



5 Tips for Talking to Public Officials

1. Remember that public officials are human.

They react the same way you do when supported or challenged: it depends on how you approach them. If you treat them disrespectfully, they will likely not listen to you. Even if they disagree with you, if you treat them respectfully, they are likely to listen to you on another issue and might even come to trust you as a source of information or perspective for them.

2. Say what needs to be *heard*, not what needs to be said.

If you say something because you believe “somebody needs to say this,” you might feel better having said it. But if you want to change a person’s mind, think about what *they* need to hear, and then say it in a manner they will be able to accept. (Hint: yelling at them or telling them “you work for me” is not going to change their mind, and it might send them in the other direction, especially if it’s an issue or bill they are on the fence about.)

3. Get the facts straight as much as possible and be humble enough to accept there might be some facts you don’t know.

Few things can do *less* to help your cause than to speak or act based on false assumptions or inaccurate information. You don’t have to know all the details or be an expert on the topic, but at least be sure that whenever you do act, whatever you state as a “fact” is actually true.

If they tell you something different from what you’ve been told, *don’t assume they are intentionally misleading you*. They may be working from old information, or they may have been given misleading information by people or groups who oppose your viewpoint. Thank them respectfully for their time, and report their response to the source from which you got your information. This could help the source, you, and the public official by clearing up any confusion and getting to the truth.

4. Cultivate a relationship with your public officials.

Arrange to meet with your public officials in their (or your) hometown. Get to know them as people. Tell them about the issues you care about and why you care about them, and ask them what they care about and why. Then, when your issues come up for debate, you aren’t starting from scratch. You’ll also likely have a better idea of what they need to hear and how they are most likely to actually hear it. (See #2 above and check iVoterGuide.com.)

5. Don’t forget to say thanks!

Send the person a message thanking them for the conversation with you and *briefly* summarizing the points you made in the meeting. This can be done by email, social media messaging, snail mail letter, or text message. If he or she ends up doing what you asked, be sure to say thank you for that as well, both privately and publicly. *If you post a complimentary comment about them on social media, they are likely to respond well when you contact them again!*