

DOs AND DON'Ts

WHEN TALKING TO A DECISION-MAKER

BEFORE

DOs

- Be informed about the issue.
- Start early – effective advocacy is an ongoing process.
- Meet with decision-makers that are in a position to influence the issues that matter to you.
- Learn all you can about the decision-maker.
- Practice before you make your case to decision-makers.
- Be open to talking to legislative staff and treat them with respect.
- Try to find out if the legislator has a personal connection or interest in the issue you are discussing.

DURING

DOs

- Identify yourself and who you represent every time you make contact.
- Use personal stories and examples to help tell your story.
- Use data to emphasize very important points.
- Relate to situations in their home district.
- Ask the decision-maker's position on your issue.
- Talk with legislators even if their positions differ from yours.
- Ask why they voted a particular way.
- Show openness to counterarguments and respond to them.
- Be courteous, firm, and confident.
- Ask the decision-maker for support.

AFTER

DOs

- Leave a handout with prepared issue material, your name, and contact info.
- Seek out new partnerships and alliances with others who share your views.
- Stay active – maintain communication with decision-makers.
- Keep the door open for further discussion even if you don't agree.
- Thank legislators and staff for their time.
- Position yourself as a resource for them by letting them know that you are available if they have any follow-up questions or want more information.

DON'Ts

- Be offended if a legislator is unable to meet with you personally and requests that you meet with a staff person.
- Shy away from meeting with legislators who are on the opposite side of your issue.
- Expect legislators to be specialists. Their schedules and the number of bills make them generalists.
- Overload an advocacy visit with too many issues. One or two is best.
- Arrive with a crowd. One to three well-prepared supporters are enough.
- Ignore or be disrespectful of legislative staff.

DON'Ts

- Overstate or exaggerate your case.
- Be argumentative. Speak calmly to avoid putting the decision-maker on the defensive.
- Confront, threaten, pressure, beg, or get into lengthy disagreements.
- Make promises you can't deliver.
- Be afraid to take a stand on issues.
- Be put off by smokescreens or long-winded answers. Maintain control of the meeting and bring the member back to the point.
- Pretend to speak for everyone.
- Bury them with paper or overwhelm them with too much data or jargon.
- Be afraid to say you don't know the answer to a question.

DON'Ts

- Forget to follow up in the near future and send information on any questions you didn't know the answers to.
- Forget to thank the legislator and staff for their time.
- Give up!



**Iowa
Environmental
Council**

www.iaenvironment.org