

In order to make certain your message is consistent with the College's goals and priorities, I request that you contact the office of Governmental Relations prior to engaging in lobbying efforts on issues affecting higher education.

Should you choose to lobby your elected officials on other issues, the guidelines below will assist you in your advocacy. While primarily aimed at the state level of lobbying, these basic guidelines will help you at all levels of government. Some will seem like common sense, but I cannot tell you how often I see violations of these simple rules.

- Always be honest
  - You only get one chance to earn their trust, but every meeting is a chance to destroy it.
  - Never overstate or exaggerate.
  - If the elected official asks a question you do not have an answer for or are uncertain of, NEVER wing it!
    - Tell them what a great question that is and that you want to make sure before you answer, but will get the answer.
    - GET the answer to them as quickly as possible!
    - This is another opportunity, through the follow up response, to lobby your issue!
  
- Provide a brief and concise talk sheet
  - Too much detail will blur your message.
  - Provide relevant, hard-hitting facts supporting your position.
  - If requesting funding, provide performance measures or historical outcomes.
    - They like to see "Return on Investment".
  - If you have detailed reports or a lot of data you would like to share, offer it separately or offer to leave it with the aide.
  - During session, unless it is an issue they are passionate about, they just do not have time to read every annual report or white paper given to them.
  
- Be brief in your presentation and be on time
  - Your elected officials have a demanding schedule.
  - You and hundreds of others are competing for their attention.
  - By being brief and concise, your points will stick out clearly.
  - Especially when in session, expect your legislator to be late: It happens all the time.
    - They may be working their bills, meeting with leadership or simply running behind because of their schedule.
    - This is just a fact of the process.
    - This does not excuse you being late.

- If you are running late, call the legislative aide to let them know.
  - Even if your group has multiple, but related issues, try to pick one major issue and focus on it to speak about, while mentioning the other issues by referring to your talk sheet.
    - By picking your most critical issue, you speak about it before questions or other issues brought up by the legislator/aide interrupt you!!
  - Do not be surprised if they do not have questions for you and thank you for your visit.
    - They may simply be trying to stay on schedule and will look back at your talk sheet later (That is why it is important to have one!)
- Be prepared to talk to the legislative aide instead of the legislator
    - This is a very common occurrence during the legislative session. There are countless demands on their schedule, especially if the legislator is a Chair of a committee or in leadership.
    - The legislative aide is often a very experienced professional who helps the legislator prioritize issues. They are your gatekeeper!
    - It is critical that you provide the same respect to the aide that you would the legislator: Remember, they are the gatekeeper and several current legislators were aides once upon a time!
- Know your issue thoroughly
    - You may be surprised with the amount of knowledge legislators will have on your issue.
    - Be prepared to debate (politely) those legislators who oppose your position.
    - If your group and talk sheet have multiple issues, be prepared to speak about each of them in case the elected official asks a question.
    - Tell your legislator what effect you think a particular bill, if it becomes law, will have on you, your children, business, or community. Be concise, but specific (flsenate.gov).
    - Suggest a course of action and offer assistance. Do not make promises or threats (flsenate.gov).
- Know as much as you can about who you are meeting with
    - Different parties will have different positions (conservative versus liberal).
    - By knowing whether the legislator you are visiting will be philosophically with or against you, you can prepare and tailor your comments.
    - Find a common ground with the legislator if possible.

- Is anyone in your group from the same hometown or did they attend any of the same schools? Does anyone in your group share a hobby with the legislator?
- Be Bold
  - Do not avoid legislators who oppose your position.
  - You may not change their mind, but you may provide them some good insight into an aspect of your issue they may not have considered before.
  - Do not be timid in your position, but be prepared to compromise.
    - Even if you only get part of what you want/need, you can always come back in subsequent years to “fix” the remaining part.
    - It is always easier to modify a partial position than to start from scratch each year.
- Be respectful
  - Even if the elected official is in disagreement with your position, they may in the future be your best ally on another issue: DON’T BURN BRIDGES!
- Plan ahead
  - Request meetings as soon as you know your schedule!
    - If you wait until a couple of days before your trip, you will have a difficult time getting a meeting.
    - Schedules fill up fast, but do not come out until approximately one week prior to the meetings.
    - Many aides will not schedule a meeting until the schedules and actual meeting times are posted. Ask if you can be placed on a list or politely thank them and ask when would be advisable to call back to make the schedule.
  - Try to schedule meetings in sequence
    - For example, multiple Senators, one after the other instead of having to run back and forth across the Capital complex from House to Senate and back.
    - During session, elevators are very busy! This is especially true of the Capital tower. It can take ten minutes sometimes between the time you punch the call button, get an elevator and stop at other floors before reaching your destination. PLAN FOR THIS!
    - Schedule meetings with enough time to travel between offices.
  - Confirm your meetings a couple of days before the visit.
  - BE FLEXIBLE: you may be asked to delay, reschedule or meet with the Aide.
  - Get a map of the Capital building in advance.

- Provide the staff a cell phone or other number they can call in case they have to change the meeting time.
- Bring plenty of business cards
  - One for the legislator and one for the Aide.
- ALWAYS follow up with a thank you note to the legislator
  - This is another opportunity to lobby their support!
  - Courtesy goes a long way in the process.
- Remember that your actions will have consequences
  - Avoid publicly bashing an elected official who does not support your issue.
    - Sometimes you have to; just be mindful of the consequence.

Remember, when you speak to elected officials, the minute you mention you work for Florida SouthWestern State College, you are fully representing this institution. Conduct your activities accordingly.

If you have questions, please feel free to call me  
(239) 489-9052 Office  
(239) 826-7864 Cell