



TIPS FOR ENGAGING ELECTED OFFICIALS

SHARED WISDOM FROM FORMER ELECTED OFFICIALS AND STAFFERS

WORKING WITH STAFF

- Many meetings with the office of an elected official (particularly at the state or federal level) will be with staff.
- Don't assume staff members have in-depth knowledge of the issues. Ask for their background knowledge of your topic upfront.
- District-level staff are important! Often a District staff member will have more 1:1 time with their representative than a Washington D.C. staff member.
- In general, don't have preconceptions about how a staff member will feel about your issue. Always start your conversation with where you agree and go from there.
- Although there is a lot of staff turnover, there are some staff members who are long-term and may move from office to office. Relationships are good investments that generally carry over to any new positions.
- Offer to take the staff member on a field trip. Often this will be an enticing offer for staff to get out of the office and will better illustrate your message. If you offer this, be sure to deliver!
- Be helpful! Be responsive, present information that is helpful for the staff to know, and don't be afraid to make yourself available as a resource.
- Avoid making disparaging comments about other staff or elected members.



FIRE ADAPTED COMMUNITIES
LEARNING NETWORK

IN-PERSON MEETINGS

- Ask how much time you will have beforehand. Many meetings are 30 minutes, which only gives you 15-20 minutes to deliver your message.
- When possible, end your meeting a little early; this will make your message more palatable and give everyone a little processing time.
- Have a clear “ask” and don’t assume it is obvious. Begin your meeting with your ask and reiterate it again at the end.
- Come prepared with potential solutions to the problem/issue you are presenting.
- If possible, and knowing that it will be a time investment, try to make relationships directly with the elected members. If you can get facetime with them, it is worth it.

MESSAGING

- Be clear on your message. Use stories to help convey your points and remain engaging. Clearly articulated, simple messages are memorable.
- If using printed material, distribute it in advance or at the beginning of the meeting. Keep the material brief (no more than 1-page) and clear.
- Don’t rely on printed material to make your point. Materials will likely be discarded immediately after the meeting. Make your points in-person and in print.
- Deliver your message in a way that is not antagonistic and recognizes the complexity of the issues.
- Be respectful. Know “when to say when” so you can come back another day.

FOLLOW-UP

- Have a follow-up plan!
- Persistence is key; expect to go to several meetings or make repeated contacts.
- Don’t be afraid to get involved and show up for your issue.

*With many thanks to our panelists:
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