Handout: Guidelines for Meeting with Government Officials

Before the Meeting

- Prepare comments to briefly introduce your delegation and explain why you have requested the meeting. Include in the introduction the names of the delegates’ neighborhood(s) and the school(s) they attend. Appoint one or two participants to do the introduction.
- Decide in advance how the group will present their policy recommendations. It is important that each delegate speak at some point during the presentation.
- Bring enough copies of your policy presentation: one for each delegate and three copies to share with the government official(s) or staff member(s) meeting with you.
- Participant should dress in conservative, professional attire. Casual clothing, such as jeans, sweatshirts, and sports jerseys, should not be worn. Male participants should wear collared shirts, ties, and dress pants or khakis. Sport coats or suits are optional. Female participants should wear blouses or dress shirts with dress pants or skirts, or dresses. All participants should wear comfortable shoes for walking.

During the Visit

- Expect the meeting with government officials to last a maximum of 30 minutes.
- Introduce your delegation. Give a copy of your policy presentation to the government official(s) or staff who are meeting with you.
- Present your policy recommendations. Expect to speak for no more than 10 minutes to allow enough time for questions and discussion.
- Always speak respectfully to the government official(s) or staff member(s), even if you do not agree with their views on certain issues. The most effective advocates communicate their views with passion and conviction while respectfully challenging those who may not agree with them.
- Thank the government official(s) or staff member(s) for the visit. Express your hope that they will partner with you to address the problem that you have highlighted.

Important Things to Note

- Some government officials will quietly listen to your presentation while others may interrupt and insert their thoughts on your ideas. Be prepared to respond to this change in format while staying focused on your primary points.
- Some government officials may not be able to meet with you directly but will send a staff member on their behalf. Don’t be disappointed if this happens. Staff members work very closely with the officials they represent and help to shape and inform their views and actions. A good meeting with a staff member can be very valuable in advancing your advocacy strategy.
Handout: Lobbying 101 – Tips for Meeting with Elected Officials

Before the meetings:
- Know the issue. Study your talking points. Ask questions. You’re not expected to be an expert on the issues, but you should be familiar with your policy recommendations.
- Organize your delegation. What role will each delegate play in the meetings?
- Prepare information to share. Bring along a packet of information to leave behind.
- Be confident! Remember that elected officials work for you. It is your constitutional right to visit your elected representatives to express your views and hold them accountable.

During the meetings:
- Be on time. Elected officials and their staff have very busy schedules that constantly change. It is important that you arrive at your meeting on time.
- Introduce yourselves and explain why you are visiting. Be brief so that all of the members of your delegation have an opportunity for an introduction. The elected official’s office will be interested in where you are from (e.g., specific county, town, neighborhood) and where you attend school.
- Outline talking points clearly and concisely. Stay on message! You want your elected official to walk away more informed and with a clear idea of how he/she can help you.
- Share a personal experience that relates to your policy recommendations. The thoughts and ideas that you are presenting came from your first-hand experiences living in your community. Feel free to briefly share a story from your life experience that helps to illustrate the importance of your involvement in Empowered for Change and your policy recommendations.
- Be flexible with the meeting format. You may end up meeting in a conference room or out in the hallway. Don’t let the location affect your focus!
- Get the business cards of the people you meet with. Give this information to your delegation leader after your meetings.

Things to keep in mind:
- Remember, this is your meeting. You will be expected to present your recommendations and lead the discussion.
- It’s OK, and sometimes more beneficial, to meet with staff rather than the elected official him/herself, because they are the “eyes and ears” of the elected official. Don’t be discouraged if you do not meet with an actual representative.
- Expect each meeting to last about 15 – 25 minutes.
- Don’t attempt to respond to questions that you don’t know how to answer. Just let the person know that you will have someone get back to them with a response.
- Be respectful at all times, even if you are not hearing what you like.

The best advocates are those that:
- Stay on message.
- Know what they’re talking about.
- Speak with passion and conviction using facts/evidence, examples and stories.
- Show respect for all people and perspectives.
- Request partnership with the government rather than demanding that the government be the “fix all”.

1
Handout: Peer Feedback Tips

No one is a “born” expert at anything – we all have strengths and weaknesses. We know that the best way to grow our skills is to build upon our strengths, and to work hard at improving on things that don’t come as naturally to us. A key to this growth is being able to give and receive effective feedback.

But what constitutes good feedback? How can we give feedback so that it is easy to receive, and helpful for the one receiving it?

Here are some tips for providing good feedback:

1. Good feedback helps others move to a next stage of growth by naming their strengths and ways to improve.

2. Feedback is most helpful when it is specific. Examples can be useful.

3. Consider using the “Sandwich” method:

   a. Start with a piece of positive feedback – citing something they did well or affirming a strength. For example, “you connected with the public official really well,” or “you were really compelling when you shared your story.” You can always affirm things like their effort, taking a risk, stepping out of their comfort zone, etc.

   b. Then offer constructive advice. Try to offer positive suggestions on how they might improve, rather than telling them they did something poorly. For example, it is more helpful to say “It might be helpful if you talk more slowly” rather than “I just thought it was really bad that you talked so fast.”

   c. End with some additional positive feedback. For example, “Overall, I think you come across as a really confident speaker!” or “when you shared about the issue, your passion really came out.”

The feedback is better received when it starts with a positive tone, then provides some specific constructive suggestions, and then ends with something affirming. We trust that you will find this method helpful when you are the one on the receiving end too!
Handout: Principles for Developing Effective Policy Recommendations

GETTING STARTED
Each group will prepare a presentation on their policy recommendations to share with local government officials.

- The document should not exceed one page of text.
- The use of graphics is appropriate if they help to communicate the central message of the policy recommendations. Any graphics can be included on an additional page.
- Below are instructions on how to design the presentation.

Part One
OUTLINE THE PROBLEM
- Describe the problem you are seeking to address. Use specific information to illustrate the problem, including statistics and evidence gathered during the weeks of training (e.g., community background research worksheet, youth poll, interviews with community leaders).
- Identify the root cause(s) of the problem based on your research.

Part Two
DESIGN RECOMMENDATIONS TO ADDRESS THE PROBLEM
- Provide recommendations that are realistic and feasible.
- Be very specific.
- Use language that is clear and concise.
- Be sure that your recommendations tackle the root cause of the problem.
- Identify assets in your community that can help to address the problem.
- Provide a role for all key community stakeholders – including youth – in the solution.
- Use a tone that is collaborative, not accusatory. The objective is not to blame the government for the problems in your community. It is to invite them to be a part of a community-driven solution.

Part Three
EXPLAIN WHY YOUR RECOMMENDATIONS ARE REASONABLE