



Fair Districts GA

January 8, 2019 Citizen Lobbyist Orientation Volunteer Lobbying Tips

Introduction—Perry Mitchell

This informal list of tips is based totally on my firsthand experiences – your FDGA leaders may not agree with some of them; I’m just telling you what worked for me as a volunteer lobbyist.

Before You Go

1. Understand the bill, especially the two-page Reading Guide. If you’re unsure of anything, get your questions answered!
2. Do role-playing at home with someone; get your pitch down to under 10 minutes. Keep in mind that every legislator will be familiar with this issue.
3. Know the reasons legislators will say they’re against the bill; be ready to politely answer those concerns.
4. Get your info packets ready; take about 20 copies – you never know when you might run into a receptive-looking legislator in a hallway.
5. Do research on the legislator you want to see; it’s online – what area/town does he/she represent; do you have **any** connection to that area? (If you don’t use this info in your call, use it when you meet.) Then call the office number -- don’t email (it’s useless). You’ll get his/her Admin Assistant (AA), and about 75 percent of the time he/she might well say, “Sorry, he/she keeps their own schedule on their cell.”

Ask for that number. On the phone, be as general as possible about why you want the meeting, for example: *I’d like to meet with you for just 15-20 minutes about some new approaches to redistricting.* Don’t say “my team,” or imply there will be a bunch of you piling into their office. If the AA keeps the legislator’s schedule, make the meeting appointment right then – so having your personal calendar with you at all times is essential.

Important: Be as friendly as possible with the AA; establishing a relationship with her/him will serve you incredibly well!

6. Schedule meetings 30 minutes apart. Always have a watch/phone so you know how much time you have left.

Over, please

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7. Dress appropriately: No jeans, no sneakers, no t-shirts. Women: Business casual; slacks are fine. Men: Business casual with sports coat; ties are nice, but not essential. Main point is to look professional, because all the Representatives and Senators do.

When You Go

1. Allow five minutes to get through security. There's a "secret" entrance on the side of the Capitol facing the Plaza (i.e., the east-facing side), which will save you time. Always have your picture ID ready to hand to the trooper. There's no secret entrance to the Coverdell Legislative Office Building (CLOB). Try to schedule meetings in the same building together so you don't have to go through security multiple times.
2. Of course, be five minutes early for every meeting. Be prepared to get blown off; immediately try to reschedule with the AA.
3. You should never have more than three of you; just you and one partner are even better. Make sure everyone has part of the pitch to give; don't have anyone just sit there silently.
4. Don't jump right into your pitch – engage in some brief small talk: weather, the AA is really nice, love this knickknack (many legislators will have mementos of their districts), I've been to (legislator's hometown) – it's really pretty, etc. Be ready to follow the legislator's lead – they may well mention some topic you can agree on.
5. After the five minutes of small talk: Thanks for seeing us; here's what we want to talk with you about. Give overview of pitch, then give them (the legislator may well have a staffer with him/her) each piece of the packet as you go over it.
6. Important: Say you're not asking for their support of this bill; you and FDGA realize this is a long-term effort; we just want to get the conversation going with some **new information from a new grassroots organization**.
7. **Super Important: As soon as you leave the office, make notes on the meeting!** You will not remember every meeting at the end of the day; just scribble something down to remind you of the one you just left!
8. At the end of the day or the next day (no later), email a thank-you note to the legislator. Reference something said at the meeting; if you've got more info to send them, attach it. Thank the legislator for his/her time; say you look forward to seeing them again.
9. Keep all your meeting notes!
10. Keep your resolve up – you're undertaking a multi-year, difficult effort.