

How to effectively meet with Virginia state legislators

Meeting with legislators can feel overwhelming and daunting. Remember, elected officials work for the people - aka you! Use this guide to build confidence, get prepared, and reach your advocacy goals. It can take practice, but it is critical that decision-makers hear your voice and your communities' voices.

Find and contact your representatives

There are several ways that you can reach your state representative. This [tool](#) allows you to find federal and state legislators' government-issued email addresses, as well as their Capitol phone number and local office phone number. Every General Assembly email uses the same format, which you can find below:

Virginia House of Delegates Email Addresses: DelFirstInitialLastName@house.virginia.gov

Virginia State Senate Email Addresses: senatorlastname@senate.virginia.gov

You can also reach your representative's office by mail at their Capitol office or their local office, depending on whether they are in session. You can find the mailing address for your state delegate [here](#) and your state senator [here](#).

Prepare for your meeting

- Prepare your talking points and practice in advance. Be clear and concise!
- Ensure all members of your meeting party are prepared and assign talking points that you are all on board with.
- Plan out your meeting with time frames for each person speaking - this can help with nerves and the limited time.
- Decide your goal. Are you making a specific ask? Are you sharing information and inviting a legislator to tour your nonprofit? Co-sponsor or introduce legislation?
- Prep and print materials for your group and the legislator to review during the meeting. Ensure the messaging is clear, include your org's name & contact info on the document.
- Consider preparing responses in advance for questions you anticipate receiving.

Sample Schedule		
10:00-10:02	Intro	Person A
10:02-10:06	Proposal	Person B
10:06-10:12	Discussion	Person A
10:12-10:14	Make the ask	Person C
10:14-10:15	Thank you	Person B

Request a meeting

- Address the email to the Legislator and include the name of their Chief of Staff(COS) or their Legislative Assistant (LA), note that in Virginia the Legislative Assistant or Chief of Staff typically are the individuals who run the state legislators' email accounts and their office phones.
- If you are personally a constituent and/or your organization works or is located in their district, share that and consider including the address.
- Share the issue that you wish to discuss. Include a bill number if you're discussing specific legislation.
- Provide specific days and times you can meet.
- State if you prefer to meet in person at the Capitol, in the Legislator's district (e.g., at your organization or coffee shop), or online. It can also be good to note if you are flexible and can work around a legislator's preferred location and meeting days/times.

Sample Email

To DelFirstInitialLastName@house.virginia.gov

Subject Meeting request from XYZ Organization

Dear Delegate X and Staffer's Name,

My name is Y and I serve as a case manager at XYZ organization, which is located in your district. I am requesting a meeting to share our support for changes to state grantmaking and contracting (House Bill 1234) and hear your feedback. The meeting will be with myself and our executive director, Z. We are available to meet at the Capitol or online on Fri, Jan 1 from 3-5pm, Tues Jan 5 from 10-12pm, or Thurs Jan 7 from 1-4 pm. If those times do not work we will do our best to be flexible and work around your schedule. Thank you for your consideration and we look forward to connecting!

Sincerely,
Name

During the meeting

- Be prompt and patient. Legislators are meeting with dozens of people per week, often in only 10–15-minute increments, and sometimes are running behind or will be interrupted during the meeting.
- If making an ask, clearly ask if they support your proposal and why. If they are unsure, say you will follow up in x days/weeks for an update. If the legislator or their staff are still decided a position on an issue consider offering additional educational information in a follow-up email after the meeting.
- If you are not making an ask, but the intention of the meeting is to share about you organization, the work the organization does, and building a relationship, share that in your request.
- Keep it short, concise and laser focused. Make the most of your time with the legislator or staff.
- Remember that legislative staff are very important in this process - treat them with the same courtesy as you would a legislator. Meeting with legislative staff is very important and in some instances can be very strategic because of their influential position.
- Start by introducing yourself and thanking them for their time. Sharing personal or professional connections is appropriate.
- Provide personal and local examples (especially if you are their constituent) on the impacts of any proposed legislation - this is important!
- Not sure how to answer a question? It's okay to not know every answer and it's okay to say, "I am not sure, but I will find out and get back to you." Follow up via email within a few days and include context of your conversation.
- Remember you are offering something legislators want and need- information and community relationships.
- Be ready to tell them about your organization and what you know and have observed about the needs in your community, including what your organization needs.

After the meeting

- Compare notes with members of your team who were in attendance. Make sure you are all on the same page with your follow up tasks.
- Within a few days of the meeting, send a thank you email to the legislator and their staff and attach any materials you provided in the meeting for easy reference.
- Set a date to follow up with the legislator and/or staff if there was an action item, such as checking in on what they decided for your ask. It's important to follow through on this.

Sample Follow Up Email

To DelFirstInitialLastName@house.virginia.gov

Subject Follow up on HB 123 from XYZ Organization

Dear Delegate X and Staff Name,

Thank you for meeting with XYZ org on January 10th to discuss topic Y. Find attached our handout with additional information on our proposal for House Bill 123. As promised, we are following up to learn of your decision to introduce this legislation. We are happy to connect if additional questions have arisen since we last met. Thank you again for your time and we look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,
Name

At the Capitol

- Click [here](#) to download the most recent general assembly building directory.
- Keep your cell phone on silent, especially during a hearing. Step out of a committee hearing to have a conversation - whether in person or on the phone.
- Always treat others with respect, especially staffers like Legislative Assistants (LA), Chief of Staff (COS), Committee Assistants (CA), and Pages - they all play a role in helping the space run smoothly each day.
- Testifying? Always be kind, courteous, and stay within the allotted time frame provided. Offer the Committee Assistant (CA) to bring printed copies of your testimony for the Committee. Plan to keep your testimony to 30-60 seconds.
- Have a few of your business cards on you to share with legislators, staff, and advocates.

Sample Committee Testimony

“Good Morning, Committee Chair and Members of the Committee. My name is X and I am the Program Director at X Organization located in Richmond, Virginia. Our organization supports HB2255 because it will help our clients get critical services to help support their behavioral health, which will in turn build healthier and happier communities in Virginia.

Thank you for your time!”

General tips and tricks

- Sign up for a legislator’s newsletter to see how they talk about their work and priorities. Sign-ups are on their legislative page.
- Story telling and data are always helpful. The data helps back up the story, but the story is also very important and often humanizes an issue.
- Message your legislator when they do things you appreciate and help your community. This is important for relationship building.
- Share if you have anything in common, especially if it would help build a bridge. (“We appreciated your comment in the paper about X, thank you for your vote on Y, thank you for visiting my kids’ school”)
- Don’t say anything in an email to a public official you wouldn’t want to see on the front page of a newspaper, as their emails can become public through Virginia Freedom of Information Act requests.
- Sign up for emails of key committees you follow (and even the legislators on those committees) to be kept in the loop. Sign-ups are on the committee’s webpage

Contact Us

Find our contact information [here](#)

Email: staff@thecne.org

Phone: (434)-244-3330

Sources

[Minnesota Nonprofits: How to Meet Effectively with State Legislators](#)

[Guide for Legislator Meetings](#)

[Citizens Guide to Contacting Virginia Legislators](#) | [Virginia Public Access Project](#)

