

Meet with your City Council Member

Tips for a successful meeting with your Council person

City Council members are elected to represent you. Never forget this. They are supposed to serve the public. As such, we have a right to speak with them and to let them know about the issues we care about. You should think about this meeting as the first of many and consider developing a long-term relationship so you can truly be part of the decision-making process.

When you meet with a decision maker, they can hear a personal story and understand how a policy will directly affect their constituents. This direct and more personal connection makes them more likely to vote the way you ask them to.

How to set up a meeting:

- Setting up a meeting is as simple as reaching out to your Council member. You could meet them at their office or meet with them virtually via teleconference or phone.
 - Remember that legislators can have busy schedules between committee hearings, floor sessions, caucus meetings, and meetings with other constituents. If an issue is urgent, make it clear that their response and action is time sensitive.
 - The simplest way to set up a meeting is to call or email them directly. You can find your Council member and their contact information here.
<https://council.nyc.gov/districts/>

How to craft an agenda with an ask, be prepared for your meeting, and keep the Council member accountable:

- Whether you're meeting with your elected official one-on-one or with a group of your neighbors or fellow activists, make sure to:
 - Introduce yourself (this includes your name, but also any roles you play in the community or groups you are a member of that are relevant to the issue);
 - have a plan for what stories and information you're going to share;
 - know what policies you're going to discuss;
 - have a clear and definitive ask for them to vote "yes" or "no" on a policy – make sure to get an answer;
 - you may want to consider asking them other ways they could support a policy beyond their vote. This may include asking leadership to hold a public hearing, making sure the policy is on a committee agenda, speaking with their colleagues about the issue, or asking them to publicly support or oppose the policy in official statements.

- If you're meeting as a group, delegate roles and responsibilities. Decide who will share their stories for each issue, who will take notes, who will print and bring materials, and who will watch the time to keep the meeting on track.
- Come to the meeting prepared with materials to show and leave behind. Examples include:
 - One-page documents that succinctly describe an issue, provide stories, and have clear asks for specific bills or policies are a great way to provide background information and leave a resource for the representative.
 - Leaving a business card or other contact information so the representative can easily reach you after you left is a must. Elected officials often have follow-up questions or may want to meet with you again.
 - Take a copious amount of notes.

What to expect at your meeting (a basic meeting flow):

- Introduce yourself, reference any groups or associations you're with, and share why you're there.
- Thank them for meeting with you and ask how much time they have to meet. It's respectful and it helps you to know how much time you have to get through your agenda. Sometimes meetings can be as short as ten minutes.
- Expect questions. Answer the ones you know and be honest when you don't know the answer. If they ask a question you can't answer, make sure to follow up with them later.
- Remain respectful. It lends you credibility and a higher likelihood of having another meeting in the future to further influence them.
- Make sure to get an answer to your "yes" or "no" ask. If they say, "yes" be sure to thank them. If they don't know yet, ask them what information they need to make a decision. If they say, "no" see if there is any additional information that they may consider, but don't burn the bridge for future work where you might agree.
- They may disagree. Remain respectful and don't beat a dead horse. If they will not support one policy, acknowledge it's okay to have disagreements and transition to the next part of the agenda.
- You may have a meeting with their staff. Legislators and executives can have hectic schedules. Sometimes that means you'll meet with one of their staff members. Staffers are just as knowledgeable on an issue and they'll make sure to take notes to bring back to their boss. Treat the meeting the same way as you would if you were meeting with the official themselves.
- Thank them for their time, no matter the outcome of the meeting.