

Bird-Dogging

What is bird-dogging?

- A bird dog's job in hunting is to find hiding birds and scare them into flight so that they are out in the open and vulnerable. Bird-dogging is essentially the same concept where an individual is asking a decision-maker a specific question in a public forum
- Bird-dogging offers opportunities to:
 - o Educate the public
 - o Educate the decision-maker
 - o Make a decision-maker articulate their position on a particular issue
- The main goal of bird-dogging is to get answers to our questions on the record by asking the candidate directly, in-person, in public. Ultimately, we want to apply pressure on our decision-makers to support legislation that will improve our patients' lives.
- It's asking about the steps the candidate will take to ensure they are representing us, "we the people", and not just those who are donating millions of dollars to their campaign.
 - o Public policy should be for the public not just the private sector.
 - o It is worthwhile to expose corporate domination.

Videos demonstrating what bird-dogging is and showing examples of this:

▶ Bird Dogging Elected Officials

▶ Webinar: Bird-Dogging as a Political Tactic

<https://www.healthcare-now.org/complete-guide-to-birddogging/>

How do I get started with bird-dogging?

1. Find a public event

- a. Public events can include local town halls, campaign fundraisers, receptions, etc.
- b. One way to find a town hall for your Member of Congress is to contact their DC office:
 - i. [Find Your US House Representative](#)
 - ii. [Find Your US Senators](#)

- c. You can also follow your Member of Congress on social media and sign up for their emails to receive alerts of local events. Social media sources tend to also post events of when your elected officials are hosting any gatherings open to the public, so be sure to check out these sources (i.e., FB Events) when searching for an event.

2. Get a crew of other medical trainees

- a. Gather students from your local AMSA chapter
- b. 4-7 students is all you need to have a solid team! This does not mean that you can't bird-dog without 4 students. Depending on how receptive your Member of Congress is to your question, you may need more support from the room (so the more, the merrier)

3. Make a specific plan

- a. Plan your question in advance
 - i. The best questions are less than 1 minute and start with a personal/patient story and end with a specific question
 - ii. The story should be powerful. Your goal is to "win" the room and allow for the public to support your ask!
 - iii. Write your question on a notecard and practice! (Memorize if you can). Each student should have their own story ready with a similar question. The most effective events are when you ask the candidate the same/similar question or follow up questions, over and over again to continue to build public support and push them to commit to your ask
 - iv. Don't ask questions more than 1-2 topics. Too many asks can dilute the effectiveness of this advocacy strategy
 - v. Make sure your phone is fully charged so that it is ready to video/audio record and take pictures
- b. When one student from your group asks a question, make sure that the other students in the room are ready to record the interaction!

4. Show up to event early

- a. Do not sit together! Spread out in the room but try to stay close to the microphone.
- b. Bring your white coat
- c. Speak with your MOC's staffers and gather their business cards

5. Be your decision-maker's #1 fan!

- a. To build good rapport with your Member of Congress, make sure to cheer widely and make good eye contact! They will be more likely to call on you for

your question if you appear as a strong supporter.

6. Ask your question

- a. Example question <<insert>>

7. Get a handshake and photo op

- a. if you didn't get to ask your question during the public forum, find your MoC in the handshake line and be sure to ask it then! If there is no handshake line, quickly rush to the exit and try to catch them as they are leaving
- b. Take a picture with your MoC and send it to AMSA for our social media
 - i. tag @AMSANational

8. Get in contact with the press at the event

- a. Find a reporter at the event and repeat your message. The reporter may ask you an unrelated question but stay on your topic and answer the question they *should* have asked you and not the off-topic question

9. Report back to AMSA what happened!

- a. We want to hear what activities your chapters are doing! Make sure to report back to us!

Ingredients for a strong question:

1. Patient story (20-30 seconds)
 - a. insert your example
2. Specific ask
 - a. insert your example

The most important aspect is to get medical trainees engaged and involved. With more medical students asking questions, there are more chances to raise awareness for the issues and highlight what we care about.

Tips:

- Follow the presidential candidates campaign trail and find out where they are speaking.
- Bring other people with you to ask questions too.

Don't forget:

- Be concise
- Know what you are talking about and why it matters to you
- Educate the candidate – and whoever else might be listening – about the issue
- Frame your question in a way that a real answer is expected

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