

Take Action

HOW TO ENGAGE POLICYMAKERS



UNITED WAY
Greater Milwaukee
& Waukesha County

Planning Your Visit with Your Legislator

- Complete research about your legislator in advance.
- Plan your discussion with the legislator. Who will be the spokesperson in your group? What will they share? Why?
- Send materials in advance so they can prepare for your meeting.

Meeting with Your Legislator

- Remember common courtesies; for example, be on time for your appointment.
- Let your legislator know you are a constituent.
- Allow the group spokesperson to manage the discussion during the meeting with a policymaker.
- Be concise, clear, and to the point in your remarks to legislators. Time is limited.
- Show your conviction in the issue you are there to discuss.
- Use your passion to help influence clarity around the issue.
- Emphasize local examples and the impact of any legislation.
- Keep the “bottom line” in mind. What is the most important take-away you are looking for from this meeting?
- Leave materials (if appropriate) with your legislator and provide information about how they can get in touch with you later.
- If you don’t know an answer to a question, say so. Let your legislator know that you will follow up with the information they requested.

After Meeting with Your Legislator

- Write a thank you note to your legislator for the meeting. Thank them if they support your position on a bill or an issue.
- Let United Way know if your legislator had any questions or concerns you were unable to address.
- Write emails to your legislators. Policymakers pay attention to constituent email.
- Emails should be short, with the issue and bill number (if there is one) in the first paragraph. The subject line should say you are a constituent.

Things to Remember

Staff members are content area experts and highly influential with the policymaker they represent.

Build a relationship with the official. The more effort you spend building the relationship, the more credible you'll become.

Recognize that there are legitimate differences of opinion, that policymakers have multiple constituencies to serve.

Things to Avoid

Don't mislead or give your legislator false information. If you do so unknowingly, go back and fix your mistake.

Don't use jargon or acronyms.

Don't act disappointed if you meet with staff instead of the policymaker.

Don't get drawn into any confrontation with a legislator.

Don't criticize anyone who disagrees with you.