



# FIRST ADVOCATES

PILOT PROJECT

## Building Relationships with your Legislators

How to Request and Conduct a Meeting

# Getting to know your state elected officials

## **Congress**

- To find your representative and two senators go to:  
<http://contactingthecongress.org/>
- Put in your address and you will be given a list of your members of Congress and their contact info.

## **State Capitol**

- To find your Governor go to:  
<http://www.usa.gov/Contact/Governors.shtml>
- Click on your state and you will be directed to the website of your Governor.

# How to request a meeting

- Call your legislator's local or national office to find out who the scheduler is.
- Your meeting request should be addressed to the legislator's scheduler, they set the meeting.
- Always ask to meet with your legislator but, if your legislator is not available, meeting with an aide who focuses on education can also be productive.

# Request via fax/mail

- Fax or mail a letter to the scheduler requesting a meeting.
- Follow up by phone within 24 hours after sending the letter to ensure it was received.
- Call back within 72 hours if you haven't heard a response from the scheduler.

# Online request

- Some legislators have an online meeting request form that you can fill out online, or you can call the main office line and ask for the email address of the scheduler.
- Easy and convenient if you have access to the internet.
- Usually provides you with a timeframe for a response (can be from 2 to 4 weeks depending upon the volume of emails the office receives).

# Prepare for your meeting

- Review your issue.
- Define your message.
- Determine and review roles of participants.
- Practice for the meeting.

# Ensure message discipline

- Everyone stays on message.
- Stay true to your core values.
- Deliver your message over and over again.
- On your own schedule.



# Rules for effective messaging

- Positive messages work
- Connect to core values
- Speak to the middle
- Movement language works
- The truth works
- Unity messages work
- Emotion vs. facts



# 7 Steps to Conduct an Effective Advocacy Meeting

## STEP 1: Introduction

- Let the legislator know who you are by introducing yourself and/or your group.
- Let them know you are a proud Head Start parent.
- Explain that you are here to talk about Head Start and specifically to ask your legislator to support the program and robust funding for Head Start.

# STEP 2: Support your argument with examples

- Use real life stories.
- Talk about Head Start and what it means to you and your family.
- Make your issue/problem “REAL” to your legislator.
- You are an “expert” on your issue and “uniquely” qualified to discuss it.

# STEP 3: Connect your issue to the legislator

- Location and geography are your strongest allies.
- How is the issue affecting you, your community, the legislators' constituents and the legislator?
- Humanize the issue with names, facts, statistics, anecdotes etc.



# STEP 4: Make a clear and direct request

- Ask your legislator to act.
- Your legislator expects a direct request from you so don't be shy, be direct and clear.
- Ask your legislator specifically to:
  1. Support robust funding for Head Start and avoid sequestration.
  2. Visit your Head Start program.
  3. Take a picture with you wearing the Head Start Works button (which you should then publicize on social media.)

# STEP 5: Leave reference materials

- Prepare education materials to leave behind with the member of Congress or their staff.
- Materials should address the main Head Start issue (s) of the time, your position and any action(s) you are supporting.
- Contact NHSA for help with materials and/or talking points for your meeting.

# STEP 6: Reporting sheet

- Make copies of the First Advocates meeting report sheet in advance.
- After your meeting record how it went.
- Share the results with your state program and NHSA.

# STEP 7: Follow up

- Follow up with everyone you met with, especially those who were undecided or needed more information.
- Send a “Thank You” letter (via email, fax or regular mail) after the meeting to everyone who you talked to and who gave you a business card.
- Reiterate your Head Start message and make mention of any commitment of support they made during the meeting.

# Lobbying Do's

- Plan in advance.
- Dress nicely.
- Know your legislator and your issues.
- Stick to your issue/message discipline.
- Make a clear request.
- Build rapport with the legislative staff.
- Follow up.





# Lobbying Don'ts

- Send mixed and multiple messages.
- Threaten when faced with adversity.
- Engage in partisan politics/attacks.
- Confuse respect with agreement.
- Be late.
- Answer what you don't know.
- Forget to follow up.

# Reasons to be hopeful!

- You can make a difference.
- People working together can make a difference.
- People can change laws/policies.
- Lobbying is an American tradition.
- Lobbying helps find real solutions.
- Lobbying is easy.
- Policymakers need your expertise.
- Lobbying helps people.
- Our views are important.
- Lobbying advances our cause and builds public trust.

# Can I help you with your advocacy activities?

Contact me at: [ogoumbri@nhsa.org](mailto:ogoumbri@nhsa.org)

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