

# Talking with Your Elected Officials at Public Events

Raising key questions and comments to your elected officials at public meetings is an effective approach to bringing the issues you care about to the forefront of their mind-- and puts a public spotlight on the local consequences of attacks on science in policymaking. Events like community forums or town hall meetings are a great opportunity for you to have direct, personal contact with your policy makers and their aides. Even better, by asking a question and requiring a response on the spot, you can sometimes get your policymaker's position on the public record.

Here are tips for finding and effectively participating in public events to engage your elected officials:

**Keep a pulse on upcoming meetings where your legislator will appear.** Check out your policymaker's webpage, follow their Facebook or Twitter pages, and sign up for their email newsletters. If you are still having a hard time learning about events, you can also call the local district office to ask if there are events in the near future. This can be especially fruitful ahead of Congressional recesses, the schedule for which can be found at [www.congress.gov](http://www.congress.gov).

**Be clear and prepare.** To make an impactful impression, draft a question or comment that hits the "three Cs": concise, concrete, and compelling. Consider the function similar to an elevator pitch: it's not about sharing a lot of information in a short amount of time—it's about piquing the interest for the legislator or local community to further delve into the issue.

In just a few sentences, your question should do the following:

- Introduce yourself as a constituent and comment on your standing as a scientist or relevant technical expert on the issue.
- Make a specific ask of the legislator—an action or a stance they take—on a specific issue.

- State why the issue you are asking about matters and what's at stake to the local community.

**Position yourself as a resource.** Connect with the legislator's staff to introduce yourself, reiterate the request of the legislator, and offer any support or resources to help inform the office of the issue you are raising. This is a great opportunity to make a personal connection and offer yourself not only as a concerned constituent, but also as a resource. Don't be shy to *concisely* reiterate your standing as a technical expert and professional in their district.

**Follow up.** Send a thank you note or call to thank the legislator and their staff for their time. Share concise informational resources with the staff—fact sheets or executive summaries, not full reports, unless requested otherwise. If you were unable to ask your question, follow up with the office after the meeting to ask it. If you were able to and received a response, consider it as a springboard for further public education or advocacy. Opportunities include:

- writing a letter to your local paper to educate people on the issue and commitment or position they did or didn't make;
- inviting like-minded colleagues to join you in following up with the legislator via calls to the office, letters, or meetings at the local office to ensure they take the action you are pursuing; and
- making connections with local advocates attending the event who have shared interests to explore opportunities to collaborate.

If you have any questions or would like specific advice as you prepare to speak up at a public event, email us at [ScienceNetwork@ucsusa.org](mailto:ScienceNetwork@ucsusa.org).