



EFFECTIVE ADVOCACY: A "HOW-TO" GUIDE

Park Advocacy Day provides participants with a rare and valuable opportunity to connect with their legislators and share their views and priorities. This is what living in a democracy is all about. California State Parks Foundation wants each and every participant in Park Advocacy Day and Park Advocacy Month (May) to feel fully prepared. This "'How-To' Guide" will give you all the information you need to be successful.

While we aren't participating in person this year, walking the halls of the Capitol, we hope you are able to use some of these tips in the future or apply them virtually!

Introduction to Advocacy

- **You don't need to be an expert.** This is the most important thing to remember when participating in advocacy activities. Your point of view is important and worth expressing. It is our job as citizens to hold our elected officials accountable, and by helping legislators understand how we feel, we are working to ensure that accountability. Never forget that democracy depends on citizens expressing their views.
- **Meeting with your legislator has many benefits.** First, as discussed above, you're helping them understand how important parks are to you and your local community. Second, you're getting to know your legislator. In the future, they will be much more likely to listen to your views than those of a faceless, unknown constituent. Third, by connecting with your legislator as part of *Park Advocacy Day* you are conveying that you are part of an organized parks movement with many members.
- **Never threaten or antagonize.** Be aware of your own biases; project an image of a concerned citizen who can respect different points of view. This will enhance your ability to influence your legislator. Hostile or angry behavior will adversely affect your ability to communicate.
- **Know your issue.** Phrase the argument in your own words. Don't be surprised if it appears you are more knowledgeable than the individual you are lobbying. However, no one can be expected to address every

question or matter of concern regarding an issue, so don't hesitate to admit your lack of knowledge on a particular point. Be willing to pursue the answer and report back. Also, know your opposition's viewpoint; it's always preferable to anticipate the opposition and be prepared to answer and rebut their arguments respectfully.

How To Make An Appointment (when safe!)

Making an appointment with your legislator can require some persistence, but with a little patience it can be accomplished.

- First, know who your legislator is! [Click here to find out who your State Senate and Assembly representatives are.](#) You can also visit [your local county registrar or elections department](#) to accurately determine your district.
- Give yourself at least 3 weeks lead time to allow enough time to schedule and set an appointment.
- Once you know the name and phone number of your legislator, call and/or email the office and ask for an appointment. Be sure to specify that you live in their district and that you need about 20 minutes for the meeting. Be prepared to say who will be at the meeting and that the main topic will be parks and open space.
- If you contacted the office by phone, you may be asked to leave a message. If no one calls you back within a day or two, call back. Be polite but firm, and remind the legislator's office that you would like to set an appointment so that you can visit them when you come to Sacramento. If you do not immediately receive a call or email back, continue to call every other day or so until you confirm your meeting.
- Do not be disappointed if your meeting is with a staff person. Legislators are busy and staff members pass the information they receive on to their bosses. Often, by developing a rapport with a staff member, you open an important line of communication to that office. If your meeting is to be with the legislator themselves, it will usually be specified. Much of the important work is done at the staff level.

Before The Meeting/Before Reaching Out To a Legislator

- **Do your homework.** Your goal is to influence your legislator on the basis of your knowledge and understanding of the issues. California State Parks Foundation will supply participants with ample written

material to help guide the conversation or talking points. Be sure to read and understand them.

At the Meeting

- **Be on time.** Identify yourself and the organization you represent. If you are a registered voter in the legislator's district, be sure to say so. Begin on a friendly note by introducing yourselves and explaining the purpose of your meeting.
- **Present a clear message.** Do not go off on a tangent or become overly technical. California State Parks Foundation will be providing talking points – stick to those issues. Be succinct. This may be the most important issue in the world to you, but it is only one of several dozen on your legislator's plate.
- If you are with a number of fellow advocates, **choose one person to speak for your group** to begin the discussion. Get your point across in the fewest possible words. Say exactly what you want the legislator to do, using your own words or the language prepared by California State Parks Foundation. If your issue involves legislation, cite the specific bill's name, number, and author.
- **Choose one person from your group (not the spokesperson) to take notes.** Unless you are asked to perform a specific action (such as sending some information to the legislator after the meeting), do not take notes during the meeting, as this may put the legislator or staff person on the defensive. Writing down action items is ok. After the meeting, jot down who you met with, their titles (from their business cards), what you talked about, their feedback, etc.
- **Use hard facts to support your arguments.** Leave supporting documents.
- **Be prepared for questions**, and even challenges. If a question throws you off balance because you don't know the answer, don't be afraid to admit it. Respond that you will research the matter and report back to them. And then be sure to get back to them; this is the way you become a reliable source of information.
- **Be a good listener.** Give the legislator or staff member a chance to express their point of view.
- **Give special recognition to legislators who are known to be on your side.** Ask them for advice and help in reaching other legislators

and suggestions for ways to communicate the issue to their colleagues. Thank them for their support – be specific if you know they supported an issue or bill that is important.

- If a legislator or staff member expresses opposition to your viewpoint, **try to leave on a friendly note** so you will have access to them in the future. Look for an opening to send further information, and never back them into an argument – this will only cause the legislator or staff person to become defensive and stop listening.
- **Be gracious.** If your meeting was with a legislator, thank them for taking the time to listen to your point of view and the work they do for the people of California. If your meeting was with a staff member, thank him or her for communicating your viewpoint to their boss.
- **Never talk about legislators, staff members, political parties, or other individuals involved with your issue when you are in hallways or elevators before or after meetings.** There are lots of operatives. They will know who you represent, but you won't know who they represent or what side they are on.
- At the conclusion of the meeting, **be sure to leave an information sheet** or any other resource you may have on the issue.
- Take the **business card** of the person you met with; they are usually on their desk in a cardholder. If not, just ask for one.

Follow Up

- **Send a thank you note or letter.** Restate your position very briefly, and provide any information you may have promised during your meeting. This gives you a second chance to make your point. Don't forget to expressly thank the legislator or their staff for meeting with you.
- If you provide follow up information, be sure it is accurate and in an easily readable format. By establishing yourself as a reliable source of information, you will improve your access to the member and his or her staff.