

THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND:

Legislators are people too!

Outside of the session, the legislators you'll be speaking to are regular people. Keeping this in mind will not only help you to feel less intimidated, but can also open other opportunities to establish a connection between you.

Talking to you is their job!

Legislators are hired to represent you! As a constituent, your thoughts and opinions matter! And to keep their job, they need to keep relevant to be voted into office. They're well aware that they must pay attention to the things you care about. Also dismiss movie stereotypes of stony, disagreeable politicians from your mind. However you may feel about their personal politics aside, the people who become our legislators typically only get that far by being disarming to their constituents. It's easier to talk to them than it sounds.

This might be the first time they've ever heard of this aspect of the issue.

Legislators must read, consider and vote on dozens of issues each session, making it difficult to have the time, energy or brainpower to be knowledgeable about each one. Additionally, because many legislators are assigned to specific committee's like agriculture, education or transportation, many choose to focus on the bills which align with their committees scope. They often in turn then rely on members of other relevant committees to inform their vote on outside issues, so you will want to provide a complete enough overview that they do not feel it necessary to get clarification from an unknown source later on that may or may not understand or support the issue.

This means you will want to touch on major points of the issue while being concise and using easily understood language. Though the so called "opiate epidemic" is now on every politicians radar regardless of political alliance, they may not be familiar with harm reduction but want to be the politician who helps the opiate epidemic.

You don't need to know all of the answers.

If a legislator asks you a question you aren't expecting or for which you don't know the answer, don't guess! Its okay not to know everything, no one does. This best thing is to be honest and say "I don't know the answer to that particular question but I'm going to write it down and I will call your office by the end of next week." Then, follow through on that promise. This will let your legislator know that you are willing to act as a resource for them and also that you are willing to continue to build a relationship with one another.

Thank You Card

A small way to maximize your impact is to bring a Thank You card. The card helps to briefly express gratitude for the legislators time and consideration and will help remind them of your conversation. The card is the sort of gesture that conveys sincerity and professionalism so be sure to include your and SPWs contact information so if they have future questions they know who to talk to.

This is the time to talk policy, not politics.

It is not an opportunity to discuss your personal feelings on an unrelated issue, that legislator's affiliated party or that legislator's voting history on unrelated issues. Also, while making an emotional appeal through storytelling can be a valuable way to personalize the issue, anger and negative accusations are unproductive in this setting and can serve to damage opportunities for a long-term relationship with that legislator for any of the participating organizations.

Know your opposition.

Legislators may have concerns of their own, or may anticipate what concerns their constituents may have. Because of this, it is a good idea to know a few of the most common arguments or concerns against the issue you are trying to advocate for. Know a few, and have responses planned in advance.

Know the policy.

Know the bill name in advance, HB2148. Many legislators rely on the bill number to look it up among the dozens submitted. Read the bill and do your best to know what the policy will do and how this differs from the existing legislation. Legislators will want to know the specific changes taking place and how that will help resolve the issue.

Provide each legislator with a long-term resource.

Whether that's you, a friend or colleague, or the organization you're representing, make sure the legislator has a point of contact to keep the conversation going. You'll want to provide a resource you can rely on so that the legislator you've spoken to doesn't seek out information from elsewhere, leaving a chance for misinformation to occur. SPW will provide a packet with informational resources to leave behind but it is also recommended to bring a Thank You Card with your and SPW's contact information to express your gratitude for your legislators time and sincere hope that Arizonans can work together to find solutions.

Following a conversation with a legislator, make sure to report to an SPW staff member, the important details from your interaction. If you choose to discuss particular legislation, information which is particularly valuable includes: their position on the legislation discussed, how they would vote on that bill, any main concerns regarding the specific bill, primary points of interest or sway for that legislation, and if they were especially enthusiastic about the legislation and could be utilized in advocating for that legislation in additional ways.