

HOW TO PREPARE FOR A DECISION-MAKER MEETING



Once you have booked a meeting with your elected official, you will want to prepare to make the most of your time.

1. SET YOUR GOAL FOR THE MEETING

Ask yourself a few questions to determine what you want to get out of your meeting.

- Do you want your lawmaker to understand your work or your organization's impact better?
- Is there a specific piece of legislation or budget spending request you want them to consider?
- Is there a pressing local issue that they can help you with?

The clearer you are with your goal for the conversation, the better you can prepare.

2. CREATE AN INTRO

Often called an elevator pitch, write down 3 - 4 sentences that explain your work or your organization's community impact. Take some time to practice this and try it out on your colleagues and friends.

3. KNOW YOUR ISSUE, KNOW YOUR LAWMAKER

If there is a specific bill you want to discuss, make sure you know what it will do, how it will change things for the constituents your official represents, and any supporting data that helps make your case.

If you want to share more about your work or the creative sector, have some data points and stories of impact supporting your goal.

Be ready to share your personal connection to the issues. We connect to people, so share your story as well as the data.

Do some research on the official's position on the issue you care about and their voting or action record. Know if they're already co-sponsoring or showing public support for the bill or solution you're meeting about.

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4. SOLUTIONS STAND OUT

Lawmakers are in the business of listening to their constituents and there are many difficult challenges they are asked to consider. You can stand out by presenting the solution to the problem you introduce. If you're meeting to talk with an official about a bill or ongoing movement, present that as one solution to the problem.

Offer to be helpful. Is the elected official working on an issue you care about besides the one you're meeting over? You can always offer to help them advance things that are mutually important to you by amplifying their social media or otherwise sharing your support.

5. THINK ABOUT THE FLOW

Elected officials and their staff's schedules can change quickly - especially if you are meeting with a state legislator when the House or Senate is in session. Be prepared for a brief meeting, and don't get flustered if you have to wait or wrap up early.

- You can start by introducing yourself or your organization and the reason you are meeting.
- You should be ready to share stories and data, then make your ask. Example: "One of the reasons I'm here today is to ask for your support on House Bill 1234, the Art Advancement Act. This bill directly addresses the challenges we are facing in our district."
- Listen to them. They will have their own reasons for supporting or opposing an issue. Part of doing your research is understanding their perspective.
- Be prepared that they will have questions - that's good! A question that lawmakers often ask is, who has the opposing position to you? And why? They want to understand the landscape of the bill.

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6. WRAP UP AND FOLLOW UP

Towards the end of your meeting, offer yourself or your organization as a resource and partner. You have important knowledge about cultural policy issues, and lawmakers may call on you to help them better understand the creative community in their district.

Additionally, if the elected official is working on an issue you care about besides the one you're meeting over, you can always offer to help them advance things that are mutually important. Consider amplifying their social media or otherwise sharing your support.

Be sure to thank them for their time and consideration of your ask.

A day or so after your meeting, follow up with an email thanking your elected official for the meeting and reiterating your ask. You can always include attachments of materials you shared or items that you discussed.

A NOTE ABOUT STAFF

No one accomplishes their work alone and when it comes to elected officials, there are talented, diligent staff members who support their efforts. They advise their lawmakers on issues and help them connect with constituents. Sometimes, when the elected official is very busy, a member of their staff will meet with you. These folks are smart and knowledgeable and can be your greatest ally.

They also notice when someone takes the time to thank them and treat them with professional courtesy. Be sure you take a moment before or after your meeting to thank the legislative aide who helped you schedule your meeting, the intern monitoring the phones, or the chief of staff who sat in on our conversation.