

## Meeting Tips

The single most effective way to communicate your message is through face-to-face meetings. The rule for a meeting with a politician or departmental official is to plan ahead: know your facts, know who you are meeting with, and prepare for opposing arguments.

### Scheduling a Meeting

Meetings can take place in the elected representative's office, in the legislature, or in their riding office. Before calling them you should check if the legislature is in session. If you know they will be in their riding, take advantage of this time by planning a meeting. It is usually much easier and more effective to schedule a personal appointment with an elected representative (even one who is a Cabinet Minister) in her or his constituency office than in their legislative office. When you call ask to speak to the person in the office who handles their schedule, state that you are a constituent, and know that virtually all elected officials have regular constituency office appointment hours.

For a meeting, contact the person handling your elected representative's schedule and state your affiliations and the subject you wish to discuss, and ask for 15 to 30 minutes of their time. If it is clear that he or she is unable to meet with you, then a very good substitute is a meeting with the assistant in charge of the file you are interested in discussing. Do not feel discouraged if you cannot meet with your elected representative. Elected representatives have demanding schedules and rely on their assistants to research issues and report on constituent concerns.

Finally, call to confirm your meeting a few days before it is scheduled to occur.

### Once the Meeting is Scheduled

**Do your homework.** Learn as much as you can about the professional background of your elected representative and record as it relates to your issue. Politicians want to be acknowledged for positive political action and to be informed about local issues. Be prepared to talk *in detail*, and directly, about the issue you wish to discuss. Know the opposing arguments as well as those in favor of your view. Compile your information, such as local statistics, ready in a digestible and concise form, just as you would when writing a letter or making a telephone call. Have personal stories ready and include case studies that illustrate the human side of what you're talking about. Be able to answer specific questions on how the issue affects you, your patients and community, the province/territory or the country in general.

Produce and provide a brief fact sheet on your topic. For every meeting it is important that you leave a short synopsis describing the issue and listing your recommendations, in bullet form, with the assistant and/or the elected representative. Ideally this should be no longer than two pages. The CPA Head Office can help you with fact sheets, studies, or position papers to help explain the issue succinctly. Do not bring large documents or send emails with large attachments as they will likely end up in the recycling bin.

If you are going to meet an elected representative as a group, it is important to practice your presentation ahead of time. Pick a leader who will introduce the issue and decide who will say what, and when. Prepare to only make one or two arguments. If the meeting starts to go off topic make sure that your group members are prepared to bring the conversation back to the subject of concern.

## Meeting Tips

### Day of the meeting

**Be on time.** If meeting at the legislature building, ensure you arrive 15 minutes before your meeting, as you'll be required to go through security.

**Don't be surprised if they are late.** Elected official's schedules are hectic and ever-changing. Being a visitor to a legislature often requires patience and flexibility.

**Establish ties.** Make a point of introducing yourself to and learning the names of key staff with whom you meet, including the secretary or riding office manager. These individuals may be especially helpful in the future. Convey information about your affiliations and exchange pleasantries briefly. Give them your business card and a copy of the one page leave-behind.

**Don't waste time.** Get right to the issue you wish to discuss. Don't get bogged down in small talk. Remember your purpose for the meeting and don't allow time to get away from you (15 or 30 minutes can pass-by quickly).

**Be inquiring.** Ask your elected official if she or he is familiar with your issue. If the answer is negative, take the opportunity to inform them. If the answer is positive, ask them to state their position; however, if they are unable to do so immediately, then say you will follow-up in a week or two speak in easy to understand language and use personal examples whenever possible.

**Be assertive.** Know what you want in advance and ask for it!

**Be respectful.** Be tolerant of differing views and keep the dialogue open. State your points clearly and firmly, but *do not get into an argument*. Never speak badly of other legislators or organizations. Always be polite but don't let politeness make you timid.

**Be a good listener.** Remember that this is a two way conversation and look for ways to collaborate.

**Ask for advice.** Many politicians enjoy helping their constituents and appreciate being in the role of advisor. If they are supportive of your cause, then ask them for advice as to how to move your issue forward.

**Have a small "ask."** If the politician appears supportive of your cause, look for small ways that they can help move the issue forward. For example, ask them to write a letter to the Minister on your behalf, speak to caucus, or say a statement in the legislature. Having a small 'ask' gives you a reason to follow up with the politician and continue to build the relationship down the road.

**Be responsive.** Try to answer questions. When you can't, offer to get back to them with the information. Don't be afraid to say "I don't know, but I will get back to you." It is much more important for you to provide accurate information than to give an answer which may be incorrect.

## Meeting Tips

***Be appreciative.*** Always end the meeting on a courteous note. Thank them for the time spent with you and leave promptly. Don't overstay your welcome.

***Thank you.*** Follow up with a thank-you letter that outlines any action the politician agreed to take and restate your points. Do any follow up that was discussed.