

TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL ADVOCACY VISIT

A Resource from Interfaith Alliance



Interfaith Alliance is the only national interfaith organization dedicated to protecting the integrity of both religion and democracy in America. In the nearly thirty years since our founding, we have stood as a leader in defense of true religious freedom and democracy, empowering activists around the country to make a difference in their communities.

Whether you are an experienced advocate or just getting started, your voice can make a difference. Speaking with your national and state legislators is a great way to raise issues that directly affect your local community. A great advocacy visit depends on planning, preparation, and follow-up. Whatever the topic you're hoping to discuss, your goals are to cultivate a relationship, share your perspective, and ask your legislator to take specific action.

BEFORE THE VISIT

- **Identify your audience.** Find the official who is best situated to take action on your issue area and schedule an appointment. If the official is not your local representative, make every effort to include a constituent in your meeting group.
- **Research the official's district, committee assignments, affiliations, voting history, and your issues.** Come in equipped with the knowledge to build a relationship and engage in an informed conversation. Be prepared to answer follow-up questions.
- **Create an agenda and assign roles to meeting attendees.** The meeting leader will introduce the organization and issue. Participants should share a personal story, make the ask, and answer questions. Supporting advocates will take notes and answer questions. Make sure to identify any constituents in the group.
- **Select additional materials.** Create a 1-pager about your issue to leave behind at the end of the meeting and bring business cards.
- **Practice.** Tell your story and describe your issue a few times out loud.

DURING THE VISIT



- **Be flexible.** Meeting times and locations may change at the last minute. You may end up meeting with a staffer than the elected official. Rest assured, staffers have the ear of your representative and will convey all relevant information.
- **Start with introductions.** The meeting leader should introduce the organization and allow each participant to introduce themselves.
- **Follow-up with a thank you.** Thank the representative for a recent vote, a bill, attending an event in your area, support on a particular issue, etc.
- **Frame the issue.** Use a personal or local story to emphasize why the topic matters to you. Then, make the ask. Connect your story to the action you'd like the representative to take.
- **Gather information on the official's perspective.** Ask the staffer questions like, "Have you discussed this issue with your boss? What concerns do you have?"
- **Listen.** This is supposed to be a conversation. If you're asked a question that you don't know the answer to, you can be honest. Just say "I don't have that information handy, I'm happy to send it to you via email."
- **Leave on a positive note.** Review any comments, commitments, and follow-up items for each issue. Offer to be a resource and give them your information packet and your contact information. Thank the officials or staff for their time and collect their business cards.

AFTER THE VISIT

- **Debrief away from the office.** What went well? What would you do differently?
- **Review any requests and decide who will follow up.** Send a thank you note that includes your ask, plus any follow-up materials.
- **Stay in contact with the official or staffer you met with.** Cultivating relationships with legislative staff can make a difference in future advocacy efforts.