

# HOW TO LOBBY DECISION MAKERS

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**Direct personal contact is the best way to persuade Members of Congress (and other elected officials). Your personal story is the most powerful tool you have. Sharing your story and asking for support are cornerstones of our advocacy effort.**

Lobbying techniques include making lots of phone calls; sending quantities of emails, postcards, and letters; and holding events covered by the news media. You can also:

- **Meet face to face with a Member of Congress or his/her staff.** Such meetings are held in Washington, DC, as well as district offices. Local leaders can meet as a group with the Representative for their Congressional district.
- **Show up at an event where you know the Member of Congress will be.** Practice a 10-20 second pitch as well as a one-minute version — you never know how much time you'll have.
- **Find out about back home "office hours."** Some Members of Congress have them and they are open to constituents.
- **Attend a tele-town hall meeting.** These events — town hall meetings conducted by phone — are sponsored by NEA as well as Members of Congress. Attending one and dialing-in to ask a question is highly effective.
- **Invite a Member of Congress to a round table discussion in a school setting.** Have Association members in different positions provide a variety of real-world perspectives on what happens in classrooms and schools, and what students need to succeed.
- **Ask a Member of Congress to set up an education advisory group.** It could be composed of educators, parents, and other stakeholders, and serve as a sounding board for proposals Congress is considering.

## Requesting a Meeting

Most Members of Congress have a chief of staff, a legislative director, a press person, a staff member who specialize in specific issues such as education, and a scheduler — the person you need. You can request a meeting in several ways:

- **Call and give the scheduler a heads up.** Best bets are when Congress is in recess, or on a Friday or Monday. Make sure the Member of Congress is in town and NOT in Washington on the day you're asking to meet.
- **Fill out a form online.** If your Member of Congress uses such a form, you'll find it on his/her website.
- **Fax a letter to the Member of Congress.** You'll want to include the purpose of the meeting, when you'd like to meet, who will be attending, and who you represent. The local or state Association leader should sign the letter. A sample letter is provided below.

**BY FAX**

Date

The Honorable \_\_\_\_\_  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable \_\_\_\_\_  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Attention: Scheduler

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

On behalf of 500 teachers represented by \_\_\_\_\_, an affiliate of the National Education Association, five colleagues and I would like to meet with Senator/Representative \_\_\_\_\_ to discuss \_\_\_\_\_.

We would like to meet with Senator/Representative \_\_\_\_\_ on \_\_\_\_\_ [proposed meeting dates]. Please contact me at [telephone number] or [email address] to arrange a mutually convenient time. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

Name  
Title



### Sample Meeting Agenda

- Introductions: 3 minutes
- Explain your goals, and how you hope to achieve them: 5 minutes
- First educator story tells story: 3 minutes
- Second educator tells story: 3 minutes
- Deliver materials: 3 minutes
- Make the “ask”: 5-10 minutes
- Review next steps: 3 minutes
- Thank you: 1 minute

#### *What if the Member of Congress supports us?*

- Get a photo and use it — in print publications and on the Web (your local Association’s website or Facebook page).
- Offer to provide resources and information.
- Ask him/her to meet with local educators.
- Ask him/her to make strengthening public education a key campaign issue and to talk with colleagues about key education issues.

#### *And if the Member of Congress is undecided?*

- Try to understand why: Reservations about our principles? Opposing views?
- Promise to provide information that speaks directly to his/her concerns and then do it — promptly.
- Ask him/her to meet with educators in a local school — being back in a classroom can be persuasive.

#### *Or the Member of Congress is opposed?*

- Ask for a reason. Look for areas where you might agree.
- Attempt to address his/her concerns.
- STAY POLITE no matter what happens.

### NEXT STEPS AND FOLLOW UP

Make sure to provide any materials you promised to provide. Send the Member of Congress copies of published pictures or stories — or links to the website where they appear. Schedule another meeting, if that was discussed. Send a thank-you note — handwritten or email. Fill out the visit report form at <http://educationvotes.nea.org/boardadvocacy>.