

7 Steps to a Successful Lobby Visit



United States Student Association

1. IDENTIFY YOURSELF AND THE GROUP YOU REPRESENT

Say "Hello, my name is _____, and I am (position) with the (school) Student Government in your district. (School) is a member of the United States Student Association, the nation's oldest and largest student organization." This tactic allows you to show your voting power, a base of support, and your relationship to the member of Congress. Also mention you are working with USSA and students across the country.

2. BE PREPARED TO CONTROL THE MEETING

Before your appointment, select a student in your delegation to chair the meeting. Remember, it is *your* meeting. Don't let the member/staffer get off track or control the agenda. Have the chair decide who speaks, when, and what points should be covered by whom. Remember that you may only have 15 minutes to present your issues, so you will need to be efficient and prepared.

3. STATE YOUR POSITION CLEARLY

Once you have introduced your delegation/organization, explain your position on the issues. Use clear arguments and statistics to back up your position. (Use your USSA factsheets) Personalize the issue. Draw on your own experiences and those of students that you know to illustrate your points. Use campus specific figures and anecdotes whenever possible. Do not be intimidated by not knowing facts and figures. You are the expert because you are a student and directly affected by these issues.

4. ASK SPECIFIC QUESTIONS

It is important that you are prepared enough to ask the correct questions of the member/staff person. It's not enough for him or her to assure you that s/he is "for education"- you want her/him to vote a certain way, to sponsor legislation, or to sign on and cosponsor. Again, be polite but firm. It is your right to ask your elected officials their position on the issues. If you disagree with her/his position, say so. Politicize the issue- make it clear that voters will be unhappy if s/he does not take the correct position on the issue. **Take good notes.**

5. PROVIDE INFORMATION

Always try to leave a "one pager" on your/ USSA's position on the issues you discuss. This gives the member/staffer reference material. During the meeting, be as informative as possible, but never speculate about facts you are not sure of. If you don't know the answer to a question, say so. If it is something you can find out, promise to do so as soon as possible. Don't assume that your member already knows your position, or has taken a position.

6. FOLLOW UP

After a lobby visit, ALWAYS follow up with a letter restating your position and thanking the member/staffer for her/his time. If you meet with a staffer with whom you have an established relationship, an email may be sufficient. Also, include any information that you promised to follow up on during the meeting. After you send a letter, think of ways that you can continue to build a relationship with the member. Invite the member to your campus. Organize a campaign and continue to pressure your member if s/he is shaky on your issue. Remember that a lobby visit is only one step in building a relationship with your elected officials.

7. DEBRIEF WITH USSA

Be sure to call USSA and your state student association to debrief the meeting. Tell us the substance of the meeting, the member's positions, and determine what the appropriate next steps should be. Talk to the USSA Legislative Director about any follow up that should be done from the national/state offices. Complete the follow up plan at the campus level.