How to Talk with Your Legislators

Remember that conversations directly with a legislator may be very brief, but staff usually has more time to give. Utilize those relationships to your advantage – get to know both your legislator AND his/her staff members. We consider meetings with legislative assistants as important as meetings with legislators. Be respectful and thankful for their time. Remember you are developing a relationship with the whole office, not just the legislator.

• **Packet for Legislator:** You will receive two packets (one for your Senator and one for your Representative). Included in the packet are fact sheets on the issues. Please be sure to give your legislators the packet or his/her assistant the packet (and a bike pin!) at the conclusion of the meeting.

• **Lead Advocate:** If there are others from your district attending, please make sure you do meet with your legislator in a group. You will have time during the morning sessions to decide as a group who will be the main speaker.

• **Note Taker:** Assign someone to take notes and keep track of the meeting. Each group should report back via the online form where the legislator stands on the issue, if they need followup, etc. Be sure to write down any questions that you didn’t feel comfortable answering. *Fill out the survey here after your meetings: [http://bit.ly/BikeSummit19](http://bit.ly/BikeSummit19).*

Prepare

Never go into a legislative meeting unprepared. Research is critical. If you are going into a meeting with another constituent, be sure to coordinate your plans and talking points. Remember that legislators may not be an expert on the issue, so keep it simple. A concise message is easy to remember and understand.

The Greeting

You’re beginning to build a relationship with your own legislator (remember, you may be working with them for some time to come). Be friendly. Be polite. Maintain eye contact. Introduce yourself, tell them where you live in their district, what you do, and/or describe the type of bicyclists you or your family members are.

Background

Discuss why you’re visiting and explain that you’re a bike advocate with the Bicycle Alliance of Minnesota. Be prepared to discuss the top reason why these issues are important for you. Feel free to tell a personal story, anecdote, use talking points from the palm card, talk about how this issue will affect you or your district, or engage in some other way on the issues.

Feedback/Questions

Ask if they know the issues. Listen and give the legislator a chance to talk and give their input. Create a dialog, not a monologue! If they have questions you can’t answer, be honest. Make a note of the questions and get them to BikeMN staff as soon as possible. If we do not follow up, we may lose the interest (and possibly the support) of your legislator.

The “Ask”

Communicate what you are specifically asking the legislator to do, we’ve outlined the “ask” portion on your palm card.

Stay in Touch

This is the beginning of the conversation. Follow up with a thank you letter, we’ll deliver it for you! Leave it with us at the church or at Sweeney’s Saloon later in the day. Try to answer any questions the legislator asked and alert BikeMN staff if you need help. Make an appointment in your calendar to call or write the legislator again in a few weeks and plan to check in periodically. If a new piece of information or research is released, send it along to the legislator. Pay attention to what he/she is working on and, when appropriate, reach out to thank and commend him/her for their work.
Legislative Visits Dos and Don’ts

Do:
• Introduce yourself and tell where you’re from.
• Stay on message.
• Be on time, but be prepared to wait.
• Know the name and number of the bill and something about it.
• Be efficient and articulate. The meeting should be brief and concise.
• Ask your legislators’ support for the issues at hand.
• Stop discussing the issue if you get a “yes.”
• Listen to what they have to say and take notes.
• Give the legislator (or his/her assistant) the legislative folder.
• Turn off your cell phone.
• Thank the legislator in person and follow up with a thank you note.

Don’t
• Attempt to answer questions that you don’t know the answer to.
• Get angry or hostile.
• Threaten (i.e. “You’ll pay for this at the polls or I will work to recall you.”)
• Lose track of time.
• Disparage a meeting with staff and waste an opportunity.
• Blow off any scheduled meeting (see below)
• Lobby on other issues (“Well, since I’m here, what is your position on XYZ?”)
• Don’t get offensive. If an elected official doesn’t support our legislation, thank them for their consideration and move on.

If you are scheduled to meet with your legislator and cannot attend the meeting, PLEASE let others in your district group know.

THIS IS CRITICAL:
If you are the only Summit attendee from your district and you are scheduled to meet with a legislator alone and you cannot attend your scheduled meeting, please call your legislator’s assistant ASAP to cancel the meeting or call Dani at 641.328.4699.