



GUIDELINES FOR MEETING WITH ELECTED OFFICIALS

Almost everything we do as advocates depends on our ability to communicate well. Communicating with your elected official doesn't have to be complicated or provide every last detail or piece of information. Effective communications are those that are personal, clear, concise, honest and to the point. Elected officials depend on their constituents, like YOU, to help inform them on the issues and to help guide their decisions.

Getting Started – Your Communications Approach

- “What” you communicate is as important as “how” you communicate.
- Be personal, clear and concise in telling your story, sharing your information, and asking for your elected officials support.
- Remember that talking with an elected official is no different than speaking with one of your peers. Speak clearly, thoughtfully, and always with respect.
- Before your meeting carefully plan out what you are going to say so you can be concise and maximize your time. Clearly lay out your goal for the meeting and stick to your objectives.

Effective Communications with Your Elected Official

Introduction First impressions matter and often set the tone of the relationship. Introduce yourself, state where you are from, and identify Marriage Equality USA as the organization you are with.

Background Start by providing a personal story which illustrates why marriage equality is important in your own life. NEVER assume that your elected official is already aware of how the lack of access to civil legal marriage affects individual daily life.

Stay Focused In addition to sharing your personal story and basic facts on marriage equality, stay focused on two or three key messages you want to leave with the legislator.

Make A Personal Connection Show how your issue connects with your elected official. Are they married? Do you both have children or grandchildren? Do you attend the same church? Give an example of the impact of marriage equality and the elected official's constituents.

Answer Honestly Always answer any and all questions asked of you. If you don't know the answer, that's ok, don't try and fake it. Say you don't know the answer, but will find out and get back to them. Make sure you find the information and do get back to them - this shows you are serious about marriage equality!



Meeting with Staff is Key Don't be disappointed if you end up talking to or meeting with staff, rather than the actual senator or representative. Legislators depend on advice from their staff because it is impossible for them to follow all issues themselves. Staffers are gatekeepers and they can sometimes be the real driving force on an issue.

Be Courteous Avoid personal criticism and always be polite. You may not agree with your elected official, but you need to maintain a positive and respectful relationship – remember you will NEED to work with them for the duration of their term.

Always Say “THANK YOU” Thank your elected official for their time and attention and express appreciation for past or future support.

Offer Yourself as a Resource Offer to act as a resource for more information on marriage equality. Always include your name, telephone number, and/or email address in case your elected official would like to get in touch with you. Encourage them to be in contact with any questions or if they need additional information.

Communications Follow Up with your Elected Official:

- **ALWAYS Follow Up** Follow up your conversations with policymakers and their staff with a “Thank You” note via email and/or handwritten letter. This should be done within two weeks of your meeting. In your follow up note it is appropriate to *briefly* restate your issue and your main points. Be sure to include any additional information your elected official may have requested, or that you promised to provide.
- **Share Information** Provide feedback on your meeting to your ROC so that they may also follow up with your elected officials, if needed.
- **Keep a Record** Let our E.D. and national staff and your ROC know about the success of your meeting and what you discussed by emailing info@marriageequality.org and your fellow ROC members.