

Holding a Successful In-District Meeting

These tips will help you hold successful in-district meetings and build professional relationships with legislators. While this is written for meetings with state legislators, many of these tips can be used to hold meetings with candidates, other policymakers (such as county board or city council members), and other local stakeholders.

One or More Months Prior to the Meeting

- Schedule the meeting.**
- Recruit volunteer attendees who are constituents of the legislator.** Contact advocacy partners (ACS, ALA, AHA) as they may also have local volunteers who can attend the meeting. Find several times and dates when volunteer attendees are available.
- Find an in-district location to propose for a 30-minute meeting** like a coffee shop or public library.
- Call the legislator/candidate's office.** Ask to speak to the scheduler to set an in-district appointment. To find legislator contact information, visit <http://waml.legis.state.wi.us/>. Ask a constituent volunteer to arrange the meeting, if possible.

1-2 Days Before the Meeting

- Contact the legislator's office to confirm the time and place.** Don't be surprised or upset if the meeting is cancelled at the last minute. Legislative schedules are very fluid and are often "preempted" by pressing issues. Be gracious and work with the staff and volunteers to arrange another meeting.
- Be prepared that the legislator might bring staff with them or have legislative staff attend in their place.** Communicate with staff just like you would with the legislator. It is important that legislative staff understand the importance of the coalition's work, the successes, and needs of the program.
- Prepare for the meeting.**
 - Paint a picture of tobacco's impact on the district.** Reference local data whenever possible. Check the [Local Data Resources](https://tobwis.org/toolkits/educational-advocacy/local-data-resources/) - <https://tobwis.org/toolkits/educational-advocacy/local-data-resources/>
 - Illustrate local disparities and discuss products in your community. Give examples of products that are being marketed to the community. Are young people attracted to certain products? Are stores selling? Share examples about how tobacco advertising targets specific populations. Talk about where you've seen products displayed. Provide pictures if possible.
- Discuss tobacco control work being done in the district.**
 - Share some of your accomplishments. Discuss the innovative partnerships or programs you have developed. Give examples of local presentations you have given.
 - Discuss your outreach to populations disproportionately impacted by the burden of tobacco. Share examples of collaborations with mental health and AODA facilities. Highlight local First Breath efforts. Share what youth prevention looks like in your community, if there is a FACT group in the district highlight that.
- Select the information to include in a leave behind packet:**
 - (choose 1-2):** WRAP data, FACT stories, new local ordinances, compliance data, and points of success or significant challenges.
 - Always include the statewide Educational Materials four pager.**
 - Include local coalition contact information.**
 - Offer to mail extra copies in case the legislator wants to share them with staff.

- ❑ **Gather background information.** Review legislator's past positions from prior education meetings, candidate forums, newspaper clippings, etc.
- ❑ **Meet ahead of time with the planned volunteer attendees.** Discuss background information with coalition members (i.e. known areas of support or opposing policy positions) and show them the printed leave behinds.
- ❑ **Come to a consensus about the coalition's meeting goals.** These should reflect knowledge of the legislator.
- ❑ **Select roles for the meeting.** Designate a lead spokesperson to facilitate the meeting and keep it on track. Identify specific attendees best suited to address impactful data points, share powerful stories, speak to how program funding is used in the jurisdiction, and answer questions.
- ❑ **Write an outline of how the meeting may flow.** Use this as a general meeting outline:
 - ❑ Introductions
 - ❑ Brief Alliance/Network description
 - ❑ Current efforts
 - ❑ Questions
 - ❑ Wrap up

During the Meeting

- ❑ **Be early!**
- ❑ **Stay on message.** Stick to the outline you prepared.
- ❑ **Listen carefully to the views, concerns and questions the lawmaker expresses.** Get back to them after the meeting if they have any questions you do not feel confident in answering off the cuff. Keep the meeting positive and focused on public interest. Don't get defensive and don't get into a debate.
- ❑ **Stick to education and avoid lobbying. Don't ask decision-makers to support or oppose specific legislation.**

Immediately after the Meeting

- ❑ **Document legislator responses right after the meeting.** Did the legislator provide rationale for why he/she/they supported or opposed an issue discussed?
- ❑ **Debrief meeting with attendees.** What went well, and what can be improved? Write this down to use for future in-district meetings.
- ❑ **Send a thank you note shortly after the meeting.** If more time is needed for specific follow-up materials, send them after a brief thank you note.
- ❑ **Report back to the coalition and state partners on how the meeting went.**

Between Meetings

- ❑ Communicate with leaders regularly.
- ❑ Invite legislators to appropriate events when they are a target audience.
- ❑ Send quarterly newspaper clippings highlighting successes.
- ❑ Add them to the coalition newsletter mailing list.
- ❑ Attend events in the district to see the lawmaker in-person.
- ❑ Drop by during office hours held in the district with a five-minute coalition update. Go with a volunteer constituent.