

How to Organize and Hold a Meeting with a Policymaker or a Staffer

Advocacy Toolkit

Meeting with a policymaker and/or or staffer can be a great way to build relationships, become a trusted source of information and advice and get involved in the legislative process. Such a meeting can seem intimidating at first glance, but meeting with an elected official or staffer can be easy, informative and fun!

Who should attend the meeting and with which policymakers should we meet?

You may want to invite some colleagues to participate in the meeting with you. These individuals could be representatives from your school/district, ISTE state affiliate members, parents, business representatives or others. To find the relevant federal policymakers who have the most influence on education technology issues and legislation, take a quick look at senate.gov and house.gov. To find the relevant state policymakers, go to your state.

Legislature's website

Create a list of legislators who are members of the House and Senate Education and Appropriations/Budget Committees. You may also consider meeting with the member who represents you or your school/district. It is usually helpful if at least one individual who is participating in the meeting is a constituent of the elected official in question. However, it is entirely appropriate to arrange a meeting with the offices of all the members of the Education Committee, for example, even if none of the meeting attendees are constituents of that member.

How do I arrange a meeting?

Call the legislator's office and ask for the name of the staff member who handles education issues and send that person an email requesting a meeting. Provide a variety of possible meeting times and be conscientious of the staff member's time and busy schedule. Include in your meeting request what topics you hope to discuss. Additionally, indicate that you would like to meet with the legislator, as well, if he or she is available at that time. While legislators have busy schedules, they may be able to join the meeting and are most likely to do so if you are a constituent. Even if the legislator is unavailable, the staff members play a critical role in collecting information and advising their bosses on policy issues on which they will eventually cast a vote.

Before the meeting

Hold a conference call with your colleagues who will participate in the meeting. Agree on your top messages, the meeting leader and what each individual will contribute to the conversation. Write a one-

pager that will help guide your conversation and that you can leave behind with the policymaker. Complete the ISTE Scavenger Hunt for State or Federal Legislators to become more familiar with your policymaker and learn about his/her interests. The scavenger hunt includes:

- Recent sponsorship of education legislation
- Recent press releases or public statements on education
- Prior connections to the education field such as a previous career as an educator

Tips for your meeting

What legislators/staff want to hear

- Explain who you represent – i.e. your school or district and your position.
- Make it clear why you are there. Is this an introductory meeting? Are you providing educational materials? , Are you asking the legislator to do something such as support particular legislation?
- Share your stories and connect those stories to the interests/ goals of legislator. See ISTE's Ed Tech Success Stories Template for more information on how to best convey these stories.
- Communicate the relevance of ed tech to student achievement/ global competitiveness/college and career readiness.
- Ask what information you can provide to help the legislator and/ or staffer do his or her job better.
- Don't forget to verbalize what you want or "your ask"—such as support for a bill.
- Leave behind one-pagers that summarize your "ask" and position on key policy issues if you have created such documents. See ISTE's How to Create a One-Pager Tips and Template for more information on how to create one-pagers.

Things to remember in the meeting

- If you are with a group, identify one person to lead the conversation and decide in advance what each participant will discuss during the meeting.
- It is best if at least one participant in the meeting is from the legislator's district.

- Be sure to praise the legislator's leadership on education issues.
- Be respectful if the legislator is from a different political party than you. Bipartisanship is key!
- Meeting with staff instead of the legislator should not be viewed as less important. Staffers are powerful and have the ear of the legislator.
- Remember that interns may be the boss one day.
- Bring and leave behind business cards.
- Bring and leave behind a one-pager.
- Know when it is time to go.

Continue the relationship

- Write a thank you email or letter.
- Provide the legislator or staffer with regular updates on the issues you discussed.
- Extend an invitation to visit your school or library to see education technology in action.
- Attend a town hall meeting, constituent breakfast or other constituent event. Attending a town hall meeting or a similar event is a great way to share your ideas with a policymaker without having to make an appointment. Policymakers regularly hold town hall meetings or constituent gatherings to hear directly from folks outside of government and it's important that they hear from you about how digital learning is impacting students in your school/district.