

TIPS FOR PREPARING FOR A MEETING WITH ELECTED OFFICIALS

Follow these steps to have a productive meeting:

1. Prepare to **convey the purpose of your meeting in personal stories or information** connected with them. Invite people from your organization or community to attend the meeting who can tell those stories. Do not pack the room with people. Assign roles in advance.
2. Introduction: Just like any interaction or conversation with a new contact, first impressions matter and often set the tone of the relationship. **Introduce yourself, state where you are from, and identify what health center you are representing.** If you are a constituent, be sure to state that, too. Everyone present should be introduced, too.
3. Background: **Start with some background and basic information about health centers and the work they do in the community.** NEVER assume that your elected official is already aware of what a health center is or how they are important.
4. Stay Focused: Once you have provided basic education on health centers, shift the discussion to your objective. Succinctly **outline the case for your position on a particular piece of legislation or the issues that prompted your meeting.** Stay focused on two or three key messages you want to leave with the legislator.
5. Make A Personal Connection: Show how your issue connects with your elected official. **Give a local example of the impact of the issue on your health center and the elected official's constituents.**
6. Answer Honestly or Not at All: Always answer any and all questions asked of you. **If you don't know the answer, that's ok, don't try to fake it.** Say you don't know the answer, but will find out and get back to them. Make sure you find out and get back to them - this shows you are serious about community health centers!
7. Meeting with Staff is Key: Don't be disappointed if you end up talking or meeting with staff, rather than the senator or representative. Legislators depend on advice from their staff because it is impossible for them to follow all issues themselves. **Staffers are gatekeepers and they can sometimes be the real driving force on an issue.**