

HOW TO DO AN IN-DISTRICT MEETING

State legislators make decisions about the level of attention and funding tobacco prevention and control receives in Wisconsin. Therefore, legislators should be viewed as a funder and should be regularly informed of what is happening with the tobacco control efforts in their district. As with any funding source, it is important to inform and educate state legislators about how the program is working, what impact it is having, and where unmet needs exist.

Meeting with legislators in their home district is the single most effective action you can take to educate them about your program. The following are a few tips for a successful meeting.

1. Schedule the meeting *(Coalition Coordinator or coalition volunteer/members)*

- Call the legislator's office or published home number to set an appointment in district. To find your legislator & contact info visit <http://waml.legis.state.wi.us/>.
- Set a meeting location. Ideas include a local supportive smoke-free business such as a coffee shop, public library, or the public health department.
- Recruit 5-7 key people – suggestions are coalition members, health care organization representatives, aging/disability advocates, physicians, nurses. Base recruitment on what you know about the legislator and who may be most influential to them.
- Connect and coordinate with your regional colleagues – both local and state - to discuss what different aspects of the program can be highlighted.
- Keep it short – plan for a 15-30 minute meeting. We need meetings to be brief and impactful not merely a document dump.

2. Do homework & determine message/focus *(Coalition Coordinator and coalition members/volunteers should do this together)*

- Gather background information on your lawmaker - review legislator's positions/arguments from candidate education meetings, forums, newspaper clippings, etc on our issues, consult with partners and advocacy groups.
- Discuss background information with coalition members to identify areas of common interest or concern with legislator, i.e. rising cost of health care on small business, threat of OTPs to children.
- Find out if other groups have met with your lawmaker (work through region and state partners on this) and see what has occurred in their meetings.

3. Compile information (not just data) that supports your message *(Coalition Coordinator)*

- Base what you bring on what the legislator may have already seen such as the candidate education packet or new research. Keep in mind what you know about the background of the legislator.
- Burden of Tobacco and other statistics that demonstrate the continued need for program funding.
- CDC recommendations for a fully funded program.
- Prepare information about your coalition's/program's work and success stories (youth education/prevention/advocacy, smokers who have quit, etc).

4. Meet ahead of time to determine the goals and specific roles of participants *(Coalition Coordinator and coalition members/volunteers should do this together)*

- Designate a lead spokesperson for the meeting - This person would give opening remarks and help facilitate the meeting.
- Decide who will discuss what issues/talking points. Identify if particular members are best suited to share certain information/data based on their background and interests.
- Specific goals for each meeting should reflect coalition knowledge of the official and include: how program funding is being used in your county/community and general policies that will reduce youth and adult tobacco use in your county.
- Assess your legislators understanding of the tobacco control and prevention program.
- Rehearse how each participant will introduce themselves and what their role is with the coalition (successful quitter, refers patients to quitline, works with youth in school, etc). If possible, coalition members should be prepared to share a personal story tied to the need to reduce the burden of tobacco in Wisconsin.

5. Prepare a few key items of information for the meeting *(Coalition Coordinator)*

- One-page background sheet on the coalition - highlight activities in legislator's district, if possible (i.e. FACT, local ordinances, compliance data, and success stories).
- Candidate Education Packet ([Tobacco's Impact, Program Funding & Other Tobacco Products](#)).
- Copies of any recent studies that might be of interest (air quality, bartender study, etc.) - only plan to share/discuss one or two.
- Don't feel like you have to bring everything, if a particular study/media story is referenced; offer to follow up after the meeting.

6. At the meeting

- Introduce those present, when possible provide a frame of reference for legislator - where people live or what they do. (Spokesperson leads introductions)
- Provide a brief summary of tobacco prevention efforts in the area. (Coalition spokesperson or coordinator)
- Try to stick to the plan regarding the information to be provided and roles in the meeting. (Coalition spokesperson, coordinator and volunteer members)
- Listen carefully to the views, concerns and questions the lawmaker expresses. If you don't know the answer to a question, be honest and get back to them. Don't get defensive about questions and don't try to answer questions that may not be friendly unless you feel fully prepared. (Coalition spokesperson, coordinator and volunteer members)
- Express appreciation for the meeting and let the legislator know that the coalition is available to help and provide information in the future. Provide a way for the legislator to reach the coalition. (Coalition spokesperson, coordinator and volunteer members)

7. After the meeting *(Coalition Coordinator or coalition volunteer/member)*

- Document legislator responses as soon as you leave the meeting. Did the legislator provide any rationale for why he supported or did not support an issue discussed?
- Debrief meeting with attendees. What went well, and what can be improved? Write this down to use for the next in-district meeting you schedule.
- Send a thank you note shortly after your meeting. If you need more time for additional follow-up materials, send them after you've sent the thank you note.
- Report back to the coalition and state lobby team on how the meeting went.