



## How To...

### Do's and Don'ts When Meeting with Legislators

Effective Advocacy is relationship-based. Establishing and nurturing a respectful relationship with your legislator and staff requires an investment of time and effort. Keep the following etiquette guidelines in mind when planning and having a legislator meeting.

#### DO

- **Be on time and be flexible:** Legislators' schedules are tight and subject to change. Arrive on time (even a few minutes early!) and notify the staff person that you (and your group) are there for a scheduled meeting. Recognize that the start time and/or length of meeting may need to change.
- **Turn OFF your cell phone.**
- **Keep your presentation brief, succinct and professional:** Lawmakers hold dozens of meetings each week on a wide variety of policy issues. They cannot be experts on everything. Make sure to cover the following – what your issue is; why it is important to you and others; why it is/should be important to the legislator; and what it will cost and how it will be paid for. And **always**, clearly convey your “ask.”
- **Tell a story:** Explain how the policy affects you, your health, your lifestyle, your family, etc. It is important to convey the human side of the policy need and impact.
- **Take turns speaking:** If you are meeting the legislator with a group of people, identify a point person for each aspect of the topic. This allows each person to contribute while confirming that the group stands as one on the issue. Try to reinforce, not repeat, information and stay on point.
- **Deliver the NCRSP ‘leave behind’:** This will reinforce the NCRSP position that was discussed at the meeting.
- **Be prepared to answer questions, if asked:** If you do not know or are sure of the answer, do NOT try to fake it. Promise to get an answer and make sure to follow-up promptly with an email or phone call after conferring with NCRSP staff. Understand the opposition's perspective and counter arguments.

- **Agree to disagree:** While it would be ideal to have a lawmaker on your side on every issue, it is not common. Expect to disagree sometimes, but don't let disagreements define the relationship.
- **Show appreciation:** Be sure to thank the lawmaker for his/her time and consideration of the NCRSP position and/or past support of NCRSP issue(s). Express your gratitude too to lawmakers who pledge to support your cause going forward. Promptly, send a follow-up thank you note or email.
- **Offer continued dialogue:** Stay in touch. Make sure the lawmaker and staff know that you can be a trusted NCRSP resource.

### **Do NOT**

- **Express disappointment if the lawmaker's schedule changes:** Offer to meet with the staff person or reschedule. Staff are trusted by their bosses and are often relied on to provide issue detail.
- **Discuss partisan politics, campaign activities, or political contributions:** NCRSP's issues are not partisan. Your visit should not be a reason to discuss personal, political opinions, so stay on point.
- **Argue, have low expectations or hold a grudge:** Not all legislators will support all of NCRSP's issues. A lawmaker who may not have been on our side on another issue might be a supporter on the current issue. Always take the high road; the impression you make reflects on NCRSP.