



The Key to Effective Citizen Advocacy in Sacramento: Effective In-District Advocacy by Constituents

Legislators care about what their constituents think. Indeed, no matter how much money they receive from special interests, legislators know that they ultimately have to win the votes of their constituents to stay in office.

That's why it is so important for activists to develop a relationship with their legislators in their own backyard—in the district where voters vote. Legislators are generally willing to listen to the views of constituents on home turf. And they need to hear from constituents who care about the environment.

This document outlines the steps you can take to become an effective in-district voice for the environment (or any cause).

The 10 Steps to Being an Effective In-District Voice

1. Know who your legislators are and how to contact them. California has a bicameral legislative system, meaning there are two houses: the Assembly and the Senate. There are 40 state senators and 80 assembly members. Every voter lives in an assembly district and a senate district. You can find out which district you are in and who represents you by going online to: <http://findyourrep.legislature.ca.gov/>. To learn more about your particular representative, including phone numbers and addresses for district offices, go to <http://www.assembly.ca.gov> for information about assembly members and to <http://www.senate.ca.gov> for information about senators.

2. Get on your legislators' mailing lists. Many legislators regularly send out emails or newsletters about what they are doing. In these publications, you'll find information about local town hall meetings or "meet your legislator" meetings that the legislator will be holding in your area. Contact the district office (see info above for how to get contact info) and ask to be put on the constituent mailing list.

3. Go to events where your legislators will be. Attend local community meetings, town halls, coffees, and other events that you know your legislators will be attending or even hosting. Use the opportunity to introduce yourself to the legislator, but spend most of your time on the first visit to one of these events listening. Listen to what the legislator has to say and how the audience responds or what they question him or her about.

4. Do a meet-and-greet meeting with your legislators. Call your Assemblymember's and Senator's district offices and ask for appointments with each to meet to discuss environmental

issues you care about. If the person answering the phone says the legislator won't be available, ask to meet with the district staff.

5. Be coordinated. Before you meet with a legislator or staff on behalf of a group or organization, be sure to let the organization's policy staff know that you are planning to meet with your legislators. Ask if there are specific state policy issues you should bring to your legislators' attention. Sometimes there won't be, but the policy staff may have some ideas about other things to discuss. Also, consider teaming up with other organization members to do the meeting. If you do team up, be sure you schedule a brief phone call for the team to figure out who will say what before you arrive at the meeting.

6. Be prepared. Before you meet a legislator, prepare your talking points. Don't overwhelm the legislator or legislative staff with too much information or ideas. Instead, consider one or two environmental issues that you think the legislator needs to know about (exactly what these are may be informed by your discussion with your organization's policy staff), and then consider the most important thing about that issue that you can share in a minute or two of conversation with legislative staff or the legislator. Most appointments with legislators or staff last only about 15 or 20 minutes, so be prepared to be concise.

7. Be neat and on time. When you meet with the legislator or staff, be sure to dress neatly. Arrive at the meeting location—usually at the district office—with at least 5 minutes to spare. If you are being joined by other activists for the meeting, it's a good idea for all of you to have discussed before you arrive at the meeting place who will say what.

8. Be polite. Legislators and legislative staff are more likely to meet with you again and again if the experience they have with you is enjoyable and productive. Be polite, be concise, and be friendly. This doesn't mean you have to agree with everything the legislator or staff says. It just means you have to be careful not to be argumentative. Listen, calmly state your position, and then listen again. If you are asked a question you don't know the answer to, say you don't know but will get the answer--and then do.

9. Report back. Let your allies and policy staff know how the meeting went.

10. Say thank you. After the meeting, drop an email or written note to whoever you met and thank them for meeting with you. If you promised to supply additional information, do that, too.

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