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Tips for Scheduling a Legislative Appointment

Getting Started - WA Legislature's Calendar

Knowing whether the legislators are in session can be helpful as you prepare to request a meeting with your elected official. If they are in session, then legislators will be in Olympia at the State Capitol. If they are not in session, it is best to schedule the meeting somewhere in their district.

In Session

During the legislative session, many legislators are away from their homes and families, working under stringent deadlines. There is a lot of pressure on them during this time. Their Legislative Assistants, who will most likely be the ones you are speaking to when scheduling a meeting, are under a similar amount of pressure and are working just as long of days. It is ***essential*** to understand this and keep that in mind when sending your requests.

In-person vs Virtual

While in-person can be the best way to make meaningful relationships, it is not necessary nor the only option. Virtual meetings, via Zoom or Teams, are common and can be helpful when accommodating multiple people's schedules. Offering a virtual option can also help you get a meeting with a legislator quicker if their schedules are packed.

Who and how

Start with a request to legislators on a related committee or in a leadership position, regardless of their district. Many legislators will only take meetings with their constituents (someone who votes in their district). However, committee chairs decide what bills will be moved to a hearing and if a bill makes it to the floor then every legislator gets to vote on it. So, having legislators who may not sit in a committee relevant to your issue is extremely important. They can be your allies in discussions with their colleagues.

Timing

It is best practice to request a meeting at least two to three weeks in advance. The earlier the better, especially during the session. Leading up to the session, many legislators will not be scheduling appointments over a month in advance, but send your request anyway. As soon as you know when you will be at the Capitol you should start your initial outreach in case they are accepting request at that time. If not, they will respond with a timeframe that will start reaching out and sometimes will say that will reach back out to you when they are ready. Mark the timeframe on your calendar. If that time comes around and you haven't heard from them, politely send a follow-up email. They have a lot of requests coming in from different organizations and constituents.

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

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Follow-up emails can look like

“In case my message was lost in your inbox,...” or “I know this is a busy time for you. I wanted to follow up on my earlier request to see if Representative/Senator XXX will be available to meet with [student constituents] on [date]”

THE MOST IMPORTANT aspect to keep in mind when scheduling appointments is being respectful and well-tempered at all times. You are building a working relationship with every interaction. There are real people behind these interactions. While keeping professionalism, it is encouraged to break script every once in a while to include something nice and humanizing.

There is a fine line between being proactive and being annoying or a nuisance. It is important to keep this in mind while building a mutually respectful relationship with your elected officials. Do not spam their inboxes.

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