

# ADVOCACY DOs AND DON'Ts

## when talking to a decision-maker

### BEFORE

#### DO

- Be informed about the issue.
- Start early – effective advocacy is an ongoing process.
- Meet with decision-makers that are in a position to influence the issues that matter to you.
- Learn all you can about the decision-maker.
- Practice before you make your case to decision-makers.
- Be open to talking to legislative staff and treat them with respect.
- Try to find out if the legislator has a personal connection or interest the issue you are discussing.

### DURING

- Identify yourself and who you represent every time you make contact.
- Use personal stories and examples that help tell your story.
- Use data to emphasize important points.
- Relate to situations in their home district.
- Ask the decision-maker's position on your issue.
- Talk with legislators even if their positions differ from yours.
- Ask why they voted a certain way.
- Show openness to counterarguments and respond to them.
- Be courteous, firm, and confident.
- Ask the decision-maker directly for their support on your issue.

### AFTER

- Thank the decision-maker and staff for their time.
- Leave a handout with prepared issue material, plus your name and contact information.
- Seek out new partnerships and alliances with others who share your views.
- Maintain relationships with decision-makers. Follow their social media accounts; sign up for their email newsletters; attend their public forums.
- Keep the door open for further discussion, even if you don't agree.
- Position yourself as a resource for them by letting them know you are available for follow-up questions or more information.

#### DON'T

- Be offended if a legislator is unable to meet with you personally and requests that you meet with a staff person.
- Shy away from meeting with legislators who are on the opposite side of your issue.
- Expect legislators to be specialists in every subject.
- Overload a visit with too many issues. One or two is best.
- Ignore or be disrespectful of legislative staff.

- Overstate or exaggerate your case.
- Be argumentative.
- Confront, threaten, pressure, beg, or get into lengthy disagreements.
- Make promises you can't deliver.
- Be afraid to take a stand on issues.
- Be put off by smokescreens of long-winded answers. Maintain control of the meeting by bringing the legislator back to the point.
- Pretend or claim to speak for everyone on your issue.
- Overwhelm them with too many documents, data, or jargon.
- Be afraid to say you don't know the answer to a question.

- Forget to follow up in the near future and send information on any questions they asked.
- Forget to thank the legislator and staff for their time.

**Don't give up!**



Iowa  
Environmental  
Council

iaenvironment.org  
iecmal@iaenvironment.org  
(515) 244-1194

