

Advocacy Day Dos and Don'ts

Thursday, September 11, 2008

Advocacy Day is your opportunity to educate your Members of Congress and their staff about the importance of asset policies and how asset building programs in your home state and community transforms people's lives. You are providing critical information to legislators and their staffs regarding your state or district.

Adhering to the following Dos and Don'ts will enable you to advocate effectively for asset-building policies.

DO ... PREPARE

- Gather information that highlights the impact your program has had in the community, including the number of program beneficiaries, the number and type of assets participants purchased, total participant savings, and the banks, foundations or agencies that are working with your program.
- Review your Member's biography on their webpage. [Senators](#) and [Representatives](#) often use their bios to state their positions on issues, allowing you to frame your message around their interests.
- Identify the 3 main points you will cover during the meeting and practice your presentation. You will likely have 10-15 minutes to deliver a clear and succinct message; practicing your talking points will prepare you to deliver an effective presentation.
- Ask to meet with your legislator, but recognize that it is likely that you may meet with the Member's staff. Hill staff are experts on specific issues and can be strong advocates for your position.

DO ... ENGAGE

- Introduce yourself with confidence and thank the Member/staff for meeting with you.
- Promote dialogue by asking questions: "What do you think can be done to incent Americans to save?" or "What are the Senator's primary strategies to help families build assets?"
- Ask for a specific action such as cosponsoring a bill, signing on to a letter, or voting a certain way.
- Explain how your request impacts the people in the state or district: Does it lower the rate of asset poverty? Decrease the homeownership gap by race? Grow the local economy?
- Answer all questions truthfully; if you do not know an answer, let the staff know you will research the question and include your answer in a follow-up message.
- Restate your main points and "ask" if they will support your issues. Recognize that you will not likely receive an immediate answer. Usually, you will not be able to get a commitment right there. The legislator or staff may need more time to review the issue; offer to follow-up in a few weeks.

DO ... FOLLOW-UP

- Send a thank-you note to everyone you meet with. Thank-you notes are an opportunity to reiterate key points from your meeting and to answer any outstanding questions. A thank-you note also indicates that you value the Member's and staff person's time.
- Call the Member's office two or three weeks after your meeting and request to speak with the staffer that works on your issues. Inform the staffer that you are following-up on a recent meeting and you hope to get the Member's support on the issues raised in the meeting.
- Encourage your partner organizations and program participants to send letters to the Member. Members enjoy hearing from constituents. Providing Members with stories that capture the transformational impact of asset-building often resonates with them.
- Invite the Member and staff from their local office to visit your program during recess.

DON'T ...

- Arrive to the meeting late and/or unprepared.
- Wear shoes that you will be unable to WALK in all day. Marble floors are unforgiving!
- Discuss your issues without giving the Member or staff person an opportunity to join the conversation or ask questions.
- Give a long-winded, unorganized presentation.
- Become frustrated if you meet with staff instead of the Member. Staff are critical to legislators who rely on them to make decisions on a variety of issues.
- Overwhelm the Member with multiple papers; limit your issues to one-page handouts.
- Be surprised if you end up standing in the hall or crowded into a small room. Legislative offices are small!
- Argue with the Member or their staff.
- Introduce partisan topics.
- Forget to send a thank-you note.
- Forget to bring a business card.
- Forget the weather in DC can be quite muggy and humid; drink plenty of water.

WHILE ON THE HILL ...

You may encounter long lines to get through security: all bags and the contents from your pockets must be put through the X-ray machines as you step through a metal detector. Be sure to allow plenty of time to get through Capitol Hill security.

Between walking to meetings with your legislators and advocating for policy change, you will likely need a place to recharge. Here are a few suggestions where you can organize your next presentation, grab a snack, rest your feet, or take in the scenery:

- On the [House side](#), there are cafeterias located in the basements of the [Longworth](#) and [Rayburn](#) House Office Buildings.
- On the [Senate side](#), there is a cafeteria located in the basement of the [Dirksen Senate Office Building](#) and there is a small café located in the basement of the [Russell Senate Office Building](#).
- The [United States Botanical Garden](#) is located across from the U.S. Capitol and this is where advocates will be dropped off for their Hill Visits. The U.S. Botanical Gardens offers a beautiful and fascinating living plant museum and is located at First Street, SW, between Maryland Avenue and C Street.
- You can walk underground between all the House buildings and between all the Senate buildings (head to the basement), but you cannot take the underground passage between the House and Senate buildings without a Congressional staff member.
- CFED's Legislative Reception will be held at the [National Postal Museum](#) from 6-8:30 p.m. on Thursday, September 11, 2008. The National Postal Museum is located next to [Union Station](#) at 2 Massachusetts Ave., NE. Advocates whose visits end before 6 p.m. can fill their remaining time on Capitol Hill shopping at [Union Station](#), conducting research at the [Library of Congress](#), exploring the [Folger Shakespeare Library](#) or visiting the [Sewall-Belmont House](#).