

VISITING WITH YOUR DECISION MAKERS

Meeting face-to-face with your decision makers is the most effective approach to urge for arts and cultural funding. You have the opportunity to present your case, raise questions, and provide the answers and information, which allows your funders to do the best job possible to represent your interests.

Make an appointment: Schedule your meeting in advance. Explain the purpose of the meeting and who will attend.

Be brief and concise: You will probably have 10 to 20 minutes to meet with the decision maker. If you need more time, request a breakfast or a luncheon meeting.

Establish a relationship: Promoting arts and culture is a person-to-person activity. If you have friends in common, if the decision maker knows a member of your board, or if you have met before, mention that connection during the beginning of your visit.

State your purpose: Within the first few minutes, make clear who you are and why you have asked for a meeting. Be straightforward.

Appeal to reason: An emotional appeal is not enough. Back your arguments with facts and substance. Show how proposed policy or legislation would affect the community and/or your organization.

Ask for specific action: Tell what action you would like the decision maker to take in support of your request. Don't hold back! Be sure you demonstrate what you NEED, not what you WANT.

Make your politics local: As a constituent, you are in the best position to explain what the decision maker needs to know and what your request will mean to your community. Explain what you do and how the issue at hand will affect you.

Don't bluff it: If you don't know the answer to a question, say, "I don't know, but I can get that information for you." Then follow up later.

Seek guidance: Ask the decision maker's advice on how you might proceed with your issue. They can offer useful information on how to pursue your interests elsewhere.

Leave evidence: Bring material about your program and a brief one-page document about the issue you have discussed. It provides a reminder of your visit and a refresher on the points you have presented.

Appreciate staff: You may be asked to meet with a staff member instead of with the decision maker. Don't be put off. This person should have a good understanding of your issues and will relay your concerns to his or her boss. Officials rely on staff to have a thorough understanding of the issues and to help them in shaping their opinions, which in turn determine how they vote. Establish positive relationships with legislative staff and aides—they are the gatekeepers.

Remember to say thank you: Send a note thanking the decision maker for the meeting. You can use this opportunity to mention any points you may have forgotten or to send information you promised to provide. Offer yourself as a resource for educating the decision maker.

Share what you learn: Share information about your contacts with others in the arts and cultural community. Communicating the decision maker's feelings on arts issues helps make your united advocacy efforts more effective.