

# HOW TO LOBBY: TIPS AND BEST PRACTICES

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## Why Lobby?

Lobbying is vital to making a difference in the lives of fire fighters. Virtually every aspect of a fire fighter's job – from equipment and staffing, to bargaining rights and pensions – is shaped by an elected official. Simply put, lobbying lets you tell your story and fight for what matters to you and your members.

IAFF members can use the [online form](#) to contact the Government Affairs Department for assistance in securing meetings with members of Congress, preparing for these meetings, and developing lobbying strategies. All IAFF members are also encouraged to attend the annual Alfred K. Whitehead Legislative Conference in Washington, D.C., where we actively lobby nationally elected officials.

## Meeting Preparation

When meeting with your elected official, it is essential to prepare well in advance to take advantage of this opportunity to make a difference for you and your members.

### Have Clear Goal:

- ***What is it that you hope to achieve?*** Sometimes you may have a specific “ask” for your elected official, and other times you may just be looking to build a relationship. Both are good reasons to lobby your elected official, but these two goals have very different preparation needs.
- ***What are your asks?*** Sometimes you may need your elected official to introduce a bill, cosponsor a bill, vote on a bill, etc. When this is the case, make certain you clearly and directly ask for what you need from your elected official. While you always want to be polite, now is not the time to be timid about what your local needs.

### Questions to Ask Yourself to Better Prepare:

- What is the issue that needs to be addressed?
- Why is this issue important?
- How can I demonstrate this issue?

### Know Your Issues/Asks

- Do research ahead of time so that you feel you have a confident grasp on your issues/asks.
- Remember that your elected official will look to you for your expertise and recommendations on the topic.
- Develop a one-page summary of the issue and explanation of your ask. Contact the Government Affairs Department if you need a summary. The IAFF maintains one-page summaries of our top priorities that IAFF members can use when meeting with their members of Congress.

### Personalize Your Ask

- Add personal testimony and anecdotes to your presentation to humanize your issues and provide real-world examples of how fire fighters in your local are being affected by this issue. Personal stories make for more compelling arguments.
- Elected officials and their staff look to experts like yourself to educate them on the issue and explain how it impacts fire fighters in their district. Your one-page summary may be the briefing document that an elected official brings with them to inform their vote on a bill.

## HOW TO LOBBY: TIPS AND BEST PRACTICES (continued)

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### **Know Your Elected Official**

- Do you have a prior relationship with this elected official? If so, is it positive or negative?
- Have you worked with this elected official or their staff before?
- Has this official supported or opposed this issue in the past?
- What committees does this official serve on? Is this official in a leadership position on the committee?
- Is the official a freshman member or do they have a long legislative history?
- Is the official fire fighter friendly?
- Do you have relationships with any of their staff?
- What is your elected official's background? Are they familiar with firefighting and unions or will they need help to understand what a career in firefighting looks like and why unions are a good thing?

### **Dress Appropriately**

- Make sure your attire is appropriate, regardless of whether you are meeting in-person or online. First impressions matter. Make sure your elected sees you as the professional and informed fire fighter that you are.

## **During the Meeting**

- Meetings are often very brief, so make the most of your time. You may also meet with staff rather than the elected official. This isn't a bad thing, as elected officials rely very heavily on their staff for advice and information on how to vote. Winning over their staff will ensure you have an advocate inside their office.
- If multiple people attend, figure out who will say what in advance and plan how to transition from person to person.
- Know the current status of the bills you are advocating for. Be able to articulate arguments in favor of your issues and stay consistent and clear with your "asks" and messaging.
- Start with a brief description of the issue and its impact on your local's members.
- Explain the issue's impact with a personal story. Elected officials always want to know the specific impact of an issue in their district or state.
- Give arguments in favor – make sure to also know the opposition's arguments and prepare for any pushback you may receive.
- Listen and respond to their questions or thoughts. You may want to take notes for future conversations.
- Try to get a firm commitment on the next steps. Elected officials, and especially their staff, may not be able to give an immediate answer to your "ask." However, try to understand how their decision process works and how you can best influence it.
- Write down any questions or concerns for follow-up conversations.
- If you do not know the answer to a question, it is completely fine to respond later via email or phone call. You can simply say, "I am not sure, but I would be happy to find out and get back to you." Under no circumstances should you make up an answer or lie. You want to establish yourself as a trusted source of information. Being authentic and doing follow-up research is a great way to build your position as a trusted advisor.
- Reiterate the official's commitment or next steps and any ways you can help in their research and decision-making.

### Post Meeting

#### Debrief with those who attended the meeting:

- Did you deliver your message?
- Did you present a clear “ask?”
- What feedback did you receive?
- Were there questions that you need to follow up with an answer?

#### Send a written Thank You:

- Email is acceptable
- Thank the elected official on social media for meeting and/or commitments

#### Take notes from the meeting:

- Write down as much as you can remember from the meeting
- Did they request any additional information?
- Is a follow-up necessary?

#### Things to Consider:

- The best way to achieve lobbying success is to develop productive, long-term relationships with elected officials (and staff).
- Officials want and need knowledgeable people they can trust on selected issues.
- Relationship building takes time, effort, and repeated interactions.
- Accept that you may not always agree with your official, but it pays to have a positive relationship.

#### Building Relationships

- Continue to engage and build relationships with your elected officials outside of meetings. Don't wait until you have an ask to engage. There are several things you can do to build relationships with your elected officials and their staff:
- Invite your officials to station visits
- Invite your officials to do a ride-along
- Invite your officials to a FIREOPS 101 event
- Attend fundraisers and community events for your officials
- Attend town halls for your officials
- Tag officials on social media when applicable