



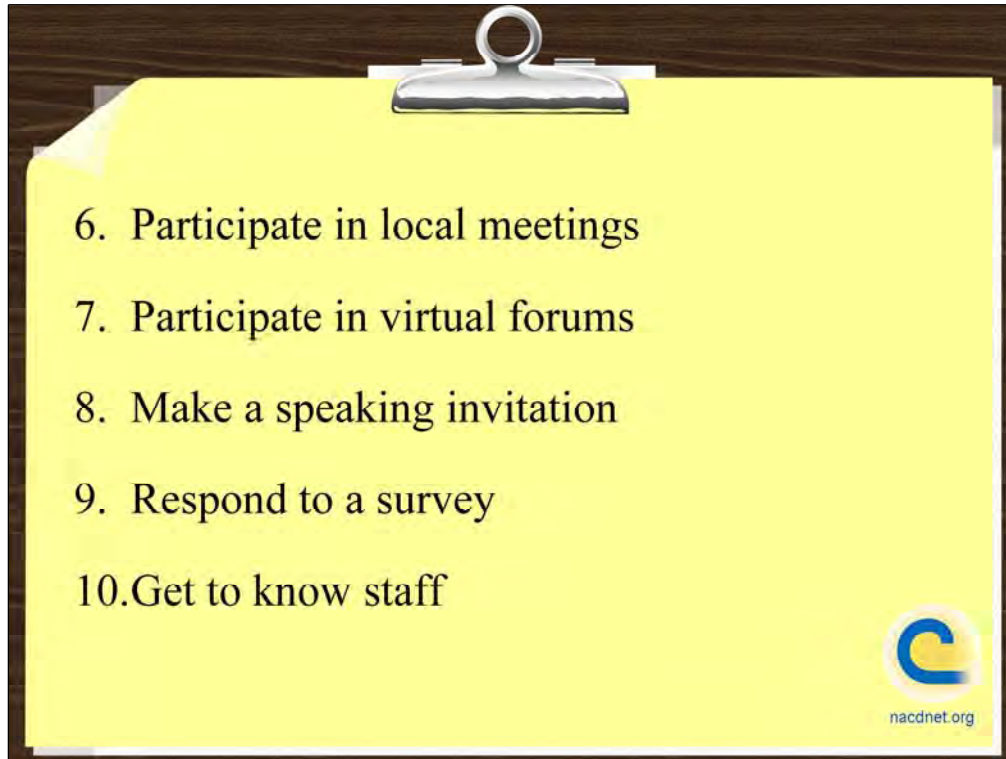
We all know the importance of connecting with our legislators – developing and maintaining relationships with our lawmakers and educating them on the issues surrounding the conservation of our natural resources. What we'd like to do is provide you with some useful information, ideas, and examples of how to do this successfully. In a time where budgets are strained at every level, our conservation message has a lot of competition.

Let's make the most of your time and effort – bridging the gap between your work on the ground and the work done at the Capitol.



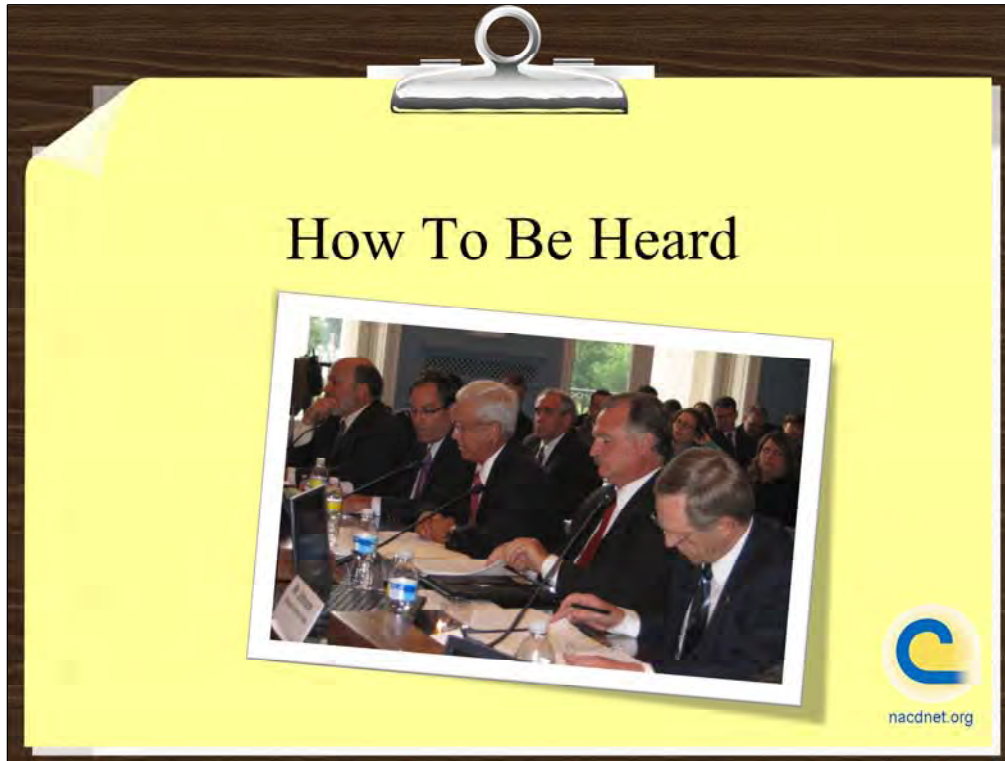
Consider the different ways you can deliver your message to your legislators...

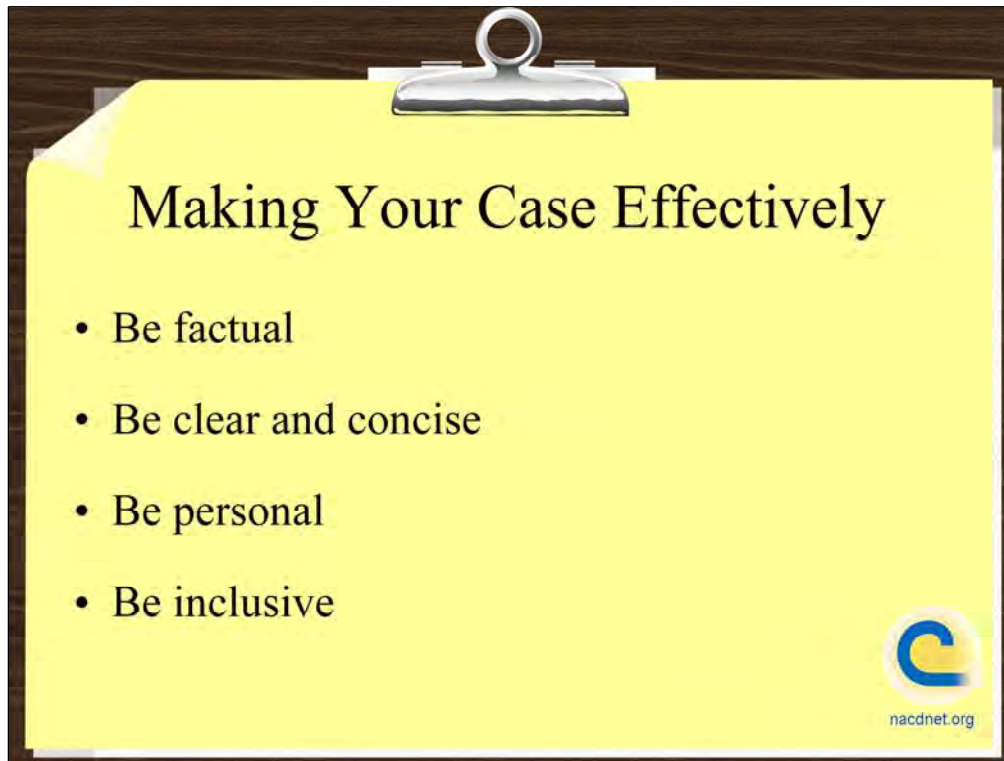
1. Send a letter – all correspondence to a member is reviewed and you will almost certainly receive a response. All conservation districts should use the conservation C logo available on the NACD website so that we all have a common connection when our letters are received. Due to security issues, if you send a letter through the US mail, it may be routed for inspection and delay its delivery. If a hard-copy letter is your preference, it is best to fax it to your legislator’s office.
2. Send an email - Email is now the most popular and most common way to get in touch with a member of congress
3. Call on the phone - It is difficult to get a member of congress on the phone, but you can certainly pass on a message. Although you probably will not get a return call, your message on an issue is definitely documented and accounted for.
4. Meet in Washington - Members make time on their schedules for constituents, but be sure to give advance notice, as members’ days are full. Consider coming to the NACD Legislative Conference held every July in Washington DC where you can come together with other conservation district leaders, discuss conservation issues, meet with and hear from government leaders, and conduct hill visits together.
5. Meet in their district office – Sometimes it is easier to schedule a meeting back home, away from the distractions of the Capitol.



6. Participate in local meetings – members regularly hold public meetings; look for the schedule on your member’s website, and don’t hesitate to speak up!
7. Participate in virtual forums – Many members now hold “virtual forums” – it is easy and convenient to participate in these online discussions.
8. Make a speaking invitation – You can invite a member to speak at your conservation district board meeting, your annual meeting and even your state meeting. This is a good way to start a dialogue, and there is strength in numbers.
9. Respond to a survey – Many members will send out surveys by mail or online – to solicit the views of their constituents on issues before Congress.
10. Get to know staff – Members have staff in Washington and at home in the congressional district who are excellent points of contact. They have expertise that might help resolve your specific problem.

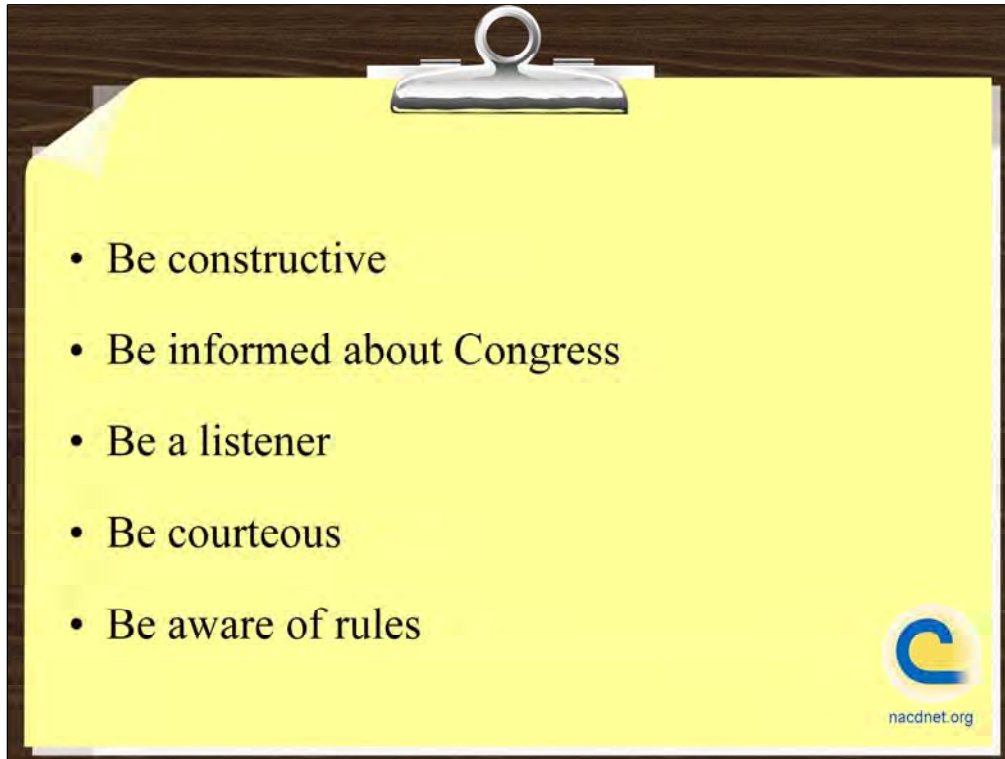
Keep in mind that effort pays off. The more of these that you can do, the better!





Here are some tips to help you get your message across to your legislator, or to help you state your case effectively.

- Be factual – Don't "wing-it", lie or make up information – your credibility is on the line. Instead, do the research and be knowledgeable about the issues. Make your case with FACTS and FIGURES, and know the other side of the issues. If you don't know the answer to the legislator's question, tell them you will find out and get back with them – then DO IT.
- Be clear and concise – your time is limited with your legislator, so stick to a couple of issues and state your case briefly. Provide them with a short fact sheet on your issues, but don't provide them with too much paper.
- Be personal – make your case personal. It is preferable that you state the issues' impacts on you personally rather than just signing a form letter. It may also be helpful to make the issue personal to your legislator, by relating it to his or her background, and try to put the issue into the context of the legislator's own congressional district.
- Be inclusive – be sure to bring other constituents with you who share your views. If you can, bring someone with a different background who shares your thoughts. This may give you more influence with your legislator.



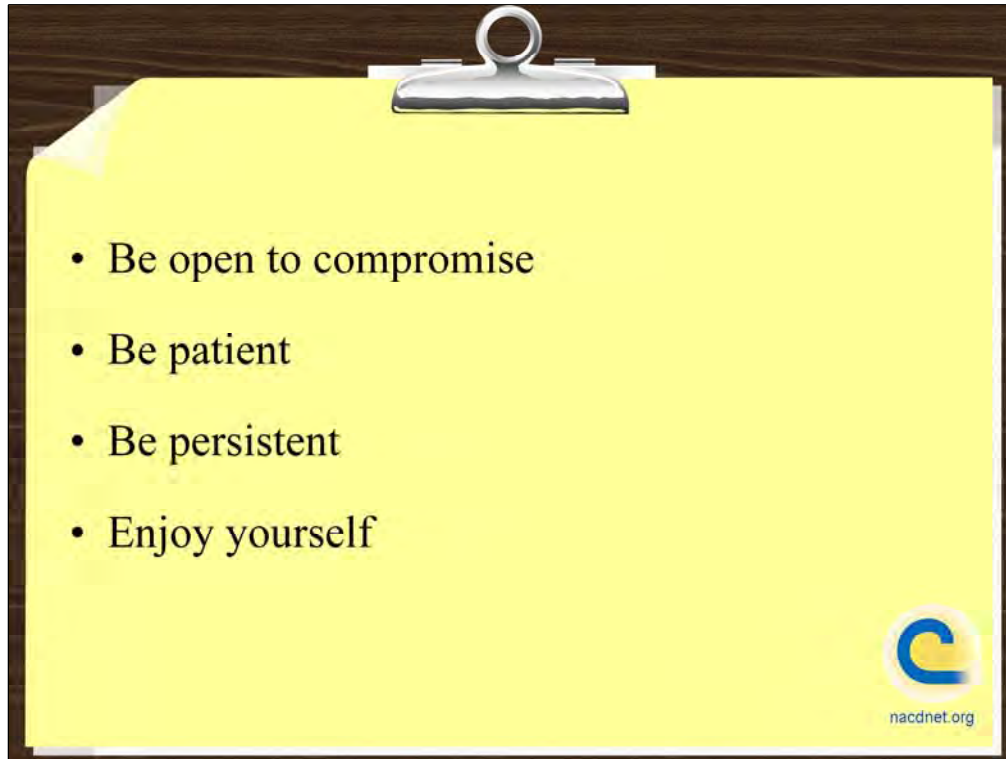
•Be constructive – While stating your case, try to also suggest solutions to the problem without vilifying or demonizing the opposing viewpoint.

•Be informed about Congress – It is important to know the steps a bill must take before becoming a law, the legislative calendar, and what your members’ voting record is on areas of conservation. All this will assist you in appropriately addressing the issue to your legislator.

•Be a listener – Allow your legislator a chance to respond, listen carefully to their advice and don’t interrupt. By listening, you may learn more about their position, gain insight into his or her thinking, and discover more about the issue. This may help you have a better understanding of the entire issue and may assist you in influencing your legislator in the future.

•Be courteous – You can disagree without being disagreeable. Stick up for your views, but do not make personal attacks, raise your voice or even issue threats. If you handle a difference of opinion or stance on an issue well, you may earn the respect of your legislator.

•Be aware of the rules – Be informed on the rules and restrictions the legislators are under – what they can and can’t receive from someone who is seeking to influence them. Don’t bring expensive gifts or promise campaign contributions.

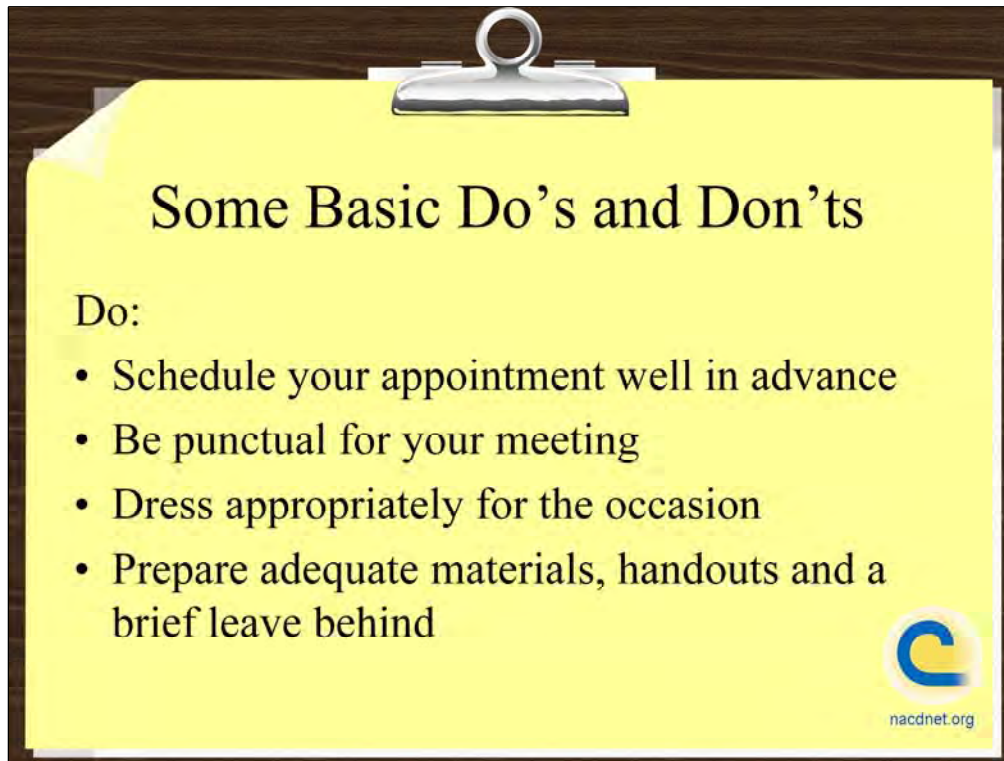


•Be open to compromise – It is important to recognize some progress towards your goal is better than none at all, so compromise is key. Recognize and appreciate that not everyone gets everything they want in the legislative process.

•Be patient – don't expect your legislator to give an immediate response or commitment to your issue as some issues are complex and may require further consultation and deliberation. Some issues and legislation may be evolving, but your input now on the subject is important. Whatever their response, let them know you will look forward to discussing this with them further in the future.

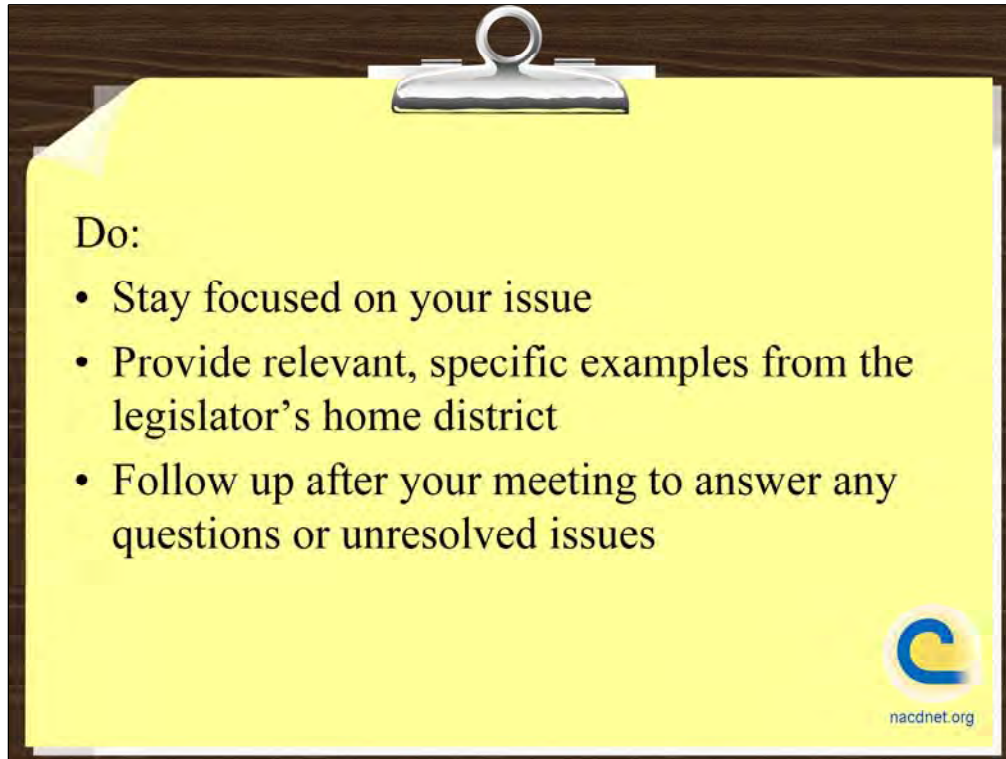
•Be persistent – Be sure to follow-up after your visit to reinforce your message and especially if there are any outstanding questions you couldn't answer at the time. Remember that this is not meant to be a one-time deal – cultivate a relationship with your legislator and their staff. Even if you lose on one issue, don't hesitate to go back and discuss the next issue or piece of proposed legislation. Just make sure you make frequent visits or contact without overdoing it as it may backfire.

•Enjoy yourself – Relax and have fun. Don't overstress about the conversation and the exchange of ideas. Take pride and enjoyment in the fact you are taking an active part in our representative democracy!



When preparing to visit your legislators, keep these basic tips in mind...

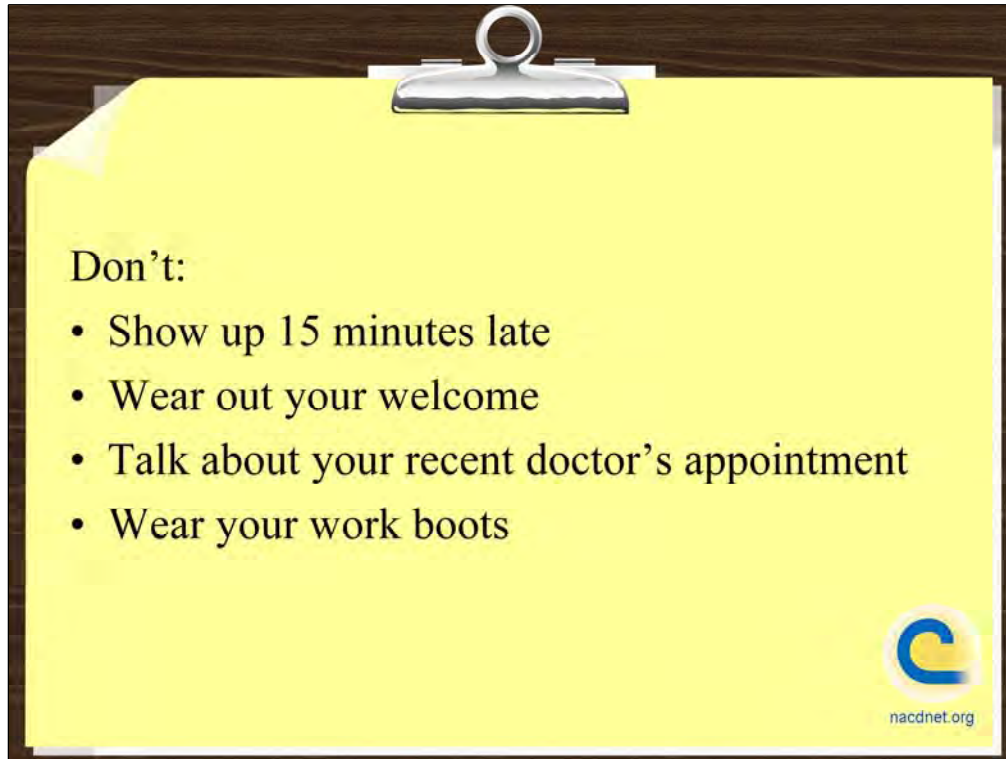
- Scheduling – be sure to schedule your appointment well in advance so your chances are good that you'll get the meeting scheduled for the day and possibly the time you want. The longer you wait to make the appointment, the fuller your legislator's schedule will be and the less options you will have.
- Be punctual – being on time or even early for your meeting is a standard courtesy as they have scheduled appointments throughout the day that must happen.
- Dress appropriately – it's important to show respect for the office of the legislator by dressing presentably. Some ideas for dress could be to have your group all wear blue jackets or clothing with your organization's logo. This will not only provide your group with a safe dress code, but also give your legislator a visual association with you and your organization.
- Prepare materials – because you cannot say everything that needs to be said on an issue in you meeting, leave packets of materials (or issue papers) with each person in your meeting. This will allow you hit the main points, discuss questions, but offer them more information to review when time allows. Be sure to leave a business card or your contact information with the materials.



•Stay focused – your time is limited and you want to make every minute at your legislator's office count for the sake of the group who has sent you with a message – your conservation district, your state association, and your national association.

•Give examples – Help your legislator understand the issue as it impacts and applies in his or her own congressional district.

•Follow-up – don't just say "I'll get back to you on that...", but be sure to research the questions that were raised in your meeting and provide your legislator or staff with the necessary information or answers.



Some of the things you may want to avoid...

(Bullets 1 & 2)

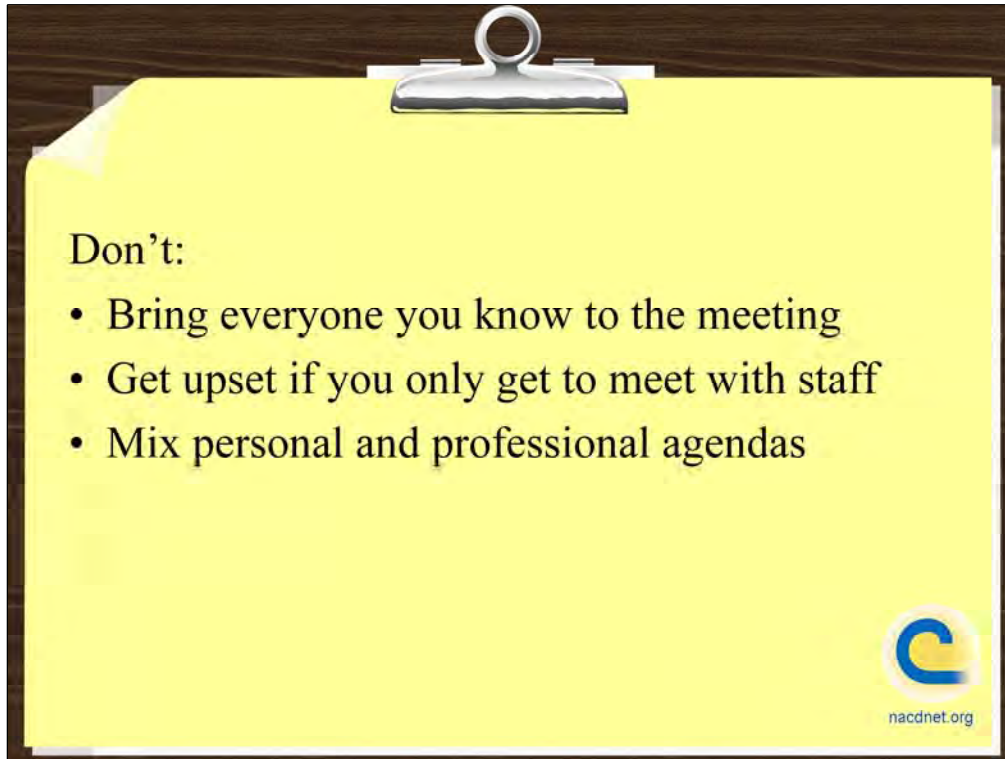
Don't show up 15 minutes late for your appointment and do not wear out your welcome. Be respectful of the time they've set aside to meet with you and realize that they have committed to meet with others like you throughout the day.

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Small talk can be disarming and can be good conversation starters, but be careful to not mention things of a personal nature. Your appointment with them is business and you want to focus on the issues at hand, not wasting any time on personal issues. Your conservation district or your organization will benefit more if you stick to the issues you're there to represent.

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Although you may be discussing agricultural issues or take an "earthy" view on issues, it is important to dress with respect for the office. You want to make a good impression on your member and their staff and not distract them with the casualness of your appearance.



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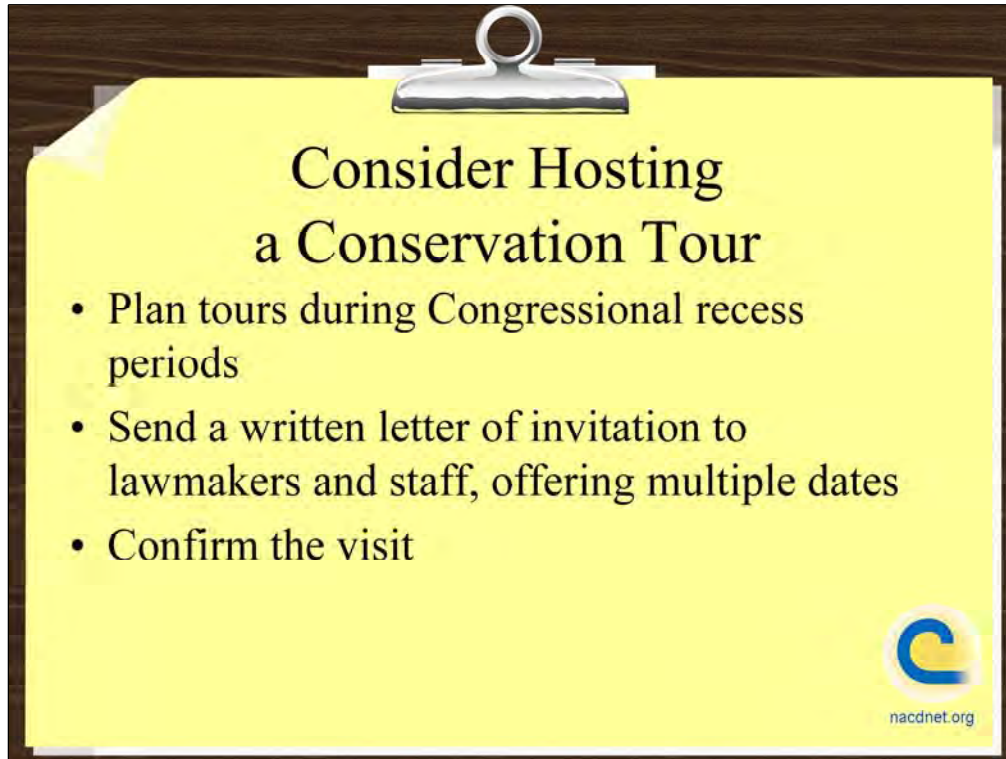
While it has been suggested earlier that bringing others with you to state your case – to be “inclusive,” be sure not to bring too many people into the meeting. Not everyone will have the chance to speak and the office may not physically allow for such a sizeable group. Consider breaking up into teams and dividing up the appointments so you get more accomplished.

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Don't underestimate the role of “staffers.” In many ways, they are the “gatekeepers” and the fact-finders that your legislator will rely upon to brief them on issues. Developing relationships with the staff can be just as important as with the legislators themselves. If you treat them with respect and intelligence, it will go a long way in building such relationships. Don't forget, we listed it earlier as one of ten ways to get to know your legislator – get to know their staff!

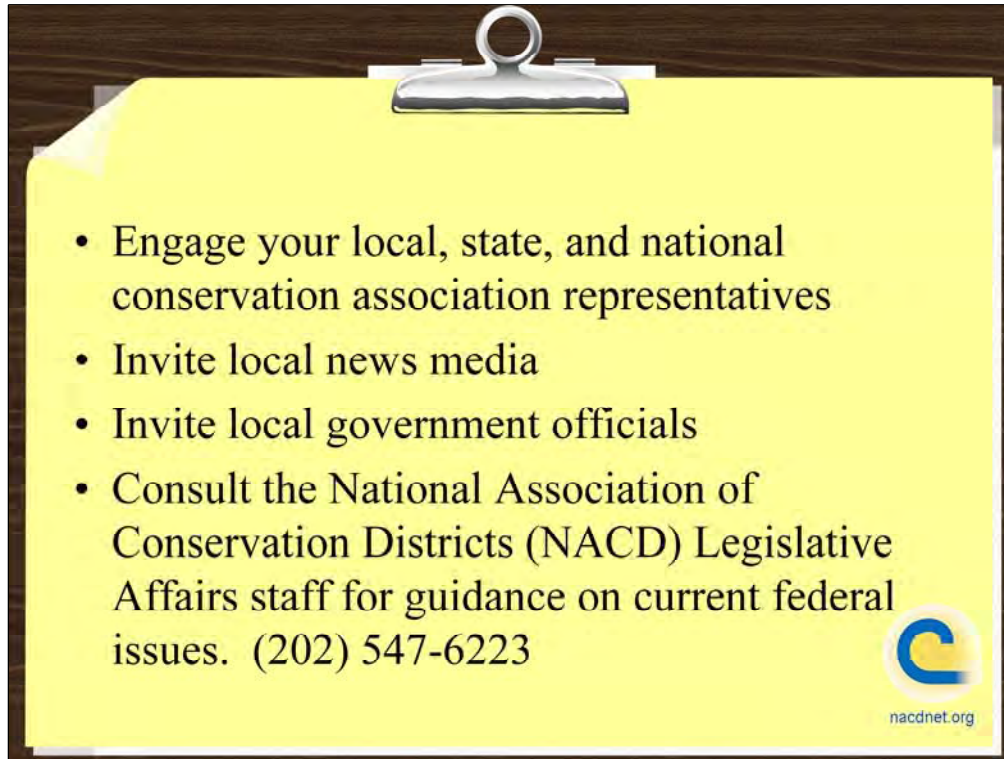
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Again, stay focused on the issues at hand, as you are there to represent your conservation district, state association and/or national association. Do not mix your own personal agenda with the agenda of the organization you are there to represent. By mixing personal with professional agendas, you risk doing harm by misrepresenting the organization when it is actually your personal issue you are discussing.



Another way to “be heard” and get your message across to your legislator is to consider holding a conservation tour in their home congressional district

- First, consult the congressional calendar and find out when your legislator will be on recess
- Next, it is important to send a written invitation with multiple dates as options. You want their attendance, so be as flexible as you can so you can be sure to get on their calendar!
- Be sure to confirm with their office that they will attend.

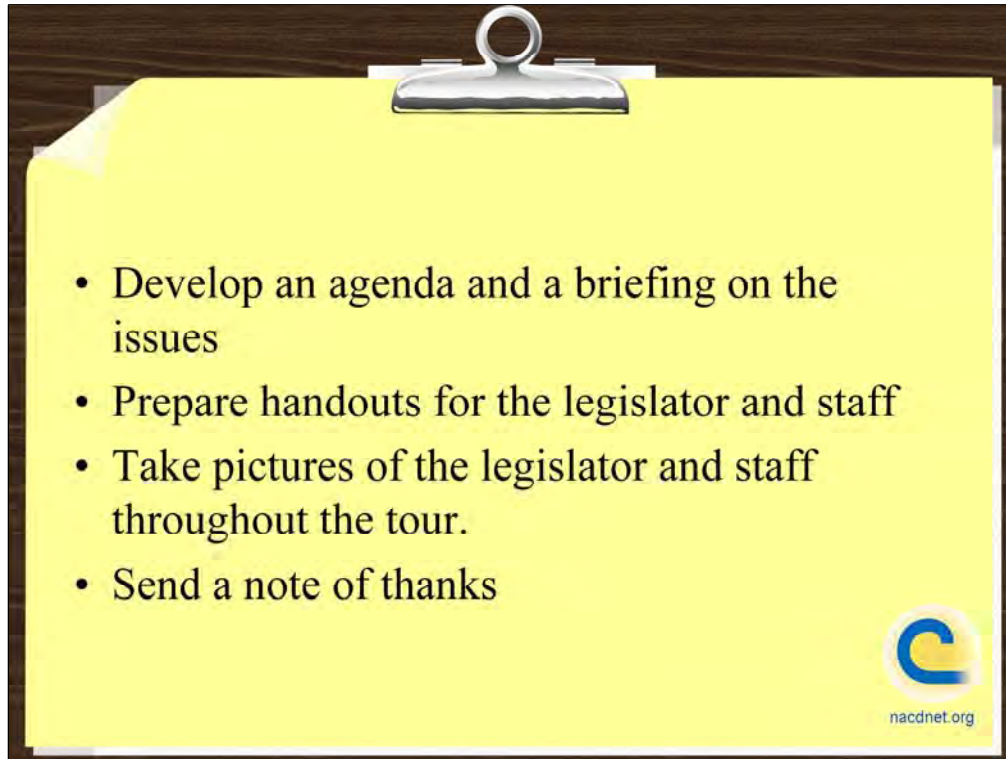


•Don't forget to engage your conservation leaders at the local, state and national level on your tour. This may assist you in delivering your local message and putting into a bigger picture for your legislator and staff. At the same time, it will show your conservation leadership the good work as well as your needs in your community.

•Invite your local news media – make this a “media event,” highlighting the work of conservation districts on both public and private lands as well as giving your legislator extra exposure to the community. Be sure to share with your legislator any confirmed media that will be in attendance. This may assist in making this a priority event for your legislator!

•Invite your local government officials. Have them share the day and let them have time on the agenda to explain how they have assisted the conservation district and support conservation.

•Contact the Legislative Affairs staff of the National Association of Conservation Districts for guidance in addressing some of the federal issues your legislator may be facing so your message can also be put into a broader context as well as a local context.



- In advance of the tour, prepare and release to your legislator and media a copy of the agenda and briefing papers. This will serve to alert them to the focus of your tour, the issues at hand, and the time frame required, allowing them to come informed.

- Prepare a packet for your conservation tour which includes the agenda, the briefing papers, any supplemental handouts as well as the contact information of the conservation district and the contact information of your leadership. This will assist your legislator's office AND the media on any follow-up needed afterwards.

- Be sure to take plenty of pictures throughout the tour to help in publicizing the event. This can be used in any press releases to your local paper, your conservation district newsletter, and many other ways you may discover in the future.

- After the tour, be sure to thank your legislator, their staff and the media for attending your event as it will help further your relationship. This will also give you a chance to briefly recap the issues for them.



Some ideas for effective tours would be to:

- Visit local producers who have utilized the services of the conservation district to enroll in federal or state conservation programs.
- Conduct a boat tour. This could be an interesting way to highlight water issues by showing the different practices implemented and explaining some of the issues in your community – water quality and/or quantity, riparian habitat, streambank erosion, etc.
- Showcase some of the demonstration projects and other innovative conservation practices.
- Conduct walking tours.
 - Highlight some of the neighborhood conservation projects implemented and the remaining opportunities that exist to implement conservation practices.
 - Tour some forestland, highlighting sustainable forest management, wildfire risk or impact and wildlife habitat.



Up to this point, we've been focused on building a relationship and connecting with your legislator once he or she is in office – educating them on conservation issues as they consider proposed legislation and budgetary needs. What if they knew you BEFORE they got into office? How much stronger would that relationship be? Or could it be?

Why not consider cultivating a relationship with your legislators BEFORE they enter into office. By asking the right questions during their candidacy, you may be able to discover their conservation platform – where they stand on the different issues and program funding, and where their priorities are.

Be sure to invite candidates to your conservation district board meeting, your annual banquet or even a conservation tour in their congressional district. Make it a priority to invite all candidates so it does not appear to be an endorsement from your conservation district for any one candidate - making it instead an opportunity to engage them early on.

Your early outreach efforts can be foundational to further meetings once the candidate has been elected to office as the message you bring him or her will not a new one. Your newly elected legislator will have already become familiar with their local conservation district, the work that is done, and the needs that exist.



Here's a great example of how additional leadership training assists in your legislative outreach efforts.

Minnesota has 7 components to their Leadership Institute, one of them being Civic Engagement.

Through this training, participants have the opportunity to visit Washington DC and schedule visits with foreign ambassadors, federal legislators and staff, federal agency staff and national organizations – building relationships at all levels. This kind of training has provided its participants with a broader understanding of conservation issues – from a local and state perspective to a national and even global perspective.

As part of this training, Minnesota conservation leaders in 2005 visited with Senator Mark Dayton. Today, he holds the office of the Governor of Minnesota. This is a great example of the importance of building relationships early and the potential for greater impacts in the future.

Such a scenario could easily be duplicated within your own state. Be sure to share with NACD any of YOUR success stories.

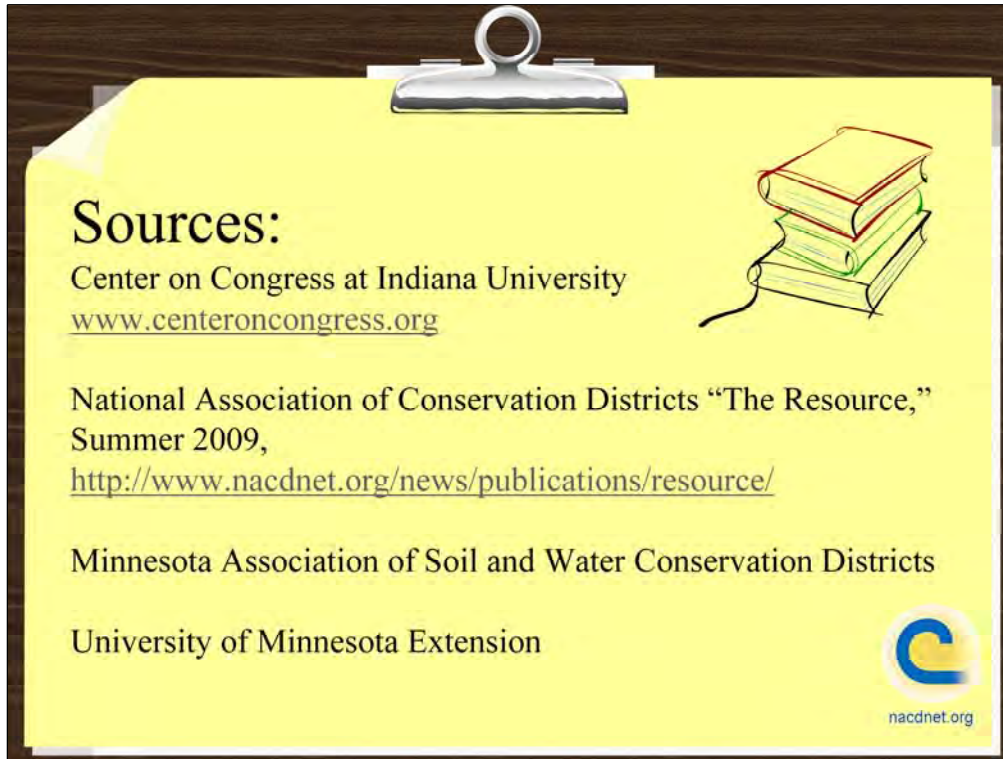


Our Founding Fathers looked at our representative democracy as a process for getting things done, not the final product.

DEMOCRACY IS A WORK IN PROGRESS.

There will always be new elections, new representatives, and new laws under consideration. Your participation in our representative democracy lessens the distance between communities and the government elected to serve them.

WILL YOU SIT ON THE SIDELINES OR WILL YOU ENGAGE IN OUR REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY?




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