

The In-District Meeting

And Relationship Building with Legislators

1. Schedule the meeting.

- Recruit attendees, who are constituents of the legislator. Ask a constituent volunteer to arrange the meeting, if possible.
- Prepare several time and date options volunteers are available. Plan for a 30-minute meeting at an in-district location 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/](http://waml.legis.state.wi.us/).
- Offer to meet with ALL candidates running for a particular political office (i.e. if the coalition offers to meet with one during an election cycle, it MUST offer to meet with their opponents).
- Contact the legislator's office 24-48 hours before the meeting 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.
 - The legislator brings staff with them or legislative staff attends in place of elected official. It is important that legislative staff understand the importance of the coalition's work, the successes, and needs of the program.

2. Prepare a printed leave behind packet.

- Include the Key Messages four pager.
- Include local coalition contact information
- Choose other information to include, such as: WRAP data, FACT stories, new local ordinances, compliance data, and points of success or significant challenges.

3. Prepare for the meeting.

- 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).
- Share the printed leave behinds with planned attendees.
- Come to a consensus about the coalition's meeting goals, which should reflect knowledge of the leader.
- Write an outline of how the meeting may flow.
- 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.
- Rehearse introductions that include name, address in-district, and role with the coalition (i.e. successful quitter, refers patients to Quitline, works with youth in school, etc.).

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4. Remember these tips for the meeting.

- Be early!
- Stay on message. Stick to the plan as rehearsed (introductions and role with the coalition, share key data points, and share powerful stories).
- Provide a brief summary of tobacco prevention efforts in the area, including any recent successes. Remind them of past successes, even if they were mentioned them at prior meetings.
- Listen carefully to the views, concerns and questions the lawmaker expresses.
- Get back to them after the meeting with any answers to tougher questions.
- Keep the meeting positive and focused on public interest.
- Don't get defensive. Not all legislators will be supportive. Don't get into a debate. Depend on assigned spokesperson to get the conversation back on track.
- Keep in mind that tobacco use is not a partisan issue. It is a personal/health issue. Don't bring personal partisan politics into the meeting.
- Stick to education and avoid lobbying. Don't ask decision-makers to support or oppose specific legislation.

5. Think of the meeting in terms of relationship building.

- Document legislator responses right after the meeting. Did the legislator provide rationale for why he/she 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.

6. Maintain a dialogue.

- Develop a long-term relationship with legislators.
- Communicate with them between meetings.
- Invite legislators to appropriate coalition meetings and events.
- 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 that they hold in the district with a five-minute coalition update. Go with a volunteer constituent.