

An in-person meeting is a golden opportunity to build goodwill for the arts. A brief in-person visit with an elected official shows that you care deeply about the arts in community life. It's a chance to share information while building mutual understanding and rapport. With that foundation in place, your subsequent calls or written communications will carry more power. It's most comfortable—and most effective—to establish a relationship *before* asking for a vote or for funding. Follow these simple steps to conduct a winning meeting with a legislator or staffer.

1. Be Prepared

Take a little time to learn basic details about your legislator. Research the legislator's background, voting records and committee memberships. On-line tools like [Open States](#) can be useful, but also review the legislator's bio, website and social media activity. Whenever possible, include in your meeting someone with a connection to the legislator—a board member, donor or former colleague. Before you go, determine your main message about the arts. ([Five Essential Arts Arguments](#) and [Why Should Government Support the Arts?](#) can help!) If multiple people are attending, determine roles for all participants in advance.

2. Introduce Yourself

Begin the visit by briefly introducing yourself and your organization and letting the legislator know you are a constituent. Thank the legislator for meeting with you as well as for their public service or for a favorable position they have already taken on the arts. Keep your introductions brief. Set a tone that is warm and social, not adversarial or about an "ask."

3. Build Your Arts "Brand"

Your goal is to build a brandlike reputation as a trusted, knowledgeable source on arts issues. Be prepared with facts and stories that show how the arts help your community. Offer your lawmakers help as they seek creative ways to address community needs. Keep in mind that new legislators may have relatively little power or influence when first elected, but they can become powerful in the future. You can play a role in grooming them to become arts champions!

4. Listen and Learn

During your interaction with elected officials, listening is usually more important than talking. Invite them to share their views on community needs, legislative priorities and why they chose to run for office. Ask about any



FACT:

According to [research](#) conducted with congressional staff, face-to-face meetings are the most influential way for citizens to affect the views of an undecided legislator. Elected officials are flooded with e-mail and social media contacts, so in-person contacts are more memorable and appreciated.



Memphis arts groups representatives meet with Rep. Larry J. Miller of District 88.

arts involvement, especially the creative interests of the legislator's children or spouse/partner. Acknowledge as many arts connections with you as possible: Are both of your children budding filmmakers? Do you both enjoy singing in a church choir?

Pay close attention to everything legislators or staff members say, listening for cues you can use to connect the arts to issues about which they care deeply. Never become partisan or defensive if a legislator seems opposed to your position. Keep the meeting positive, respectful, interesting and full of information. Don't be afraid to say you don't know something. You can offer to follow up after the meeting—then fulfill that commitment!

5. Leave Evidence

Bring material about your organization and its impact along with brief bullet points summarizing your key messages. The ideal length of a leave-behind document should be no longer than two pages. Photographs, event programs, exhibit announcements or other colorful accessories add appeal. Such materials are a reminder of your visit and a refresher on the points you presented in person.

6. Develop Relationships with Staff

Meeting with a staff member can be equally—or even more—productive than meeting with a legislator. Legislators are very busy, so staff are crucial liaisons with constituents. Staff also can hold a reservoir of policy knowledge and have tremendous influence on legislation, so they can be powerful arts allies! Develop a good working relationship with staff members, and prepare for meetings with them as thoroughly as you would for a meeting with a legislator.



Wake County advocates meet with former North Carolina State Sen. Tamara Barringer to tell their stories of how the arts impact their lives and the lives of fellow citizens.

7. Extend Appreciation and Follow Up

Send a thank-you note shortly after the meeting. This follow-up can highlight the main points of the visit and provide any additional information the legislator or staff may have requested. If the visit was held with staff, address the thank-you to the legislator with a copy to the staff member.

QUICK TIPS:

- ✓ **Prepare a 30-second elevator speech for each attendee.**
- ✓ **Be a good listener.**
- ✓ **Don't be afraid to say you don't know the answer to something.**
- ✓ **Prepare talking points and stick to them.**
- ✓ **Take notes.**
- ✓ **Bring and leave behind helpful handouts.**
- ✓ **Follow up with a thank-you note.**

