

WSDA Legislative RD Day 2010: Tips for Meeting with Legislators

Objectives:

- Begin to build relationships with legislators to have a foundation for later advocacy
- Gain experience and confidence in how to advocate for our profession in WA
- Raise the visibility of Registered Dietitians as experts in the field of Food and Nutrition

1. Be prepared

- Meet before the meeting to develop a game plan and agenda for the meeting
- Assign each person a role (ex. spokesperson, note taker, leader for a topic etc)

2. Be on time!

- Representatives and Senators are often very busy especially when the legislature is in session
- Being late will reduce the amount of time for your meeting

3. If your legislator is unavailable, meet with his/her aide.

- Don't be offended if a legislator cannot meet with you. Be just as polite to the aide.
- Often the aides do much of the background work anyway.

4. Be brief, simple and straightforward

- After introductions there may only be 5 or 10 minutes to get your point across.
- Be sure to cover your priorities in the beginning.
- Use short personal stories when possible. It is often more effective than listing statistics.

5. Be Specific in your asks

- Limit your asks to one or two topics.
- Be clear on what you want. Specific requests are more likely to get specific responses.

6. Be honest

- If you don't know the answer to a question, say that "I don't know, but I'll get back to you on that". Having to get back to a legislator can be useful to build relationships.
- If you try and bluff or fake it then you will lose credibility.

7. Stay Calm

- If a legislator disagrees with you, try and find out why.
- Keep the lines of communication open no matter what the disagreement is about.

8. Keep notes of the meeting

- Either have someone take notes during the meeting or immediately afterward.
- Be sure to write down any follow-up needed.

9. Follow-up

- If a legislator cannot commit his/her support now, make sure to check back in a week or two to get their thoughts.
- If you've promised to provide more information than make sure to do it.

10. Thank your legislator

- Always thank the legislator for their time. Sending a thank you note is a nice touch.
- If your legislator is not supportive yet, he/she may be in the future.