

GETTING TO KNOW NEW ELECTED OFFICIALS: PLANNING ENGAGEMENT AND ASKING SMART QUESTIONS

Building long-term relationships with legislators and their staff is one of the most important things you can do as a policy advocate. Thus, following an election, it is critical to identify newly elected legislators, assess where they are on your policy issues, and prioritize meeting new legislators based on your goals for the legislative session.

Benefits of Early Meetings With New Legislators

- **Newly elected officials often don't have staff initially** and are appreciative of resources such as evidence-based policy recommendations about which bills to cosponsor and why.
- **No one is an expert at everything**, and new legislators are working to learn about many new policy issues at once. By getting in early and offering policy resources and evidence-based expertise, you can establish yourself and your organization as a go-to resource for elected officials and their staff.
- **Getting to know the legislators and their early staff** as they set up their professional office provides insight into how the elected official operates (or plans to), who they rely on, and which issues are their top priorities.

Where To Begin

It is useful to reach out to every new legislator because they should all be hearing why your issue is important and what they can do to support it.

- 1. Research newly elected officials' positions on your issues.** [Click here for more information on where to look and what to look for when researching legislators' policy positions.](#)
- 2. Create your target list.** Build your legislative target list so you can decide where to start based both on your goals and where they are on your issues. [Click here for more information on how to build and leverage an effective target list.](#)
- 3. Schedule meetings.** Set up meetings for the start of the legislative session. Below are a few different options for prioritizing those early meetings.
 - ▶ Begin with newly elected legislators who have been vocally supportive of your issue on the campaign. These legislators are more likely to talk about your policy issues, and you want them to use your recommended messaging and talking points and come to you with policy questions.
 - ▶ Start with new elected officials who have been assigned to Committees with jurisdiction over your policy issues. This is another group likely to speak about your issue, so you want them to have your message and think of you as a resource.

- ▶ Prioritize new elected officials who don't seem to have a clear position on your issues. This is a group you should target for education and persuasion advocacy to increase support for your issues.
- ▶ Reaching out to all new elected officials so that you can share resources and establish your organization as an authority on your policy issues.
- ▶ Meet with each legislative chamber's leadership, as well as any new chairs or members of relevant committees, because they have an outsized impact on how your policies move through the legislature.

These initial meetings and contacts allow you to make a strong first impression with elected legislators. It is important that you go in prepared, not only with the resources you want to share with them (e.g., one-pagers on your priority policy issues) but with solid questions that will elicit information that will benefit your advocacy over time.



Sample Questions to Ask Legislators in Early Meetings

- Ask about their family. Connecting over something more personal is great for relationship building, but be mindful of your limited time with legislators.
- Ask if they have any personal connections to your issues (e.g., is their partner a pediatrician, do they have young children in child care, etc.).
- Ask about their relationships with other elected officials (e.g., is another legislator a personal friend, etc.). This is vital information for power mapping.
- Ask about the Committees to which they hope to be assigned and why. This information provides insight into their top priorities.
- Ask what papers they read and/or how they get their news. This information can be helpful when trying to influence them on a policy issue.
- Ask what questions they have about your issues. Asking this question allows you to assess how much education you should provide.

For additional guidance, [click here for best practices when meeting with an elected official](#).