

A Guide to Using the
Legislative Tool

Getting Ready for Legislative Visits



PROMISING PRACTICE #13
Take students to Sacramento.

uCANRise

u·aspire



SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA
COLLEGE ACCESS NETWORK

 STUDENTS RISING ABOVE

Outcomes for this Tool

This tool is intended for trainers and includes a student-facing handout (located at the end) — “Getting Ready for Legislative Visits” — as well as this guide, which includes suggestions and activities for training students on how to prepare for visits with electeds. Upon completion of your workshop, students will be able to:



Real-World Goal and Training Delivery

We recommend that you create real-world urgency for your students by culminating this workshop with a legislative visit so that students can operationalize their learning. As you plan your visit, remember that all legislative visits are different, as are all students, so be sure to add your own outcomes, approaches, activities, and content to your training to prepare students for the actual legislative visits they will be making.

Most students will benefit from having ample time to plan and practice, and we suggest that you set aside (at a bare minimum) three 90-minute meetings (over the course of at least a couple of weeks and with out-of-workshop group “homework” in between) to prepare students. We have most successfully trained groups of students for legislative visits by working with them over the course of six weeks in once-weekly 90-minute workshops as follows, with sections from “Getting Ready for Legislative Visits” italicized:

- SESSION 1** Overview
Sharing Past Experiences
Defining the “Ask”
Know Your Audience
Introducing Homework (Finishing Elected Profiles)
- SESSION 2** Sharing and Consolidating Information from Elected Profiles
Shape Your Message
Homework (Three Stories)
- SESSION 3** *Craft Your Story*
Homework (Memorize Narrative with Revised Story)
- SESSION 4** *Figure Out Roles and Responsibilities*
Homework (How to Be Listened To)
- SESSION 5** *Prepare for the Meeting*
Rehearse, Rehearse, Rehearse
- SESSION 6** (After legislative visit): *Debrief*

Getting Off to a Good Start

Once you have recruited and assembled students for your workshop, we suggest that you open the workshop by:

1. Asking who in the room has participated in a legislative visit before and inviting them to share their experiences, and/or sharing your own experiences.
2. Sharing the outcomes above in order to ensure expansive thinking — that the skills in this workshop are transferable to other settings, including student groups and home communities.
3. Giving students a “lay of the land” to let them know what to expect throughout each training session, in between sessions, and once the training is complete and you make your legislative visit or visits.
4. Setting students up for the concept that every student will be prepared to speak but not all students will be able to speak to the electeds given time constraints. Let them know that as a group, you will use tools like consensus and democratic decision making to determine roles for all students in order to make the most of your legislative visits.
5. Facilitating selection of the shared “ask” that everyone will be working on, making sure that students agree on terms and concepts before moving on to the “Getting Ready for Legislative Visits” handout.
6. Distributing the handout, “Getting Ready for Legislative Visits.”

The remainder of this guide supports you in working with your students to operationalize “Getting Ready for Legislative Visits.” Each section of this guide is mapped to a section of the handout, using the same order, so that you can prepare students for a successful visit.

Know Your Audience

It is imperative that students know as much as possible about who they are going to meet with so they can create a communications strategy and appropriate messaging for that individual. To achieve this, use the tips provided in “Getting Ready for Legislative Visits” to facilitate students in creating a profile for each elected or staff member they’ll be meeting. The components of each profile should include:

- A profile with photo, biography, and key areas of advocacy and interest.
- A network connection that can be used to build rapport early in the meeting.
- A list of relevant educational equity and related legislation they worked on and voted on, with their stances. (Wikipedia is often a good source for this information.)
- A positive highlight of their work to call attention to.
- A motivation strategy, based on careful research and as described on the handout.



Students should complete their profiles and be prepared to share and consolidate their research at the next session.

Shape Your Message

The prepared narrative is the foundation for establishing credibility and purpose. Support students in preparing a shared narrative for the legislative visit or visits. Though you'll be creating a single narrative, it's important that all students participate. Having everyone engaged is critical because students need to know their content inside and out, like it's second nature, so they make their points naturally in conversation versus sounding like they're reading from a script.

Using the items in this section on the "Getting Ready for Legislative Visits" handout, we recommend you facilitate your whole group in preparing a single narrative together, first by dividing students into five small groups that are each tasked with drafting the content for the item assigned to them, along with a list of supporting facts and data, and then by working with the whole group to bring the pieces together into a cohesive whole. (Do not have students prepare stories for the item "Define the problem with urgency," since this will be addressed at the next session.)



For the item "Define the problem with urgency," ask students to individually prepare three possible stories they could tell from their own lives that would fit with the narrative, illustrating the problem in a vivid, compelling way. Students should write these stories down, developing at least one paragraph for each story.

Craft Your Story

We know that decision makers respond well to stories — and, in fact, elected officials are sometimes more motivated by stories than they are by facts and figures. Before having students identify and hone stories for inclusion in the legislative visit, make sure that they know the value and purpose of storytelling in this context, drawing on their own experiences in being persuaded by and persuading others with stories. Then begin the storytelling workshop.

Ask students to have the three stories they prepared out and to be thinking about them as you go over the items included in the "Craft Your Story" section of "Getting Ready for Legislative Visits." As you cover each item, students should consider the potential of each of the draft stories they generated to eventually meet the four elements of a good story included on the handout.

Once you've looked at each of the four elements as a group, give everyone a few minutes to pick one of their stories to work with for the rest of the workshop, which should proceed as follows:

1. Students get into small groups of three or four, with one student being the storyteller and the others the listeners.
2. The storyteller tells their story, while the listeners listen "through the ears of" the elected official the group will be visiting. Remind listeners that the story should both fit with the narrative and be compelling for the elected official based on knowledge gathered in their profile.
3. Once the story is told, each listener shares back to the storyteller what they perceived as the beginning, the middle, and the end of the story, what they think makes the story compelling, and what tips or feedback they have for improving the telling of the story, based on the four

elements of a strong story included in “Getting Ready for Legislative Visits” and information collected and discussed in previous sessions.

4. Another student then becomes the storyteller and the group repeats the steps above. (Repeat until all students have had an opportunity to tell their story and gather feedback.)
5. Students then work individually to integrate the feedback they received from their peers and revise their stories of no more than 500 words. (You may want to support them in conceptualizing the size/duration of 500-word stories by sharing two or three stories you have already prepared for this purpose.)
6. Students pair up to repeat the storytelling workshop format above with one storyteller and one listener, but this time the listener jots down 5-7 key points from the storyteller’s story. (Make sure storytellers have a clear, written version of the key points their listener captured – they will need these to complete their homework.)



Each student should memorize the now-complete narrative, including their individual story, which they should hone down to just a few minutes, using the 5-7 points their final listeners captured. Remind students that they will each prepare as though they are making the entire ask themselves, though the pieces of the narrative and other roles will be divided among a smaller group of students.

SESSION

4

Figure Out Roles and Responsibilities

Start this day off by having students all stand up and then choose partners to deliver their complete (though still brief), memorized narrative (with their revised individual story), taking turns speaking and listening. Ask them to listen carefully to their partner, but not to provide any feedback or suggestions at this time. Then, have them grab another partner and repeat the process, using the same rules.

Next, have students reconvene as a whole group and go over the roles and responsibilities section of the “Getting Ready for Legislative Visits” handout, making sure everyone is clear on what each role entails. If there is immediate interest by students in serving in the logistics or facilitation role, ask those students to hold off until after speakers and storytellers are chosen.

Remind the group that all student stories are worth telling, but due to the amount of time you have with the elected official, you will have to be very precise in determining how many people will speak and for how long. Usually in legislative visits, only a few students will have the opportunity to speak due to limited time with the elected. It’s critical that the students assigned roles as speakers and storytellers are passionate, confident speakers who are grounded in their story – meaning they believe in their experiences as valid and informative, and are ready to share their own journeys.

Ask students to keep this in mind as they select their student speakers using the following process:

1. As a group, and drawing on the profiles they have created, draft 3-5 criteria that the whole group agrees are important in selecting the content of a story that will be shared. What should the story illustrate in terms of the problem presented in the narrative, and what impact should it have on the elected official? Scribe the final checklist of criteria where all students can see it.
2. As a group, and drawing on the profiles they have created, draft 3-5 criteria that the whole group agrees are important for selecting the speakers who will share stories. What kind of storyteller will most spark emotion in the elected official, and what qualities should they bring to the telling of their story? Scribe the final checklist of criteria where all students can see it.
3. Based on the criteria selected, students supply nominations to “try out” complete asks in front of the whole group, inviting their partners from the earlier activity or previous workshops or themselves. Thoughtfully flag any nominations that don’t meet the criteria and ask students if they want to change the criteria or think differently about the nomination, making adjustments as needed. Aim for a pool of 5-7 potential speakers and storytellers.
4. As each student in the pool delivers their complete ask, students track story criteria and speaker criteria against the list created by the whole group. Find ways to signal appreciation and approval to every speaker, separate from their matching of the criteria.
5. Once all speakers have been scored, work to find consensus about who should be assigned speaker roles and storyteller roles. Be sure to monitor feelings and reactions so that the experience is positive for everyone, especially the speakers under consideration.
6. From the remaining students, take nominations, including self-nominations, for Logistics Coordinator and Facilitator, asking each nominator to “state the case” for the nominee. Once all nominees for each role are scribed, work to find consensus about who will fill these roles.
7. You may also want to determine “understudy” roles for each of the four role types, just in case you need back-up coverage on the day of the visit.

Review the “Prepare for the Meeting” section of “Getting Ready for Legislative Visits” as a precursor to assigning homework as follows below.



For the Logistic Coordinator and the Facilitator (with understudies if applicable): These students should work together to draft the agenda, with all the details needed about time, place, speakers, duration of each speaking role, etc., and determine what system they will use to alert and organize participants. They should carefully go over their responsibilities on the “Getting Ready for Legislative Visits” handout and come to the next session as though it were the Big Day.



Homework for Speakers and Storytellers (with understudies if applicable): These students should finalize their talking points, make their supporting index cards, and practice, practice, practice as if the next session were actually the Big Day.



Homework for Everyone Else: The legislative visit is an opportunity for students to start a relationship with an important decision maker whose partnership is necessary in order to achieve a policy or public opinion goal. In order to make that happen, they must deliver their message in an invitational way – a way that invites the elected official to hear them. With this framing, have these students work collaboratively on a Google Doc that provides a “top 10” (or more) list to support speakers in preparing for the Big Day. The list should encompass their best thinking on the **top 10 (or more) ways to get people with power to listen to you in a meeting**, including the items listed on the first bullet point under “Prepare for the Meeting” on the “Getting Ready for Legislative Visits” handout. Refer students to that bullet point to make sure they are on the right track.

SESSION

5

Prepare for the Meeting

The last session before the meeting is all about making sure that you have every aspect nailed down tight. Start by revisiting the “Prepare for the Meeting” section of “Getting Ready for Legislative Visits,” handout and reminding everyone that these are the tasks for the day.

- Start by having the group who worked on the top 10 (or more) ways to get people with power to listen to you in a meeting share their final list. In addition to the profiles created for the elected, this will be a guiding document for making final decisions about the agenda, the speakers, their talking points, and all other features of the visit.
- Next, the facilitation and logistics team should walk the group through the agenda, and finalize it based on any feedback. This team will provide everyone with printed copies of the agenda on the day of the event, but for now, put the agenda on the whiteboard or somewhere everyone can see it.
- Start rehearsing, start to finish, using the agenda with non-speakers playing the role of the elected and staff, and providing short, targeted feedback based on the profiles, the top 10 (or more) list, and everything else that has been learned in the training so far.
- Keep rehearsing until running the event for the whole meeting, top to bottom, feels like second nature to everyone involved.

SESSION

6

Debrief

Though it’s tempting to forego another meeting, getting together one last time to debrief is an important part of the learning and dissemination of this practice. Using the bullet points in the final section (especially the one about the party!), bring students together one last time to wrap it up and dance it out.

Getting Ready for Legislative Visits

Visiting legislators at the state capitol or state legislators' local district offices can advance your goals for advocating for educational equity. For visits to be successful, they must be well-coordinated and strategic. This guide will help you prepare for your visit and to debrief to capture learning for next time.

Know Your Audience

- **Get it together:** Craft profiles for each person with a cover sheet that includes a photo, biography, and what each of them cares most about. Include how to address them and what they will most want to know about you, such as if you are a constituent, a member of a group they are familiar with, etc.
- **Bridge the gap:** Select one key network connection to mention at the meeting. Contact your potential connection and ask them if you can pass on a greeting, and then do so.
- **Know your history:** Familiarize yourself with relevant educational equity and related legislation your elected worked on and voted on, with their stances, and be prepared to let them know you've done your research.
- **Give thanks:** If possible, find something for which to thank your elected – a bill they helped pass, legislation they authored, a stand they took in the media – that relates in some way to the advocacy issues you are bringing before them. Present this “thank you” as a natural bridge: “Because of your support of _____ we believe you may be interested to hear about _____.”
- **Motivate them:** Design a strategy to motivate the person with whom you will meet. Are they likely to be champions? Skeptics? Non-supporters? Fence-sitters? What committees do they sit on? What are their pet issues? Know what interests, motivates, and offends them.

Shape Your Message

- **Define what we all believe:** Based on the topic of your “ask,” articulate a foundational idea or concept that everyone can get on board with, like: All young people deserve access to a fair and equal education – the success of our society depends on it. It would be hard to deny this statement without appearing in a negative light.
- **Define the problem with urgency:** In clear and accessible terms, describe the problem that is the basis for your “ask.” Include facts and data to support the case that there is indeed a clear and urgent problem. Prepare a story that illustrates the problem in a vivid, compelling way.
- **Explain the solution:** Describe what it will take to fix the problem, and be specific. Are you planning to ask for funding for campus food pantries? Are you asking the elected official to vote in support of a particular piece of legislation? Make sure electeds have the facts and stories they need to justify their vote to other constituents and colleagues.

- **Illustrate the vision for the future:** Explain what the world will look like when the solution is instituted. For instance, when students take part in determining what equity looks like on their campuses, they graduate college and return to their communities to help lift others who face the same challenges they do. They help empower their neighbors and improve society in a way that's good for everyone.
- **Make the ask:** Don't be afraid of asking for what you want - it's why you invested all the time and energy into having the meeting in the first place! Be very clear about what action you're asking the elected to take. For example: "Will you make a case for this funding to your peers?" or "Will you include this in the higher education bill you're writing?"

Craft Your Story

- **Give it structure:** Create a story that has a beginning, middle, and end. The protagonist (in this case, you!) should start as one person and come out on the other side of their journey having overcome a challenge and been transformed in some way.
- **Make your purpose clear:** Make sure your story gets a single message across. Whether to educate, share a lesson, or share an experience, the story should make a statement like, "Educational equity gives students opportunities to thrive throughout their lives."
- **Spark emotion:** Draw on what you've learned about the elected to tell a story that stirs their emotional reactions to your authentic experiences. But absolutely don't feel compelled to share anything you are not comfortable sharing!
- **Be relatable:** The story you choose to share can move people in some way because they can identify with what you're sharing, so think about the unspoken connection between you and your audience (the elected official). Can you draw on that connection in your story?

Figure Out Roles and Responsibilities

- **Logistics Coordinators make it work:** This person will confirm the meeting time, place, and format with the elected official's staff, make sure all relevant information for getting to the right place at the right time is on the agenda, and make sure everyone is present and accounted for prior to the start of the meeting. The logistics coordinator should also have an alert system in place, such as a group text or Slack account, in case the meeting is cancelled or the location is changed. They should be detail oriented and not afraid to give orders. They will not serve as a speaker or storyteller in addition to this role.
- **Facilitators make it flow:** This person will be responsible for making sure everyone is where they are supposed to be once at the venue and doing what they are supposed to be doing – lining up, speaking, moving back, etc. This person will formally greet the elected (and their staff, if present) upon arrival, cue the speakers and storytellers, and provide the formal goodbye on behalf of the group upon departing. They should be confident and friendly and comfortable speaking extemporaneously while at the same time managing time and adhering to an agenda. They will answer any questions the speaker might have at the end of the meeting. They will not otherwise be a speaker or storyteller in addition to this role.

- **Speakers and Storytellers do the actual thing:** When cued by the facilitator, and relying on a single notecard (but only if necessary!), these people will deliver the narrative as developed by the group and provide supporting individual stories to “define the problem with urgency.” Assign one or two people to deliver the narrative and one or two people to tell stories, depending on the amount of time you have. They must deliver content precisely as rehearsed, so being willing to be very prepared and having a good internal clock are necessary qualities.

Prepare for the Meeting

- **Practice for power:** Make sure everyone in your group agrees on items like tone, use of humor, what to wear, what to do when you aren’t speaker, attributes of great speakers and everything else you need to know to get a person with power to listen to you in a meeting.
- **Have a plan:** Create an internal agenda and make sure everyone has a copy. It should establish a tight schedule broken down by minutes. Reserve the first couple of minutes of the meeting for introductions and the last few for fielding any questions from the elected and making a gracious exit after thanking the elected for their time and underscoring next steps and/or follow-ups.
- **Bring notes:** If you have a speaking role, prepare note cards that include double-checked facts and figures to reference if needed.
- **Have it down cold:** If you are a speaker, rehearse thoroughly – in pairs, in front of the whole group, in your head, in the shower, over the phone, on the way to the meeting, etc. Know the content so well that you won’t need to rely on your note card.
- **Support your speaker:** If you don’t have a speaking role, listen carefully and provide useful feedback during rehearsals and think about other roles you can take on – facilitating carpools, making copies, providing “understudy” support in case someone doesn’t make it to the meeting.

Debrief

- **Hit rewind:** Walk through the meeting, with all participants contributing to a scribed “lessons learned” document that will then be shared back to the whole group.
- **Follow through:** Identify next steps and follow-ups (such as sending thank you cards!) and take volunteers to carry out each of those next steps.
- **Give kudos:** Take some time and make some room to appreciate each other. Take turns calling attention to one another’s contributions and talents with specific positive feedback.
- **Process it:** Take some time and make some room for everyone to talk about the experience in terms of their own successes and challenges.
- **Grow it:** Now that you are a Legislative Visit Rockstar, what are you going to do about it? As a group, discuss ways that you can share your learning with other students in your clubs, groups, and associations, and in your communities at home. How can you apply this learning to different contexts?
- **Dance it out:** Throw yourselves a mini (or not!) party to celebrate your achievements – this was a lot of work!