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Ten Tips for a Successful Meeting with an Elected Official

1) Prepare

Show up to the meeting with a plan of what you would like to cover. Be ready for questions on a variety of topics. Keep in mind that this could be the elected official's first foray into the topic, and they may have basic questions. If able, show how this issue fits into issues that the elected official cares about.

2) Be willing to work with staff

Do not be discouraged if you are set to meet with a staffer rather than an elected official themselves. Elected officials are busy and have a lot on their plate. The staffer will be able to bring the elected official up to speed on the issue when appropriate. Staffers are often the ones who choose where the elected official should focus, and serve as the gatekeeper of bad ideas. Getting the staffer's support can be just as important as getting the support of the elected official.

3) Be polite

Most important of these tips, always be polite. Your success with an elected official will be highly dependent on whether they view you as a respected resource. Even if you disagree with the elected official's political positions, you should be civil, respectful, and willing to engage where there is potential agreement. Remember, it is never polite to talk over an elected official.

4) Listen

An often-overlooked element of a successful advocacy meeting is to listen. Although you should be ready to jump into your pitch when the meeting begins, pay attention to the questions the elected official asks. Their questions may indicate where they are likely to fall on the issue. Take note of the concerns they raise. Their concerns are opportunities for you



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to present information that will lessen their concerns, even if it is in a follow-up message or future meeting.

5) Tell your story, but also use data and facts

Don't be afraid to tell the story of how you got involved with problem gambling, and why you care about the issue. However, when homing in on details, use data and facts to show why you believe your position to be correct. Stating that you view dedicated funding to problem gambling as the right thing to do can be bolstered by showing the number of people suffering from gambling addiction, how the government treats other addictions, and how recovery is possible.

6) Keep track of time

Often, you will only have a few minutes with an elected official. Keep track of where you are in your pitch and work to get to most of it. If you feel you are getting bogged down by a specific topic, do not be afraid to suggest you answer questions about it after you finish the pitch. However, if an elected official wants to delve into a specific topic, do not discourage them, but work to explain how it relates to the other aspects of your pitch.

7) Have an “ask”

Make sure to include what you would like to see come from the meeting. It is not uncommon for elected officials to ask, “what do you want me to do?” Make sure you have a specific ask so that they do not feel you are wasting their time. Many elected officials do not have time for purely background meetings, they want to know what you want from them, even if it is a simple ask.

8) Ask how you can make their job easier

One thing is true of nearly all elected officials and their staffs – they are busy. At the end of the meeting, do not hesitate to ask how you can be most helpful to them. They may ask for more research, for you to attempt to draft something, or for you to simply reach back out



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when legislation is up for a vote. The less work they must do, the more they will be willing to help you.

9) Leave your information and materials

When the meeting concludes, leave your contact information behind and any summaries of your materials. Typically, you should have a one-pager on who you are and what you are asking the elected official to do. Offer to leave behind copies of your pitch or studies that might interest them.

10) Follow up

After a couple days, reach back out to the elected official and thank them for meeting with you. Provide them with any information they asked for in the meeting that you did not have on hand. Offer to be a resource for them and again offer to provide any additional information they may like to see.