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SPEAKING UP FOR WHAT MATTERS

building **successful** connections



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today's presenters



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state legislators

- Volunteers
- No research staff
- 424 members

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advocating to policy makers



- **Legislators are people** with lived experience, too
- They **receive information from the news, their caucus, and social media** like you
- **They also hear** the divisive rhetoric and experience polarization
- They need **input from their constituents to understand what's going on** in their community

power mapping **decision makers**

Extreme No

Little Resources

Advocate but do not spend majority of your efforts

Gettable Middle

Most Resources

Advocate the most to these people

Extreme Yes

Some Resources

Thank these people and provide support

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preparing for your meeting



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Preparation



Keys to Success

- Know your message
- Know your audience
- Practice your delivery
- Protect your comfort

know your **message**



- **Outline your key points** to make it easier for you to remember everything you want to say
- **Bring supporting materials** like fact sheets, stories, or studies
- **Get a friend to help** you by reviewing your points from another perspective
- **Consider counter arguments** and be prepared for common talking points from another viewpoint

know your **audience**



- **Research your audience** and understand things like their interests, committees, affiliations, and background
- **Tailor your framing** to their values in order to find common ground quicker
- **Seek an understanding** of what experiences brought them to their viewpoint
- **Don’t assume their position** on an issue based on this information – always ask!

practice your delivery



- **Practice responding** to hostility or dismissiveness
- **Rehearse** de-escalation phrases and redirection tactics
- Make an effort to **not take disagreements personally**

protect your **comfort**



- **Bring support** by including friends and allies in the conversation
- **Have a plan for exiting early** if the conversation becomes too heated or volatile
- **Know the security situation** of any in-person meeting and who to alert if a problem arises
- Spend plenty of time **participating in self-care** after the meeting - *even if it goes very well*

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opening the **conversation**

respectful approach

Address legislators formally

Ask if it's a good time
Schedule meeting otherwise

Be prepared to reschedule

Be prepared to be told no

build rapport

Thank them for something specific they've done

Mention genuine shared interests and goals

Create non-transactional human connection

set the tone

Speak calmly, clearly, and from the heart

Start with shared values and establish community

Maintain respect even in the face of rejection or denial

timing and frequency



- **Engage during the session** before hearings and votes or during coordinated campaigns
- **Engage during off-season** for relationship maintenance and education
- **Avoid calling at peak times** like family dinner hours or too early in the morning
- **Prepare a one minute pitch** for elevator or grocery store interactions

navigating **conversations**



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challenging vs difficult

challenging

Someone who does not agree with your position

difficult

Someone who is hostile, aggressive, or disrespectful

communicating in challenging moments



Speak from personal experience

Your authenticity is more valuable than technical perfection - you want to be a resource

Stay factual and honest

Be accurate - correct mistakes later if needed and offer to follow up with data or resources

Ask questions

Understand their concerns before trying to persuade them - do not be adversarial

Meet them where they are

Explain the basics - remember that this may be the first time they're hearing about this

communicting in **difficult** moments



- **Recognize the signs early**
- **Utilize real time strategies** to manage contentious dialogue
- **Remember helpful phrases** and practice them beforehand
- **Leave if things become hostile**

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signs of a **difficult** conversation



Raised voice

Volume should stay conversational and intentional

Dismissiveness

“Well, that’s **not really so important**...”

Personal comments

“...and how do ***you*** know any of this?”

Refusal to listen

“I’ve heard this before and **I don’t want to hear it** again”

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utilizing **real time** strategies



Breathe

Take time to breathe before responding and collect your thoughts

Listen first, respond later

Avoid debating, guide the conversation instead of fighting or arguing

Use reflection

“I hear you saying...” or “I understand that you feel this way...”

Emphasize shared values

and reaffirm the humanity in both sides

helpful phrases when...



You want to build bridges

I hear your concerns

I see where you're coming from

I appreciate your perspective

The conversation no longer feels productive

I think we have to agree to disagree

I don't think we'll resolve this today

Let me think about this more

helpful phrases when...



You want to turn the conversation productive

Let’s find a solution together

Here’s how you see it, here’s how I see it

Let’s see if we can meet in the middle

You want to gently correct misinformation

Here’s my experience

I hear you, but that’s not my lived experience

I understand you feel _____, let’s talk about my perspective.

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managing hostility



You can pause and step away

or even end the conversation at any time

Walk away respectfully

Do not match a hostile tone, de-escalate by remaining cordial and calm

Report inappropriate behavior

Online: Do not respond

Abusive comments, texts, or emails can be ‘left on read’ instead of stoking the flames

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reporting **abusive behavior**



You can submit a complaint to leadership

- Committee Chair
- Senate President
- House Speaker

Leadership can reprimand and remove legislators

scenario #1

We think more funding should be allocated for this program

We recognise that those are important but community services are also essential

I understand why you feel that way, but I disagree. I think there are other priorities that need funding first

I appreciate that, but I don't think increasing this particular budget is the right solution

scenario #2

Residents are concerned about the lack of accessible community facilities

We feel it's an important issue because it affects access to local services

Honestly, I think people are making a fuss about nothing.

Well, I think there are much bigger problems to worry about. This really isn't worth my time

scenario #3

Research suggests that local residents are struggling

The information comes from our recent survey of local residents

We can provide more information about the survey methodology

I'm not convinced those figures tell the whole story

Was the survey truly representative of the wider community?

scenario #4

We are concerned about the proposal and the impact it could have on vulnerable residents

We'd like to explain the concerns we've heard

I've already explained why we're doing this! Why do you keep bringing it up?

You're clearly not listening. I've explained this multiple times today

building strong relationships



building strong relationships



Keys to Success

- Consistency and trust
- Show that you care
- Make it human
- Keep the future in view

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consistency and **trust**



Follow up on questions

Use email and other communication methods to keep the conversation going after parting

Provide reliable information

Cite sources and be willing to show where you got your information

Keep them updated

Things are always changing on the ground

Be approachable

If policy makers have questions outside of your meeting, be willing to let them ask

show that you care



Thank them for positive actions

even if they're unrelated to your exact conversation

Ask them about actions

Clarify their reasoning for votes and partnerships

Invite them to a new space

Show them aspects of their community they may not be well acquainted with

Demonstrate impact

Give them tangible examples of how their positive actions have helped your community

make it human



Ask about their interests

even if they're unrelated to policies

Chat briefly before diving in

Create common ground and a safe point of contact

Smile and wave

Literally, when you see them around town

Come with examples

Personal stories are impactful

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stories humanize **policy**

Stories are proven to be more:

- **memorable**
- **relatable**
- **repeatable**
- **effective at changing minds**

than data alone

meaningful follow-up



- **Send a thank you** for giving you their time
- **Provide promised information** and correct any errors you made
- **Ask to stay connected** on other issues for for a different event
- **Ask directly if you can count on their action**

practicing self-care



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self care



- Acknowledge that advocacy is hard at times
- You are allowed to step back at any time
- Taking care of and protecting yourself is extremely important
- Lean on others and New Futures

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types of **self-care**

Emotional

connecting with your emotions and processing them in a healthy way

Physical

activities you do to improve your physical well-being

Mental

anything you do to intentionally stimulate your mind and create a healthy psyche

Social

activities that nurture your relationships

Spiritual

activities that connect to you to your soul

Practical

anything that fulfills your core needs and reduces biological stress

Professional

support feeling balanced in your career and with your peers

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examples of self care



- **Setting boundaries**
- **Doing something that brings you joy**
- **Breathing exercises** *(square breathing)*
- **Forgive yourself and others**

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important **takeaways**



- **Respect + authenticity + boundaries** will keep you safe and happy
- **Showing up is success** even if the conversation doesn't always go the way you wanted
- Empower yourself with **confidence and preparation**
- **Advocacy is influence over time** - not instant wins

enacting change



- A marathon, not a sprint
- Requires ongoing vigilance
- Celebrate ALL victories
- Your voice matters!

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is here to support you in your advocacy!

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