

10 Basic Dos and Don'ts of Lobbying

DO email your topic(s) in advance of a meeting with a staffer or legislator so they can adequately prepare ahead of time.

DON'T try to get a meeting simply by walking in to the office (or even just by calling). Put the original request in written format – a fax or an email.

DO stick to one or two topics in any given meeting, rather than trying to cram in as many as you think time allows. You'll be taken more seriously if you are focused and able to prioritize.

DON'T use the meeting time to bend his/her ear about topics unrelated to the organization or field you are representing. It may be tempting to mention your views on the Iraq War or the latest free trade agreement while you're there, but it is unprofessional and unfair to the organization you are representing to use that time to air personal views.

DO make sure you speak to the staffer you are meeting with as an equal at all times, even if the staffer is younger than a) your students b) your youngest child c) your car.

DON'T use the word "educate" – as in, "I'm here to educate you about ____".

Collaborative verbs are always better received, as in "I'd like to partner with your office on ____" or "The AAUP would like to support your efforts on ____".

DO show strength in numbers and schedule meetings in (small) groups of either AAUP members or with coalition members (for example, an ACLU member in a meeting about ideological exclusions).

DON'T appear disorganized by allowing everyone a turn to speak. Collegial approaches are good in the university department, but confusing in a 30-minute meeting on the Hill. Appoint a spokesperson or two to make sure that communication is clear and consistent in both style and content.

DO find something of interest to pass along when you follow up to say thank you. It could be a statistic, a question to use in an upcoming hearing, or the card of a colleague who would make a good witness on the subject you discussed.

DON'T inundate staffers with paper and/or emails. The simpler, the better (and the more likely to be read in entirety before getting tossed into the recycling bin). Master the one-page memo. If they need deeper background, they'll ask.