

Advocacy Tips

There is protocol to be followed when meeting with legislators. For a successful meeting with an elected official and his or her staff, start with these tips.

Be on time, flexible, friendly and brief.

Make sure you arrive before your meeting is scheduled to begin, but if the member is running late, be patient and flexible. If you are with a team, and a prior meeting will cause you to be late, contact the legislator's office as soon as possible or send part of your team ahead to the meeting.

Select a team spokesperson to start the meeting.

Prior to stepping into the meeting, coordinate with members of the group the various points they will convey in the meeting. The spokesperson should begin by making introductions and summarizing the purpose of the meeting then others can jump into the discussion.

Make a personal connection with the legislator.

Prior to meeting with the member, review the legislator's biography and familiarize yourself with his or her committee assignments and legislative package, especially those bills dealing with the community college system. Be aware of the member's legislative accomplishments and thank them for their help on any issues where they have been of assistance to the community colleges. The biographies and a list of their pending community college related bills will be provided by chancellor's office staff. Chancellor's office staff will also be available to help with any questions.

Don't be disappointed if you meet with staff and not directly with the legislator.

Despite the legislator's absence, a meeting with their staff can be just as productive. Legislators rely on their staff for advice and details about an issue. Staff members are critical to making sure a bill is passed and key amendments go into a bill. They also are a good source of information.

Ask about the legislator's priorities for this year.

Ask what the member's priorities are this legislative session, particularly in light of the current budget deficit. This is a chance to develop a relationship and find out how you and your campus or organization can work with the legislator.

Ask for their support.

Ask your legislator or their staff for their assessment of the budget and what their advice would be for mitigating the impact of funding cuts. They should be able to give you an indication of their support for community college priorities.

Offer your assistance.

Legislators and their staff often have questions throughout the year and look to the chancellor's office, advocacy organizations and the local community colleges within their district for help in addressing community college issues. If you live within their district, reinforce that you are available to help.

Bring business cards and seek photo opportunities.

Ask for business cards and leave yours. This will help you when sending your thank you letters to the legislator and/or their staff following your meeting. Try to bring a camera to take pictures you could use in a press release.

Complete a key information log and meeting summary.

Someone on your team should complete a summary of the meeting and identify any needed follow-up items with the legislator or their staff.

Write thank you notes.

Sending a personal thank you note to the member and his/her staff can go a long way. Not only is it a common courtesy, but a way to keep you and your issues on the front burner. Don't forget to provide the legislator's office a copy of the press release along with your thank you note.