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AN ADVOCACY TOOLKIT FOR FAIR, SAFE,
AND EFFECTIVE COMMUNITY POLICING

Step 6: Engaging Your Target and Pressure Points, and Meeting with Other Stakeholders

Organizing a meeting with the police chief, a community liaison, or a representative from the police department is a critical strategy when the campaign goal is policy reform in the police department. Because the police chief is the decision-maker for police department policy, that person tends to be your campaign's target.

Many campaigns begin with a direct request for what the community wants. This initial request can set the tone for the campaign, give you important information that informs your strategy and tactics, gauge how long it may take for you to win your campaign, and identify obstacles you may encounter along the way. Other times, you may meet with the police chief or others in the police department when drafting policies, designing training on policies, or providing updates from the community about policy implementation.

Meeting with decision-makers such as elected officials and representatives is important for getting legislation, ordinances, or resolutions passed at any level of government. Even if legislators do not have direct power to make the change you want, they can have relationships with those who do. They are also generally willing to meet with the people they represent, directly or indirectly.

Set goals.

Regardless of the reason for your meeting or whom you are meeting, set a clear goal for the meeting.

Before scheduling your meeting, be sure that you are prepared. You will likely have limited time with the representative, so setting a clear goal (why you want to meet) before you step into the room is essential. Your goal may be:

- To get a commitment from an elected official to introduce legislation or vote a certain way.
- To educate an official on an important issue to prime them for future action or to support your efforts to move a different pressure point.
- To gather information about where the official stands on an issue or any reforms the official is contemplating.

Knowing your goal beforehand helps ensure that you and your group know whether the meeting was successful — which is especially important if members of your group have never met with an elected official before. Be prepared for the official to be in a rush, ask difficult questions as they attempt to understand the issue from all sides, or already have a firm position on the issue.

A clear goal also helps set the tone for your meeting. If you asked for the meeting, then the official will likely expect you to take the lead and set the agenda, especially if you do not have a prior relationship with the official. The meeting's attendees and your talking points help set the meeting's tone as well.

Decide who should attend.

When you know why you want a meeting, decide who should attend. An official may be more likely to share information — especially sensitive information — and answer your questions in a smaller meeting. In contrast, if you prefer a larger meeting without much back and forth or want to draw attention to the support your cause has garnered, opt for a community forum.

If you decide to bring a larger group to the meeting, be sure that everyone is clear on and unified in the message and goals of the meeting. You should also notify the official's office beforehand, so that staff can book a conference room to accommodate everyone. If your meeting is in a government building, check beforehand whether identification is required, and advise the people who will be attending accordingly.

When meeting with police department leaders, keep in mind that they frequently bring additional people to meetings with the community. It is unlikely that you will be alone in the room with the police chief or other leaders within the department unless it is a small or rural jurisdiction.

Similarly, elected officials and police leaders will sometimes have you meet with someone else in their office or use a stand-in at a meeting. If this happens, do not be discouraged. True, it is best to get a face-to-face meeting, but policymakers have busy schedules; they rely on their staff to be their “eyes and ears” and often defer to their proposals and recommendations. Never underestimate the power of the person you are meeting with, even if they are an intern. Treat the surrogate with as much respect as you would the person they are representing.

Many people in positions of power, whether elected or appointed, meet with their constituents or other concerned advocates regularly, but it can be more difficult to get a meeting in a large jurisdiction or during a busy legislative session. If you do not receive a response to your meeting request, it may be time to escalate or use a different tactic, such as a letter-writing or call-in campaign, or a creative action like a sing-a-thon outside the official's office.

Develop clear talking points.

Whether you have a few or many attendees in your meeting, clear talking points are critical to your success. If you are still trying to determine who will attend your meeting, your talking points can help drive this strategic decision. Consider whether some points will be better received if they come from a particular member of your group based on that person's direct experience with the issue or level of expertise. If you are meeting with an elected official, consider whether the meeting's attendees live or vote in their district.

Your group may choose one spokesperson or divide the meeting into portions, each with a clear speaking role for a participant to discuss one talking point. Not everyone in your group needs to speak, but everyone should be prepared to speak if asked or to fill in if someone forgets an important talking point. If language interpretation is needed, be sure that your group has a designated interpreter.



Practicing your talking points and even conducting role-plays of the meeting beforehand can help prepare your group, particularly if group members have never met with a person in power before or are nervous. It is also important to consider what your bottom line is if you are requesting something from the person with whom you are meeting. Ask yourself:

- *What concessions will your group make and under what circumstances?*
- *What will you not decide on or agree to until you have a chance to talk about it again as a group?*

Make sure everyone attending the meeting is clear on and committed to upholding these bottom lines.

When developing your talking points, be sure to consider what moves or motivates the person you are targeting:

- *Are they concerned with fiscal responsibility and how reforms may affect the budgets?*
- *Are they motivated by the possibility of becoming a national leader in police reform?*
- *Are they vying for a seat in an upcoming election?*

Talking Points:	
1.	_____

2.	_____

3.	_____

4.	_____

5.	_____

Speak directly about community concerns.

Regardless of the pressure point's motivations and interests, be sure to speak to concerns of the public officials you are meeting with, showing how your solutions will have a positive impact on the issues the official cares about most. Bring data and personal stories to grab their attention.

Similarly, focus on solutions and what the official can do to effect change. Positioning your group as an expert may mean that that official is more likely to turn to your group for its perspective during critical moments, such as drafting legislation, developing counter-arguments to an opponent's position, or seeking feedback on policy language.

Bring your talking points with you to the meeting; this way, no matter what the official says, your group will not be derailed and will hit the most important points.

Checklist for Questions to Ask Decision-Makers at Meetings

Direct questions, such as:

- For elected representatives: “Can we count on your support for [Resolution XX]?” or “What will it take to get your support on [XX]?”
- For police departments: “Is your department willing to adopt a policy on [XX] through a community-led process?”

Follow-up or recap questions, such as:

- “When can we expect to hear back from you about [XX]?”
- “Just to confirm, our next steps will be to [XX...].”

Give them information to take away.

Finally, get something in the pressure point’s hands that they can look at later. This may be a one-pager that reiterates your talking points or draft legislation you want the official to consider. Include your group’s contact information on the document so that the official’s staff members can contact you with any follow-up questions or updates.

Sample One-Pager or Fact Sheet

Background *[Provide important information about the history or background of the issue. Include compelling statements on why this issue is urgent in the community, including any relevant data.]*

Solutions *[Focus the majority of your document on the solutions to solve the problem. All talking points should align with the solution.]*

Talking Point 1:

Talking Point 2:

Talking Point 3:

Addressing the opposition *[If opposition exists to the solution you are proposing, address it here — for instance, “Although Tasers are often promoted as an alternative to lethal force, they can be lethal, especially under certain circumstances, and they are often used in situations where lethal force would not be warranted. This is why strong limitations/a ban on their use, except when the only other option would be lethal force, are/is critical.”]*

Closing statement

Special considerations when meeting with the police department.

Meeting with police leaders can be difficult for people who have had negative experiences with police officers. If planned appropriately and with care for the people who have had direct experience with policing, the meeting can be an empowering or even a potentially healing experience for community members. If not done properly, the meeting can result in further emotional and psychological harm. Also consider whether anyone in your group has open warrants, is an undocumented immigrant, or may otherwise face risks by meeting with police leaders.

Special considerations when meeting with elected officials.

When choosing whom to meet with, be sure you understand the official's role in the government and their ability to impact change on the issue at hand. You may be requesting a meeting with your campaign's target or those who can influence your target.

Learn as much as you can about the official and their position on the issue prior to the meeting. What motivates the official and what is their relationship to other decision-makers?

Questions your research should answer include:

- *What organizations does the official belong to?*
- *On which committees does the official sit?*
- *What kinds of legislation has the official introduced or championed?*
- *What policy changes has the official spoken in favor of?*

Officials typically provide much of this information on their official or campaign websites and social media accounts. Alternatively, your group can talk to other organizations with which the official has a relationship. Power mapping will help ensure that you meet with the appropriate official and give you a visual understanding of where they stand politically relative to your cause.

Remember, if your group is a registered nonprofit organization, you can still meet with public and elected officials.

Notes for registered nonprofit organizations: Is it lobbying?

If I ... ask a legislator to pass specific pending legislation?

This is direct lobbying. If your group is a registered charitable organization, the amount of time and money you spend on lobbying is restricted. Check Internal Revenue Service (IRS) regulations and grant agreements before moving forward.

If I ... ask others to contact a legislator to ask them to support specific pending legislation?

This is called grassroots lobbying, or indirect lobbying. Your charitable status still restricts such lobbying, but the regulations are not as strict. Check IRS regulations and grant agreements before moving forward.

If I ... ask a legislator to take general action on an issue without referring to specific legislation or educating the legislator on an issue more broadly?

This is not lobbying — it is considered educating lawmakers.

Disclaimer:

Check your state and federal regulations for restrictions on lobbying and be sure to check any grant agreements you may have that restrict this activity.

No matter whom you meet with, it is important to send an email or letter to thank them afterward and clarify any next steps that you discussed. This contact can also serve as a way to document in writing any commitments made.

Sample Thank-You Letter

Dear _____,

Thank you for meeting with [name of group] on [date].

At the meeting, we discussed [summary of meeting]. We look forward to [any next steps from meeting].

Please do not hesitate to reach out to us should you have any additional questions. We can be reached at [contact information].

In appreciation,

[name of group]



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