

Making the Most of Your Day at the Capitol

South Carolina Primary Health Care Association

State Policy And Issues Forum

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Being An Advocate

- **Advocating is NOT an intellectual discussion**
- **Advocating is not debating**

Your goal is not just to get someone to agree with you, it is to get them to take action

- **Advocating to policymakers:**

You are there to help them solve a problem, sometimes a problem they don't even know they have. No matter how good your case,

You have to get their attention first!

Effective Meetings with Legislators

1. Know your agenda and roles going in. How does the conversation go? Who does what?
2. Who you are matters. Tell your story. Why do you care and why are you taking the day off to be there?
3. Deliver a clear, compelling message. Your message isn't just a list of bulleted policy points, but should address why the official should care and act.
4. Provide local context. Make a strong connection between the issue and your health center that the legislator represents.

Effective Meetings with Legislators

5. Tell stories.
6. Politely control the conversation. Remember what you came for. Politicians/staff often control conversations with small talk, talking about things other than the issue at hand. Stay focused on your agenda and diplomatically move the conversation where you want it to go.
7. Make a hard ask. “Can we count on you to support the principles we’ve laid out?” Pause and wait for an answer.

Effective Meetings with Legislators

8. Be strategic in your response to their position: Thank supporters - turn them into champions. Give undecideds the information they need to become supporters. Neutralize the opposition if possible, but don't waste too much time trying to argue with them.
9. Saying "I don't know" is not a crime. It's always OK to say that you don't know but will follow up with an answer they're looking for. You don't have to be a policy expert to be effective.

Effective Meetings with Legislators

10. Remember: Rome wasn't built in a day. You may not get everything you want out of this meeting. It's the beginning or building of a relationship.
11. Do: stay positive, talk in the public interest, view this as an educational process, and take the long view (no permanent enemies, no permanent friends).
12. Don't: whine, threaten, bluff, misrepresent the facts, malign the opposition, personalize differences of opinion, or burn bridges.

After the Meeting

Follow up

- Say thank you
- Answer any unanswered questions
- Provide additional information
- Arrange a visit to your center
- Offer to help them

Remember

You are building a relationship and you need to **KEEP** working at it.

The Bottom Line

It does not make any difference how good a meeting you have with someone, if they don't remember you after you leave.

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