

# State Level Policy Advocacy 101

Advocating for inclusive disability policy at the state and local levels is a great way to make positive change in your community. However, all advocacy is not created equal. It is important to advocate in the most useful, impactful way possible and in a way that will create change. This page will help guide you through things to consider when taking part in effective advocacy.

## Know Who to Connect With

State and local officials are elected to represent you. Find out who your officials are, connect with them, and educate them about the policy issues that matter to you.

Beyond your direct representatives there are likely other key people to build relationships with. To find them, think about:

- Funding sources
- Legislators of interest
- Committees that are interested in the topic/issue
- Other decision makers
- State agencies

For help finding your state and local officials, visit [www.usa.gov/elected-officials](http://www.usa.gov/elected-officials).

## Making an Impact

As you prepare to share information with your officials, keep in mind the following to get the most out of your interactions:

- Provide information and details around your issues that are specific to your legislator's district or state
- Give examples of lived experiences on how the issue directly impacts you, family, or friends in the district
- Provide or offer data specific to your issue
- Create opportunities to meet with disability advocates/leaders and allow for media opportunities
- Learn about the arguments of those who disagree with your position; use your learning to acknowledge differing positions and work towards compromise and solutions

## Successful Meetings

When meeting with an official, arrive early and be sure to review your talking points. Keep introductions brief but be sure to explain which part of their district you're representing. After introductions, provide influencing data and materials. If the materials can be specific to the district, that is always best. Next, focus on a specific request. At the end of the meeting ask for business cards so you can send thank you notes. Be sure to debrief with your team or interested parties. Posting about your meeting via social media is a great way to involve your own network, as well as make yourself known as a resource for others to follow your example.

## Impact takes Time

Lastly, define success. Success looks different for different people. In most situations getting lawmakers to say yes to your ask would be a great success. It might also be a success just to have them meet you and know that you are a resource for them in the future. Change takes time and therefore it is unlikely that you'll walk out of a single advocacy experience feeling like you've made all the impact you wanted. It is important to consider long-term goals and view every meeting as an opportunity to deepen understanding, strengthen relationships, and develop support for the issues that matter most to you, now and in the future.

