

KEY TO A SUCCESSFUL MEETING

THE KEY TO A SUCCESSFUL MEETING.....PLANNING

The purpose of a meeting with your elected official (or their staff) is to persuade him/her to support your issue, bill, cause, etc. Since the opportunity is an infrequent occurrence you will want to make every minute count. The following planning steps have proven useful. Once you have decided who will attend the meeting with you, include them in a planning session to structure the agenda you will follow during the meeting. The most important thing to remember in developing your message is that you have something of value to contribute.

ATTITUDE: Think of your elected official as an honest, intelligent person wanting to do the right thing. Try to understand that he or she has to make decisions about thousands of issues during a legislative session and has limited time to spend on any one issue. Consider yourself an information source about your critical issues. Be positive. Try to “package” the information in a way that will be remembered: usually an anecdote about one individual will be more powerful than a page of statistics.

DO YOUR HOMEWORK: Know the issues of importance to your elected official. Know his/her committees; special awards; history of involvement with your issues; family make-up; business/profession. Check their web site.

HISTORY AND POLICY CONTEXT: Review history of segregation, institutionalization, dependency, helplessness and isolation and old paradigm of “fix” the disability.

VALUES AND GOALS OF TODAY’S DISABILITY POLICY: ADA Civil Rights goals of equality of opportunity, full participation, independent living and economic self-sufficiency. New paradigm: Disability is a natural part of the human experience.

ISSUES: You will receive fact sheets on each of the issues. Decide how you will briefly introduce each of the issues during the meeting.

WHO WILL SAY WHAT: Since there will be more than one or two representatives from your coalition, decide in advance who will say what. Consider one person being the lead spokesperson, who also keeps the discussion moving. If you plan an article for you local newspaper or organization’s newsletter try to get a quote from your elected official.

FACTS: You will not be able to include all the information from the fact sheets. Decide in advance which facts/data/statistics you will use to make your points.

PERSONAL STORY: Always tell at least one personal anecdote. It makes the issue real.

QUESTIONS: Anticipate questions from the elected official or the staff member and have the answers ready. If you don’t know the answer to any question, say “I don’t know that answer, but I’m sure I can get the information for you.” Always follow up with the promised information.

OPPOSITION: Recognize that there are at least two sides to every issue. Be prepared and do your homework on any opposition. State your views and the reasons for your position. Don’t vilify your opponents.

WRITTEN MATERIALS: Decides what written materials to leave to be referred to later. A brochure about your coalition, newspaper clippings about individuals needing services and supports, etc. could be added to the fact sheets.

