask, but make sure that someone in the group is assigned to make the ask to ensure that it gets done.



## During the Meeting:

### • **Setting the Stage**

- You will likely be meeting with a staffer, rather than the legislator. The staffers are the ones who help the legislators decide how to vote and what to prioritize, so your relationship with staffers can make or break your advocacy efforts.
- When you walk into the office, you will likely see a staffer at a front desk who will greet you. You will introduce yourself and let them know who you are there to meet with that day. They may likely offer you some refreshments before the meeting.
- Before your meeting, there may be some waiting time, so be prepared. There may be other groups advocating at the same office(s) on different issues, so it could get a little crowded.
- Office sizes vary, so you may be meeting in the staffer's office, the legislator's office, a random conference room, etc. It would solely depend on how many participants are in the meeting and what spaces are available.
- During *AIDSWatch*, Senate and House meetings will look different. Senate meetings are conducted with constituents from the entire state, which makes for a larger meeting with more participants. House meetings are conducted with constituents from a specific legislative district, which makes for smaller meetings with fewer participants, depending on the district.

### • **The Actual Meeting**

- During the meeting, you will most likely be meeting with a staffer instead of the actual legislator. The legislator could potentially show up, but that does not usually happen.
- Each legislative office has a team of staffers who actually play a big role in deciding and championing policy priorities forward (or not), so developing good relationships with the staffers is almost more important than developing good relationships with the legislators.
- Staffers are usually friendly and will allow you to share your thoughts and opinions freely. How freely or what you should share should depend on who you are meeting with at that time. Cater the conversation for your audience, which in this case is the legislator or staffer.
- The staffer will likely share how much time they have for the meeting. If not, ask them how much time they have for the meeting and plan accordingly.
  - Meeting times can range from 30-60 minutes, but sometimes schedules change. You may only have 5-10 minutes for your meeting and that may be in the hallway or walking on the way to a vote. If this happens, be flexible and significantly condense your plan. Do a quick round of introductions, make the ask, explain/show need for ask, and then repeat the ask.
- Meetings usually go smoothly, but that is not always the case. Sometimes other topics come up or someone gets offended during the meeting or the staffer/legislator is openly hostile or unsupportive.
  - If this happens, try your best to stay calm and diffuse the situation.
    - Information from your pre-meeting research can be helpful.
  - If it gets too bad, you can respectfully end the meeting. There is no need to suffer through a bad meeting and potentially derail your overarching advocacy strategy.
    - You can say, "I believe this is a great place to end our meeting today. Thank you for taking the time to meet with us. Have a good day."

## After the Meeting:

### • **Debrief with the Group**

- Talk with the meeting participants — discuss what went well, badly and overall impressions.
- Make sure to have this talk outside of the building to ensure that other people are not listening to the group's conversation and potentially sharing that information with others.
- If the meeting went badly, check-in emotionally. It can be triggering & emotionally taxing to go through hard meetings. Encourage folks to take a break and take care of themselves if needed.
- *Regardless of how the meeting goes, the meeting is already a success.* You marched up to your legislator's office and shared your story, which is huge. Having the courage to share your truth to people in power is no small feat — be proud of yourself!

### • **Follow Up with Legislative Office**

- If the meeting went well, be sure to follow up with the legislator and staffers with a thank you card or email to thank them for the meeting, reiterate any asks and provide any other additional information requested during the meeting (if applicable).
- Follow up on the completion of the ask(s) with the legislative office.

