USE YOUR VOICE TO SHAPE THE FUTURE

How to build relationships with policy makers

Purpose:

Building strong, authentic relationships with policy makers allows you to effectively advocate for your community, share lived experiences, and influence decision-making. The goal is to develop trust, mutual understanding, and an ongoing connection making your voice and perspective part of their considerations, not only during crisis rather consistently.

Core Principles:

Respect: Recognize their time is limited; be concise and clear.
Authenticity: Share your personal story and why the issue matters to you.
Consistency: Don't just show up once; follow up and stay in touch.
Preparation: Understand their priorities, roles, and current issues before you engage.
Partnership: Frame it as collaboration, not confrontation.

Basic Flow:

Do your homework

Research who represents your area and what committees they serve on.
Learn about their past positions on issues you care about.
Know how they prefer to be contacted (email, phone, meetings).

Make contact

Start with a respectful introduction, either by email or at an event.
Briefly explain who you are, your connection to the issue, and why it matters.
Request a meeting or a chance to talk further.

Build the relationship

At meetings, come prepared with specific asks, stories, and data if needed.
Follow up with a thank you and any promised information.
Keep in touch periodically, not just when you need something.

Show up and support

Attend town halls, hearings, and events where they're speaking.
Acknowledge their positive actions publicly when appropriate.

Pro Tips:

Bring a one pager or fact sheet (if allowed) they can refer to later; do not assume they'll remember everything you said.
If you don't know the answer to a question during your conversation, get contact information and offer to follow up. This builds credibility.
Be patient. Policy changes take time, and so does trust.

Source: The WA-SEN Guidebook, available from wa-sen.org