



Policymaker Engagement Toolkit

Introduction

Policymaker engagement provides an opportunity for invested officials, such as government representatives or community leaders, to get a first-hand look into the work that your organization does. Policymakers will be able to observe the thought and effort that goes into everything from research and planning to advocacy and implementation of SEL. This is a great chance to demonstrate the value of our work to important decision makers. Besides that, it is also an opportunity to give a face and a name to our organizations. Whenever possible, remember that the primary goal is to make a good impression and a lasting connection.

Why Engage Policymakers

- You are SEL experts and a resource to legislators.
- Building a relationship can be mutually beneficial and productive.
- They are a key connection to systems-level change and can be a powerful name and face for your SEL agenda.

Know Your Policymaker

Research the policymaker before you connect. Know their priorities, their roles, their committee placements, and so on. If possible, reference this information when you reach out and target policymakers likely to support your work.

Ways to Connect

Schedule a meeting

- You don't know how much time you'll have, so be to the point and relay the most important points first. Give a brief overview, but also make sure to hone in on more tangible results and goals. Make it personal, if you can.
- Anticipate possible questions. Don't be afraid to get back to them on a question.
- Follow up after meetings/events. Send a thank you note and check on an "ask".
- Remember, this (and all the following options) can be virtual, if need be!

Have policymakers come to an SEL event

- Invite a policymaker to a school event or a fundraiser - somewhere they can see the people and work that is being affected.
- This can be lower-pressure on any individual making an "ask," and great for forming connections between the policymaker and your organization.
- If a policymaker is already involved in your work, ask them to speak at an internal meeting to galvanize and support your group.
- Policymakers could also speak at an outside engagement, publicizing important information to a new audience. Connecting with a large and diverse group of policymakers could help to expand the network of your organization.

Organize an SEL site visit

- Invite policymakers to see SEL in action at your school, organization or community group.
- Include SEL lessons as well as discussions with teachers, youth, school and program administrators.
- Prepare the site in advance of the visit with a clear agenda and practice for participating parties.
- Include an explanation of SEL ahead of time, in order to set the tone, and end with some actionable steps on their part.

Offer testimony for an SEL-related bill in committee/hearing

- If a relevant bill is being heard in a legislative body, consider sending a message to your policymakers.
- Making your case to the entire legislative body could be great, but even something on a smaller scale - providing some data to be used in the debate, or simply encouraging your representatives to support or object to a bill - can be impactful.

Handouts

A handout can be a helpful tool to outline the basics - the pillars of SEL, for example - and their relevance. Try to customize this by including, for example, the potential impact of SEL in local schools and action steps that they can take.

Follow Up

Once you develop a relationship with a policymaker, keep it up! Try to keep them engaged. Don't overwhelm them with content, but pick the most relevant and actionable items and keep them in the loop as an ally.