



3 Keys to Successful Legislative Visits

Successful legislative visits depend on three things:

- 1) Prior contact to schedule your visit
- 2) Your conversation to discuss the issues
- 3) Timely follow-up after returning home.

Before your visit—

- One-on-one face-to-face contact is the most effective way to influence elected officials. However, it is vitally important that you **contact them ahead of time** and extend the courtesy of letting them know when you will be coming and why. Please review the sample e-mail letter found on the IACEC legislative webpage as one way to initiate your contact.
- **Do your homework.** Work with your local Extension office to put together a one-page fact sheet or “impact” statement that you can leave after the conversation is ended. Know the issues and know the opposing arguments. As one central Iowa legislator stated recently: “If you are well-prepared and can accurately portray both sides of the issue, you immediately move up the credibility ladder from ‘concerned constituent’ to ... ‘valued resource.’”

During your visit—

- **Don’t be intimidated** by your in-person visit to the capitol. Without a doubt, the key to longevity in politics is being accessible to constituents and understanding their views. Legislators are your public servants and want to hear from you, so don’t be nervous or feel you are imposing on their time. For them, listening to constituents is priority number one.
- On the other hand, **don’t be rude.** Keep discussions personable, even if you know (or discover) that you have differing opinions. As you familiarize yourself beforehand with the issues of interest to ISU Extension and Outreach, think about how you can relate local Extension and Outreach successes to those issues. Especially, let your elected officials know how Extension and Outreach has played a role in economic development back home. And in case you hadn’t heard—just about everything Extension and Outreach does is economic development in one form or another.
- Be specific and **tell your legislators what you want.** It can be as simple as saying “can I count on your support for...” Be firm, but regardless of the response, close your visit on a **positive** and **constructive** note.

After your visit—

- As soon as possible after you return home, **thank your legislator for his or her time**. Whether they agree or disagree, legislators are swayed by public opinion, and a timely follow-up can help assure that works in your favor. Any comments of a positive nature will be doubly appreciated and help solidify both you and your issue in your legislator's mind.
- Follow-ups may be handled **either by letter or e-mail**. Most legislators don't have a direct phone line that can be dialed at the capitol, and it's generally not a good idea to call them at home during the session. Your best choice is a letter on plain, personal stationery. Do not use either ISU or county extension letterhead. Your message may be composed either by keyboard or longhand.
- Hard copy letters should be addressed to Senator or Representative (insert name), State Capitol, Des Moines, IA 50319. Do not use the THE HONORABLE in your correspondence. That title is reserved for the governor or members of the U.S. Congressional delegation. The salutation should simply read, Dear Senator or Dear Representative (insert name).
- More important than form is content. Say a simple thank-you, and if you choose to reiterate any of the points discussed at your meeting, keep them short and positive. Again, state clearly what you want your legislator to do but, above all, avoid threats, harsh words or personal remarks.
- Emails also work for follow-up, though they don't carry the weight of a hard copy letter. Salutations are the same as for letters. Complete contact information for all legislators can be found at the Iowa General Assembly Website: <http://www.legis.state.ia.us/>.
- Don't view your visit as a one-time event. The most effective relationships with legislators are those cultivated over a period of time and based upon mutual respect.