

# A Guide to Talking with Your Legislator about Extension and 4-H at the Iowa Capitol

Participating in a visit to your legislative delegation is an important and effective strategy to influence the legislative process and contributes to the democratic process. The purpose of your visit is to educate legislators about the importance of Extension and 4-H and how their support can improve the lives of Iowans.

## Prepare Before Your Visit

### 1. Define Your Message:

- Think about your key message ahead of time, focusing on just one or two main points.  
Examples:
  - *4-H has prepared me to be a better leader.*
  - *Because of 4-H, I want to have a STEM career.*
  - *My 4-H experience with livestock projects have led to me exploring becoming a veterinarian.*
  - *County extension is funded through local property taxes.*
  - *Our ability to provide important programs like 4-H will be impacted if our property tax levy is threatened.*
  - *Extension provides a great value to Iowa's taxpayers.*
- Gather accurate, reliable data that supports your message. Here are some sources for data – or use your own if it applies!
  - [County impact reports](#)
  - [Statewide impact stories and impact report](#)
  - [4-H Impact information](#)



### 2. Focus on Impact:

- **Deliver a simple, concise message** focused on the impact county extension or 4-H has on you or the people in your county.
- **Think through your personal story** about how extension or 4-H has impacted you – or someone you know.
- **Concentrate on how extension and 4-H improves the lives** of the legislators' constituents.

### 3. Familiarize Yourself with Support Materials:

- **Look over your [county impact report](#).** Are there data or stories on the report that can support your message?

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- The [statewide ISU Extension and Outreach impact report and stories](#) may also have information to support your message.
- Perhaps you have your own data to share: business profit gains, number of people impacted by a community service project, scholarship \$ linked to 4-H experiences, etc.

#### 4. Designate Roles (If in a Group):

- **Appoint a Spokesperson** to start the meeting, introduce the group and what you would like to talk about, and keep the meeting moving.
- **Appoint a Note-Taker** to keep track of what is said and ensure any information requested by the legislator is followed up on.

#### 5. Plan Your Arrival:

- You can enter the Capitol Building on either the west side (facing the Historical Building) or the south side (facing the Iowa Supreme Court).
- **You must go through security**, entering on the ground floor. Leave any item that may be considered a weapon (including pocket knives) at home.

### Meeting Your Legislator

Legislators do not have offices at the Capitol, so meetings occur in the **second floor Rotunda**, outside the House and Senate chambers.

#### 1. Locate the Chamber:

The Senate chamber is on the south side of the Rotunda, and the House chamber is on the north side.

#### 2. Call Them Out:

If the legislators are in session (in chambers), go to the main door of the appropriate chamber.

- **Use a Message Slip:** Fill out a message slip (forms are provided) and hand it to the doorman, who will deliver it.
- **Wait:** Walk back down the chamber steps and **wait in the Rotunda** near the chamber.
- **Wait for Notification:** If the legislator is available, they will come out and call your name. If they cannot talk at that time, a Page will alert you. You may leave materials with a Page to leave on the legislators' desk if they are unavailable.



## Conducting the Conversation

### How to Start

- **Be Polite and Use the Correct Title:** The proper form of address is "Representative Smith" or "Senator Smith". Use their correct title and do not call them by their first name unless you are already on a first-name basis.
- **Introduce Yourself:** Your spokesperson should start by introducing themselves and your group as county extension council and 4-H members (and maybe some extension supporters, too!).
- **Reinforce Your Connection:** Briefly have each group member introduce themselves, stating their connection to extension and 4-H and where they live to reinforce that you are constituents.
- **State Your Purpose:** Move quickly to your main message by stating why you are there.



### Key Actions During the Meeting (Do's)

- **Give Printed Materials:** Share the legislator folder, choosing to point out one or two points on information on the folder – or in the pocket of the folder.
- **Let Experts Speak:** Have the one person most familiar with a specific point make the case.
- **Be Specific:** Be specific about what action you want the legislator to take, concentrating on only one or two items.
- **Ask Strategic Questions:** Ask your legislator questions to connect your priorities to their goals, such as: "What is of most interest to you?" or "Can we count on you working with us?".
- **Be Yourself:** Talk to your legislator in your everyday style.
- **Be Positive:** Maintain optimism and be enthusiastic about the future.
- **See Supporters and Non-Supporters:** See every legislator you can; even if a legislator has lacked support in the past, they may rethink their position. See supporters to affirm their commitment.

### Things to Avoid (Don'ts)

- **Don't Lie or Misrepresent:** If you don't know the answer to a question, tell them you will follow up, and then do so. Lying will hurt your credibility.
- **Don't Get Angry or Threaten:** Even if a legislator is not supportive, thank them for their time. Do not threaten them, as they already understand their actions will be issues in the next election.
- **Don't Be Cynical:** Avoid being cynical, adversarial, or defensive.
- **Don't Criticize:** Do not criticize, be negative, or make issues partisan.
- **Don't Ignore Differences:** Do not ignore or show disrespect for differing points of view.

## Conclusion and Follow-Up

### Conclude:

- If appropriate, **invite the legislator to visit the extension office, the fair, or an extension program** back in their district to learn more.
- Finally, **thank them for their time**.

### Send a Thank You Letter:

**Writing a thank you** – Thank your senator or representative for taking the time to listen to you. Keep it brief and tell why County Extension and 4-H is important to you, outlining your own experiences. Use your own words. Follow up with additional information if appropriate.



Legislator email addresses can be found on the [Iowa Legislative website](#) (Click on “Senators” or “Representatives” to find your legislators).

The letter can be handwritten, but it needs to be easy to read. Give your address and sign your name clearly. Here’s how to address your letter.

**Sen. (insert name), (XXth Senate District)**  
State Capitol  
1007 East Grand Ave.  
Des Moines, IA 50319

**Rep. (insert name), (XXth House District)**  
State Capitol  
1007 East Grand Ave.  
Des Moines, IA 50319

Salutation: Dear Senator (insert name):

Salutation: Dear Representative (insert name):

### Keep in Touch:

Communicate with your legislators about extension and 4-H throughout the year, not just when you need something. Ask other local supporters to share their support for extension and 4-H with your legislators.