

# **RULES FOR EFFECTIVE ADVOCACY ENCOUNTERS**

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Advocacy can be complicated, and some of what professional advocates do requires a lot of experience and sophistication. But there are some basic rules that anyone can follow, and everyone—including the least experienced—can learn to be effective.

## **Rule #1: Advocacy just means “Speaking Up”**

You can leave a hand-written note at your legislator’s office or you can call and leave a voice mail message on a machine. The only thing you CAN’T do is not communicate. You can do whatever feels best for you so long as you: WRITE — CALL — VISIT.

## **Rule #2: Learn to think in terms of 51%**

Elected officials have to think in terms of 51%, and so should we. They need 51% of the voters in their district to get elected, 51% of their colleagues on a committee to get their bills moving through the process, and 51% of the members of the full House or Senate to get something passed. When we come to them, they wonder: Is this something 51% of the voters (my committee colleagues, the Legislature) could go along with? One way to convey that our issues are supported by more than just us is by mentioning the groups we belong to—because groups convey numbers.

## **Rule #3: Be sure THEY hear YOU**

Elected officials have a lot more practice doing the talking—and may dominate a conversation, if we give them the chance. Sometimes when we finally meet our legislators, we freeze up. The process and setting can be intimidating. Therefore, it’s helpful to meet ahead of time to designate roles: a “leader” who will introduce the group, and two to three members of the group to each speak about one issue. Try to relax, and remember your legislator is another human and Oregonian just like you.

Remember to lead with the fact that we are people of faith, coming together to raise our voices from that ethical perspective.

## **Rule #4: Don’t take anything for granted**

Some people will tell you not to worry about the legislators who are your “friends,” or not to waste time on your opponents. Just concentrate on the “swing” votes who might go either way, they say. That’s poor advice.

*First*, our “friends” need to hear from us. They need to hear us say “thank you,” and they need to hear our newest, best information and arguments.

*Second*, it’s difficult to predict how someone is going to vote; few votes are certain in advance.

*Third*, the surest rule of politics is that today’s opponent is tomorrow’s potential ally—and vice-versa. Don’t ever write anyone off.

# MEETING WITH YOUR LEGISLATOR

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Personal visits are a highly effective way of helping legislators to understand your position. Legislators welcome visits from constituents. You don't need to be a professional lobbyist, because your "expertise" is in your own story. You are sharing ways this issue impacts regular constituents. Please remember that time is a valuable commodity to legislators. So with all contacts, be brief, be specific, and be courteous—even if you disagree on some points.

## **Before the meeting**

Practice what you're going to say. Write out notes and practice them. If you have a personal story related to your issue, include it, and try out practicing it with a friend.

If you are visiting with a group, divide up the points you want to make and plan ahead of time who will speak and in what order. Identify roles for each participant, including note-taking, returning the meeting report, photography, and writing a thank you note.

## **At the meeting**

Be on time for your appointment. At the beginning of the meeting, state who you are, who you represent, what you want to discuss, and *what you want your legislator to do*. When possible, keep the meeting focused on your key issue. Time goes quickly.

If you are part of a faith community, introduce yourself that way, along with other relevant affiliations. Make sure the legislator knows you are a constituent and voter.

If you meet with staff and not the legislator, don't take it personally; aides are often a filter for their bosses. If the aide is present with the legislator, direct your comments to them as well.

Don't be surprised if your legislator does not know about your issue. Legislators have to know about many issues and may specialize in areas unrelated to our work. Avoid overwhelming the legislator with information and details. If you don't know the answer to a specific question, offer to find the answer, and then forward the information to the legislator.

## **Before you leave the meeting**

Try to find out where your legislator stands on your issue. If they're on board, you might ask them if they would be willing to share this information with other members of their caucus.

If available, leave a one-page fact sheet summarizing your points.

Take a photograph of your group with your legislator, and share it with EMO on social media.

## **After the meeting**

Follow up with a note thanking the legislator for his or her time. Be sure to restate your position in this note. If the legislator asks for more information, please get this information to them. If you need help responding to questions, call the advocacy day organizers.

Check in with everyone who attended the meeting.

# PREPARING YOUR MESSAGE

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## Legislative Visit Agenda

1. All attendees should introduce themselves briefly, with their name and affiliations.
2. The designated team captain will outline the main message and request.
3. Each attendee will share their supporting reasons for caring about the issue.
4. The team captain will reiterate the request and ask the legislator's response.
5. Thank the legislator for their time, and leave the info sheet/s with them.

## Team Captain/Key Message:

We're here as people of diverse faiths because we want a safer, healthier, more welcoming state for all Oregonians. In the 2019 Legislative Session, we ask you to focus on:

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## Your Supporting Message:

Your reasons for caring about this work are important for your legislator to hear. Think about your own story and write notes below. Start with a personal/individual illustration of the need. Reiterate the main request. Elaborate with an illustration of the social impact of the issue. In one or two sentences per section, what would you like your legislator to know?

1. I'm here today because ...

2. That's why I support [name of bill and bill number].

3. This issue is important to me because ...