

American Association of Museums

ADVOCACY FOR MUSEUMS

Lobbying 101: Influencing Public Policy How to Make Your Case when Meeting with Elected Officials

- **Be informed and do your homework.** Read newsletters and legislative/advocacy alerts about an issue carefully. Understand both sides of the issues. Know when the bill is in committee, when the hearings will be held, who the co-sponsors are, etc. Pay attention to details like spelling the elected official's name correctly and making sure you have their correct title.
- **Start early.** Pay attention to legislative proposals early in the process, share your views on the issues with your lawmakers and you will have a better chance of affecting the outcome.
- **Be concise.** The more simply and clearly your position can be explained, the better chance you have of getting people to listen and respond.
- **Be specific.** Know exactly what you want your legislator to do. Do you want him/her to draft legislation, propose an amendment, vote for a specific bill?
- **Be honest.** Do not exaggerate to make a point or answer a question if you are not sure of the facts.
- **Share personal examples.** This puts the issues in memorable, human terms. In addition, legislators pay most attention to personal letters from their constituents, so it is important that a letter or e-mail express your own views.
- **Practice your visit.** Try explaining your position to friends and family or colleagues before you meet with a legislator or testify before a committee.
- **Be courteous, but firm and confident.** Remember you have a right and duty to communicate with your elected officials.
- **Do not make threats.** Telling legislators that they have to do what you want or you will not vote for them will only turn people off.
- **Do not argue with your legislator.** If it is clear that the person will not support your position, just give the facts and ask him or her to consider your viewpoint. You want to keep the lines of communication open for discussing future issues.
- **and DON'T GIVE UP!** The legislative process takes time – as they say if first you don't succeed, try, try, and try again!