

BEST PRACTICES FOR ENGAGING WITH CANDIDATES

When engaging with candidates on policy issues, keep **your goal** front of mind. The candidate's goal is trying to gain voters' support, so it's up to you to connect your goal with their goal. You're more likely to be successful if you can briefly and directly communicate why supporting your issue will help them achieve their goal. Share how popular prenatal to three issues are with voters.

Before engaging with candidates on your priority policy issues, it is essential to know where they currently stand on your issue. This allows you to meet them where they are and use language that resonates with them when making your case. To find this information, start by reviewing the candidate's website. If it isn't included, you've learned that your issue may not be a top priority for them (so your advocacy is vital!). You can also do some internet sleuthing via Google to see if the candidate has said anything public on your issue in the press or in a previous role.

Below are best practices to utilize when planning to engage with candidates to elevate prenatal to three policy issues.



IDENTIFY A CLEAR GOAL

- **What is your ultimate goal?** Whether your ultimate goal is more elected officials supporting your issue or more awareness for it, it should ground how you engage with candidates.
- **What is your goal for this interaction?** Are you trying to bring the issue to their attention? Do you have a specific question for the candidate? Do you want to increase their support for your issue? If so, how? Is there a specific action you want them to take?

HOW TO INCREASE CANDIDATES' SUPPORT FOR YOUR ISSUE

- **Do the research.** In advance of engaging a candidate, assess their current position on your issue. You can check their campaign website, social media posts, quotes in the press, or their votes on the issue if they're running for reelection.
- **Ask questions at events.** Candidates typically hold meetings with potential voters, such as town hall meetings or roundtable discussions. Attend and participate by communicating the importance of your issue and asking for their position on the issue.
- **Invite them for a site visit.** Making an issue more tangible for a candidate can increase their support. If you can, invite the candidate to visit a child care center, Early Head Start classroom, etc., so they can see for themselves why supporting your issue is essential. It is important that these visits be done privately (i.e., without journalists invited to join the candidate). You don't want your organization to be used as the setting for a campaign event
- **Provide polling to demonstrate support.** Candidates are trying to win an election, so polling showing that voters in your state support your issue can be particularly persuasive in making the case for why they should publicly support your issue.

BEST PRACTICES WHEN TALKING TO CANDIDATES

- **Prepare in advance.** Before engaging a candidate on your issue, review the talking points and prepare what you want to say and what you want to ask them.
- **Identify as a voter.** Candidates' primary purpose is campaigning to get enough votes to win, so they are more likely to engage if they can identify you as a voter in their election. Ideally, be sure to include a voter from the district the candidate seeks to represent.
- **Be concise and follow the talking points.** Because interactions with candidates are usually brief, make sure that you have time to touch on the most important points: why the issue is important, your personal connection to the issue, and ask for them to speak out on the issue.
- **Adapt your language.** When communicating about your issue, choose the language that will most resonate with the candidate.

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