

HOOK, LINE, AND SINKER – HOW TO TALK TO YOUR LEGISLATORS

Hook: Introductions

The *Hook* grabs your elected official's attention. It establishes you and the members of your group as constituents (people who vote in their district and keep the legislator in his or her position). Everyone should briefly introduce themselves at the start of the meeting. Consider sharing something unique.

Line: Stories and Statistics

Provide the policy maker with local stories and/or basic statistics about your chosen issue. This could include sharing of personal stories and experiences. Policy makers especially appreciate real-life examples that put a human face on an issue.

Sinker: The Request

Stay on message! Make a clear request of the policy maker. Ask for a commitment and then listen carefully to the response. Policy makers will often need some time to consider supporting or opposing a proposed change, but they will often share important insights into their thought process. Remember to thank them before you leave!

TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL MEETING

Prepare for the meeting- Know your issue and know your legislator. (What are their committees? What similar issues have they supported or opposed in the past? Do they have a personal connection to your issues? Who donates money to this legislator's campaign?)

Practice for your meeting- Even top lobbyists role play before their meetings. The goal is to anticipate questions you could receive and have answers prepared.

Honesty is the best policy- It's ok to say you don't know the answer to legislators' questions – the key is to find the answers and send them later. Your credibility and that of your organization is important.

Be polite and gracious- Even if the legislator/staff doesn't agree with you this time, he/she may in the future – you want to maintain your relationship.

Know when to walk away- Not all legislators are going to support our issues for various reasons. Know when to agree to disagree.

Don't let them make you too comfortable- There's no need to accept offers of water, sodas, extra chairs from the rooms down the hall – these take up time!

Stay on message- Don't let legislators distract from your message with stories from home questions about community members, long-winded diatribes about the last time they rant in to you and your family, etc. Be polite, but STAY ON MESSAGE!

Get contact information from whomever you meet with so you can follow up.

Send a thank you note/email to everyone with whom you met, including staff members.