

Top Ten Rules of Advocacy

1. Get to know legislators well - their districts and constituencies, voting records, personal schedules, opinions, expertise and interests. Be sure to have a good understanding of the legislator and his/her concerns, priorities and perspectives.
2. Acquaint yourself with the staff members for the legislators, committees and resource officials with whom you will be working. These people are essential sources of information and have significant influence in some instances in the development of policy.
3. Identify fellow advocates and partners in the public health community to better understand the process, monitor legislation, and assess strengths and weaknesses. Finding common ground on an issue sometimes brings together strange bedfellows but makes for a stronger coalition.
4. Identify the groups and other legislators with whom you may need to negotiate for changes in legislation. Do not dismiss anyone because of previous disagreements or because you lack a history of working together. "Yesterday's opponent may be today's ally."
5. Foster and strengthen relationships with allies and work with legislators who are flexible and tend to keep an open mind. Don't allow anyone to consider you a bitter enemy because you disagree.
6. Be honest, straightforward and realistic when working with legislators and their staff. Don't make promises you can't keep. Never lie or mislead a legislator about the importance of an issue, the opposition's position or strength or other matters.
7. Be polite, remember names and thank those who help you - both in the legislature and in the public health advocacy community.
8. Learn the legislative process and understand it well. Keep on top of the issues and be aware of controversial and contentious areas.
9. Be brief, clear, accurate, persuasive, timely, persistent, grateful and polite when presenting your position and communicating what you need/want from the legislator or staff member.
10. Be sure to follow up with legislators and their staff. If you offer your assistance or promise to provide additional information, do so in a timely and professional manner. Be a reliable resource for them today and in the future.

