

ESAL

Engineers & Scientists Acting Locally

Playbook Guide - Advocate for a Policy with State Legislators or Legislative Staff

Purpose

- Advocate for a new policy or demonstrate your support for an existing one through an in-person meeting with your state legislators or legislative staff.

Ideal Outcomes

- Establish concrete actions a state legislative office can take to support your issue.
- Develop long-term connections with a state legislative office and identify ways to serve as a resource for them.
- Gain a better understanding of their legislative priorities and how you can support or influence them in the future.

Step-by-step Guide

1. Time your visit properly.

- The time of year determines government priorities. For example, brainstorming new bill ideas, drafting legislation, and searching for expert witnesses all take place at different times. This [timeline](#) (California example) varies at the local, state, and federal level, so time your visit to optimize the impact of your message.

2. Do your background research.

- Find out what issues the office you're visiting is focused on.
- If possible, research the background of the staffer or legislator you will meet with and identify their role and key responsibilities.

Tip: Look at the legislative directory or the personal websites of the elected officials to see what bills they've introduced or supported

3. Plan your meeting.

- Send an email to set up the meeting. If you're scheduling multiple meetings, make sure to leave yourself time to travel between offices.
- Create your [one-pager](#). Summarize your key points and contact information, preferably in an accessible, easy to read format with graphics.
- Make sure to have plenty of business cards on-hand, so that you can easily leave your contact information. If you don't have any, [get them made](#).
- If possible, include a clear "ask" that provides concrete actions the legislator could take to further the issue. This may include things like a recommendation for how to vote on pending legislation, a request to make a public statement on a topic, or a request to send a staff member to an informational event.

Tip: Even if someone isn't available to meet with you, they might be able to suggest other staffers or legislators who would be a good fit

4. **Holding an effective meeting.**

- Be prepared for change – your meeting may start late or be cut short, or you may end up meeting with a different person in the office.
- Leave behind your one-pager and business card for easy reference.
- If you meet with a legislator directly, ask for the contact information of their staff to follow up afterward.
- When possible, determine next steps during your meeting.

Tip: Meeting with staff is sometimes more effective than meeting with legislators since they will likely do the hands-on work of pitching ideas, drafting legislation and finding supporters.

5. **Follow up after the meeting.**

- After your visit, send a thank you message reminding them what you talked about and any next steps. By staying engaged over time, you let staff know that you are committed to seeing this issue resolved. Legislators and their staff meet with hundreds of people per week and may not always take action. You need to show them that this is an issue they should care about.

Last Updated: 06/23/22
Published: 02/23/22