

Crafting a One-Minute Pitch for Policymakers

How you “pitch,” or introduce, yourself to policymakers or their staffs can pique their interest in you as a constituent and help set the stage for an effective conversation. Whether you are calling, meeting face to face, or bumping into a staff member at a public meeting, being prepared with a solid introduction that lasts no more than a minute can make all the difference in their receptiveness to what you have to say.

The Basic Elements

- Name, town, and years you’ve lived in the district
- Occupation/what you do
- What networks or communities you represent
- What you are asking them to act on (be specific and concrete—e.g., vote yes or no on a bill, cosponsor a bill, join a certain caucus)
- Why you care, and why you and your community want them to take action (an anecdote can be helpful)

A sample script:

“Hi, I’m [full name, with prefix if applicable]. I’ve lived in [town] for [#] years. I am a [profession] working on [issue]. I graduated from/work at [university/organization connection]. I’m here today to discuss [issue] because [why you care]. I also represent [#] people from my [department/group/neighborhood/place of worship] who vote in your district and are concerned about this

issue. [Offer a concise fact about how it affects the community, and the action that’s needed].”

Tips to Strengthen Your Pitch

Now that you have a formula, here are some things to consider as you craft your pitch:

Establish that you are a scientist or technical expert; worry less about your field of expertise. If your expertise is relevant, don’t be shy to share it in layman’s terms. Even if it isn’t directly related, you can still speak as an informed constituent. Policymakers often care more that you have *any* science background or affiliation than about your specific area of expertise.

Emphasize your assets as a scientist who is also a constituent, not just your specialty. A legislator’s staff members are not necessarily experts in a given policy, nor are they looking for that in a high-value constituent. Your broader knowledge is almost always more than enough to establish yourself as a voice that should be heard. Furthermore, your connections, relationship with the community, skill sets, and access to technical information will also be seen as assets to a policymaker’s staff.

Share your story—and your connections. Say how long you’ve been or plan to be a voter in the district. Describe your affiliations with local organizations, including academic institutions, faith groups, small-business coalitions, neighborhoods, or any other communities that the policymaker cares about. This will help



UCS staff and members of our Science Network meet with Maine Senator Susan Collins (third from left) during a legislative action event in Washington, DC. A solid, compelling introduction that lasts no more than a minute can make all the difference in a policymaker’s receptiveness to what you have to say.

Staying focused on the “ask” helps send the message that you respect the policymaker’s busy schedule and prevents anyone from derailing the discussion.

you demonstrate your credibility and why your opinion should matter to the policymaker—without being pigeonholed by your specific expertise. Keep it short and memorable.

Practice with a friend and focus on positive feedback. Run through your whole pitch. When you’re done, have your friend highlight points that were particularly interesting/persuasive and what you might want to add or emphasize.

Keep your eyes on the prize. Staying focused on the core goal of the conversation with your policymakers—the “ask”—helps send the message that you respect their busy schedules and prevents anyone from derailing the discussion.

Remember your pitch is just the start—keep the conversation alive! Sometimes people will be disappointed if they don’t get a commitment immediately after the initial conversation. Remember that policymakers get a wide range and high volume of asks from their constituents and are often hesitant to make a move until they know a broad cross section of their constituency cares about, and will hold them accountable for, their position

on the issue. That requires a steady drumbeat of communication that builds a rapport with the policymaker and their staff.

What Comes Next

Here are some indicators that you’ve had a successful interaction with a policymaker, even if you don’t get an immediate “yes” response:

- Policymakers or staff ask follow-up questions about your request, either during your conversation or afterward on the phone or in an email (e.g., seeking advice on policy considerations, requesting information on an issue).
- The policymaker issues a public statement on the topic (e.g., a press release on their website, an op-ed in a newspaper, a speech in the legislature, questions/comments in a committee hearing).
- Sometimes the policymaker’s silence is a good sign—if, for example, they have been outspoken in their opposition to a policy you have asked them to support, the fact that they stop voicing their opposition can be considered a win.
- The policymaker’s staff demonstrates their interest in maintaining a relationship with you (e.g., in their responsiveness to your calls, emails, or invitations).

Learn More

For more tips on building relationships with policymakers, go to www.ucsusa.org/watchdogtoolkit. For on-demand webinars on crafting your personal story, check out www.ucsusa.org/scinetworkshops.