

VISITING DECISION MAKERS



One of the most effective tactics for influencing decision makers is an in-person meeting. According to the Congressional Management Foundation, in-person visits from a constituent are consistently cited as having the greatest influence on representatives. Whether in their local, state or national office, there are a few key steps to keep in mind when visiting with an elected official or other decision maker.

1. Make an appointment in advance

- Call the office and ask to speak with the scheduler. Identify yourself as a constituent and share how many others (if any) will be joining you in the meeting.
- Name the issue(s) you want to discuss so the appropriate staff will attend.
- If you are unable to schedule an appointment in advance, drop by the office and ask to meet with the official or staff person. If a decision on the topic is imminent or the office has not responded to your requests, a “drop-by” visit can be an effective way to communicate directly and personally with the office.

2. Be prepared

- Before the meeting, take time to learn about the official you are visiting (faith affiliation, hometown, record on issues, etc.).
- Think through how you will tell your story and why this issue is important to you and your community. For tips on communicating your story effectively, see the section on “Formulating Your Story.”
- Whether attending the meeting alone or with a group, structure your meeting time to include introductions, sharing your story and “ask”, follow up questions, and a thank you.

3. Be on time and flexible

- Allow plenty of time to find the office accounting for traffic, lines and security checkpoints.
- Check in with the office receptionist. Be patient, as the official’s schedule can often be busy and unpredictable.
- You may end up meeting with an aide rather than the official.
- The meeting might not be the formal sit-down meeting you imagined. Sometimes these meetings take place in a hallway or even as the decision maker is walking to vote or attend another meeting.

(Continued)

VISITING DECISION MAKERS

4. Stay focused and friendly

- You will have a limited amount of time to communicate your key points, and elected officials are notorious for steering conversations to unrelated topics. State upfront why you are there.
- Share your perspective, ask questions, and begin to establish a relationship with the office. Whether with the decision maker or the staff, establishing a relationship with the office is an important constructive step toward long-term advocacy efforts.
- Make the issue personal by explaining the implications of this decision on you, your family and your community. Having practiced your story, you can succinctly and powerfully share a perspective that professional lobbyists equipped with statistics simply cannot provide.
- You can bring supporting documents (letters signed by others, position papers, etc.), but use your in-person meeting to communicate your personal story.
- Highlight the size of the congregation or networks you are a part of so the decision maker understands that you are connected to other constituents.
- Leave time to hear from them and ask any follow up questions about their position on the issue. If you don't have the answer to a question, that is okay - simply tell them you will follow up with the information after the meeting.
- Be firm in your opinion, but friendly even if they do not agree with you. Remember, your meeting is the first step towards building a relationship with your decision maker.

5. Say Thank You and Follow-Up

- Thank them for meeting with you and ask when you might follow up again so that you can continue to nurture the relationship.
- Immediately after the meeting, debrief with others in your delegation.
- Write a note of thanks. Restate your position, share any additional resources and information, and follow up on any unanswered questions.



CHURCH & SOCIETY

The United Methodist Church

Living **FAITH** Seeking **JUSTICE** Pursuing **PEACE**

Creating Change Together
A Toolkit for Faithful Civic Engagement

www.umcjustice.org/toolkit