

How to have a successful meeting with an Elected Official



Expectations: Meeting with an elected official can happen in various settings, whether in their office, at an official event or in the community, you should set a level expectations for your meeting.

- The power rests in the staff. An elected official's scheduler and main policy staffer are your gatekeepers to success. Treat all staff with respect and appreciation for they can make or break a meeting. Additionally, the elected official most likely receives direct recommendations from their staff. It is important to educate and empower them as much as the elected official.
- In office meetings and/or office hour meetings tend to be short. Understand the amount of time you will have to talk to the elected official or their staff in advance of the meeting. 15 minutes are normally allocated during a legislative session.
- You are the expert in the room. Most likely the person you are meeting with is not as well versed in brain injury as you are. Make sure you are educating and providing space for reflection and questions during meetings.

Preparation: As you prepare to share information with your officials, consider these tips to maximize the effectiveness of your interactions:

- Present details about your issues that are specific to your legislator's district or state.
- Share personal stories that illustrate how the issue directly impacts you, your family, or friends within the district.
- Offer or provide data that supports your issue.
- Facilitate opportunities to meet with disability advocates and leaders and create media opportunities.
- Understand the arguments of those who oppose your position; use this knowledge to acknowledge differing viewpoints and work towards compromise and solutions.

During the Meeting:

When meeting with an official, arrive early and review your talking points beforehand. Keep introductions brief but make sure to mention the part of their district you represent. After the introductions, present relevant data and materials, prioritizing those specific to the district whenever possible. Focus the discussion on an “ask”. During discussion, solicit the Member’s views on the issue and make it clear how the issues affect those in their district. During the meeting, be sure to take notes. These will be impactful when following up and identifying next steps.

Always close the meeting with reiterating your ask.

Before concluding the meeting, ask for business cards so you can send thank-you notes later.

Follow-Up: After a meeting with an elected you should:

- Debrief with your team or interested parties.
- Post about meetings on social media to engage your network and establish yourself as a resource for others looking to follow your example.
- Send a thank you note and provide any follow-up materials needed.

Meeting Don’ts: To ensure a successful meeting, there are several things you should avoid.

- *Being partisan:* Yes, the person you work with may belong to a political party, but your meeting is with them as an elected official, not a candidate. Brain injury is a nonpartisan issue. During this meeting you should put any partisan points away and stick the issue at hand.
- *Speaking too fast:* Be sure to take your time and use your voice pattern to emphasize parts of your story and ask. Speaking too fast will negatively affect the impact of the meeting.
- *Being confrontational:* Our meeting should be a time to educate and empower, not berate. Do not be aggressive toward the elected official, use attacking language or disagree with them. If there is tension during the meeting, refocus on educating and make sure you are using the opportunity to build relationships
- *Be greedy of time:* While meeting with elected officials, we may want to share our personal stories, perspectives or agenda. Be sure to keep your personal story short, you stay on message and focus the agenda at hand and that you allow all to speak. Provide space for the elected officials to ask questions and engage and respect their time limits.