
Strategies to Maximize Communication Efficacy With Legislators and Policymakers

Cindi M. Hobbes
Director, IPRC



REHABILITATION & COMMUNITY
PROVIDERS ASSOCIATION

Considerations Before Getting Started



- There are no restrictions if speaking with legislators in a personal capacity
 - May advocate for or talk to legislators and policymakers about anything
- If speaking on behalf of your organization, be careful that:
 - You advocate the correct position of your organization
 - If your organization is a 501(c)(3), you are not permitted to advocate on a specific bill or issue due to IRS rules
 - If speaking with BH-MCOs or county entities, you may speak on issues that impact your organization, however....
 - There is always a danger the BH-MCOs or counties may hold statements or positions against an organization
 - For this reason, many of our RCPA members prefer that we to reach out to the BH-MCOs or counties on their behalf
 - Can be helpful to advocate as a group or collaborative of providers

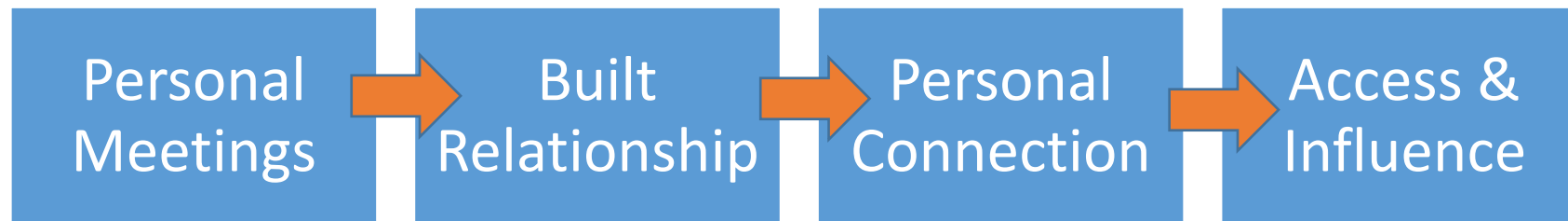
Communication Tenets

- Communicate regularly
- Communicate a consistent message
- Communicate with a variety of methods
 - In-person visits: Most effective means of communication
 - Phone calls: Often can talk with a live person (staffer); issue gets more attention than an email or letter
 - Personal letters: Viewed favorably; some offices prefer this
 - Email: Least preferred method as it tends to have the smallest impact



In-Person Meetings

- Personal meetings are the most effective means of political communication
 - To discuss a specific issue
 - To introduce yourself as a constituent
- If unable to schedule a meeting with the legislator, do not overlook the opportunity to meet with their legislative staff
 - They are the experts in their fieldInform and influence the legislators' views on particular issues



Preparing for a Successful Meeting



To ensure a successful and productive meeting, PLAN AHEAD.

- Do your research
 - Obtain information about their depth of knowledge and understanding of human service issues
- Find out the lawmaker's position on the issue and the reason for their position
- Identify your agenda and prioritize your topics
 - Limit your meeting agenda to three or four topics/issues
- Prepare a packet of information about your issue that you can leave with the lawmaker
 - Reference sheet with quick bullet points
 - Papers, articles, research supporting your position

Executing a Successful Meeting



To deliver a powerful, unified message, follow these basic guidelines:

- Greet them with a handshake and formally introduce yourself (and all others present)
- Thank them for the meeting; recognize their busy schedule
- Present your information in a direct, organized, and timely manner
 - Cite specific bills, titles, and issues to ensure clarity
- Relate the information directly to the legislator's constituents
 - Identify the constituents impacted (you and the individuals you serve)
 - Use personal stories
 - Provide tangible, realistic examples
- Demonstrate why this issue is important to you and your legislator
- Be attentive to the legislators positions, comments, and feedback

Closing a Successful Meeting

Finish strong and set the stage for future communication.



- Offer to provide any additional information needed or follow-up on questions
- Determine future methods of communication
 - Ask about preferred method(s) of communication
 - Ask about ideal time period for follow-up

After a Successful Meeting

Your work isn't over...

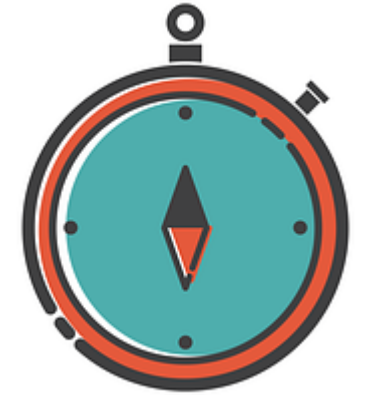
- Write an immediate thank you letter/ brief summary of what was discussed
 - Send to each legislator and/or staff member who met with you
 - Creates an instant positive memory of you and will work to facilitate further visits
- Promptly follow up on any promised items
 - Use their identified preferred communication method
- Treat this as a developing relationship with your legislator, not a one-time meeting

Build a Long-Term Working Relationship

- **Keep in touch and continue to be a resource.**
- Keep the momentum rolling after your meeting. Follow up, as appropriate, throughout the year.
- Stay on their radar screen, but do not become a pest.

*Keeping in touch will let the staff know that they have someone in the district who really understands the issues and will continue to be a resource to them and the legislator. Convince them that you are the one to call to get details they need to make the best decisions.

Be Patient



- **Don't expect immediate action.**
- Give the legislator some time to digest the issue and take a position.
- If you don't hear back right away, wait until their "ideal time frame for follow-up" has passed and then contact them to see if they (or their boss) have had a chance to consider the issue.
- Then maintain patience – it may be a while before you hear back.

Pitfalls to Avoid. DO NOT....

- Arrive late for your meeting. Arrive on time (or early) and prepared.
- Be discouraged if your legislator is late to the meeting or if you end up meeting with a legislative assistant
 - Legislators' schedules are unpredictable and can frequently change at the last minute
- Assume that they know about your field (they likely don't)
- Assume that the legislator is familiar with your issue(s)
 - Thousands of bills are introduced during the session, legislators and staff will not be able to remember them all
- Discuss numerous bills or address unrelated issues
 - This will make it difficult for your legislator to understand what your priorities are
 - Discussing side issues diminishes the importance of key issues
- Maintain a narrow-minded perspective
 - Be attentive and open to different views and feedback
 - Gain understanding of what is driving that particular office's decisions
- Demonstrate angry, threatening, or confrontational behavior
 - Instead, leave the office with a positive feeling and desire for future collaboration

Developing Your “Elevator Speech”

- Have a Clear Message
 - Practice your message delivery in a concise, clear way
 - Anticipate and prepare for questions that may arise
 - Be specific – don’t assume they know why you’re there
- Deliver Your Points Quickly
 - If in a group, identify an articulate spokesperson ahead of time
 - All present should be prepared to answer any questions that arise
- Be Respectful of Your Audience’s Time
 - Keep small talk to 30 seconds or less
 - “I know you’re busy, so let me get right to the point.”
 - Don’t waste time; a legislator’s schedule can change at any moment



Developing Your “Elevator Speech” – Continued

- Keep Your Cool
 - Stay cordial, even if in disagreement
- Be Flexible
 - Take advantage of whatever time becomes available
 - Try not to get flustered
 - Meet with whomever is available
- Pay Attention to the Staffers
 - Know their names, be nice
 - Face time with them can be just as valuable

Confidence Boosters

Meeting with policymakers can be nerve-wracking,
but REMEMBER:

- Elected officials are charged with representing their constituent's needs
- YOU will likely be the content expert in the conversation
- You are helping them help their constituents



Tips for Phone Calls

- Call state legislators in their Capitol or district offices. When the legislature is in session, state House and Senate members are usually in their Harrisburg offices Mon–Wed and in their district offices Thurs–Fri.
- Identify yourself. Tell the person answering the phone who you are, whom you represent, and your reason for calling.
- Ask to speak with your lawmaker directly. If not available, ask for a staff person with direct responsibility for your area of interest. A receptionist can share your legislators' schedules and meeting availability.
- Leave a message with the receptionist or aide, voicing your support or opposition to the House or Senate bill or policy issue in question.
- Be concise. State your reason for supporting or opposing the bill. Ask the lawmaker's position.
- Don't burn bridges. Be polite even if the lawmaker does not agree with you. You may need them again in the future.
- Follow up your phone call with a thank you note, briefly restating your conversation.

Writing Letters, Sending Emails

- Individually signed letters are viewed favorably
- Keep letter simple and concise
 - State your purpose in the first paragraph
 - If you are writing about a particular bill, identify it in the first paragraph
 - Only a few paragraphs in total and only a few sentences per each
- Explain the importance of your position
- Identify yourself and your organizational affiliation
- Whenever possible, personalize your story
- Emails, form letters, and petition signing are the least effective
 - Gives the illusion of being disconnected from the issue



Find Out Who Represents You

- PA State Representatives

<https://www.legis.state.pa.us/cfdocs/legis/home/findyourlegislator/>

- Search by your zip code: [House.gov](#) or [Senate.gov](#)

- Common Cause.org

<https://www.commoncause.org/pennsylvania/>

Addressing Correspondence / Greetings

- **To a State Representative:**
The Honorable (Representative's full name)
House PO Box (insert PO Box number)
Main Capitol Building
Harrisburg, PA 17120 Dear Representative,
- **To a State Senator:**
The Honorable (Senator's full name)
Senate PO Box (insert PO Box number)
Main Capitol Building
Harrisburg, PA 17120 Dear Senator,
- **To the Governor:**
The Honorable Josh Shapiro
225 Main Capitol Building
Harrisburg, PA 17120 Dear Governor,

Thank You!

Contact Information:

Cindi Hobbes

Director, International Pediatric Rehabilitation Collaborative (IPRC)

Rehabilitation and Community Providers Association

chobbes@paproviders.org