

YOUTH ADVOCACY GUIDE

Meeting & Communicating with your Representative



This guide was created for the youth of Washington, who requested access to on-demand resources about becoming successful youth advocates. Read below on how to meet your representatives, including information on writing your pitch, avoiding pitfalls, and communicating your message.

This guide should be used with **HANNAH'S TIPS** where Hannah Stewart, Washington State High School student, talks about her on-the-ground experiences as a youth advocating in Olympia.



Policy affects everyone!

Even if you're not old enough to vote, policy can still have a huge effect on your life. However, if you don't tell lawmakers what is happening in your life, then they won't know how they're impacting you.

Who Can Vote?

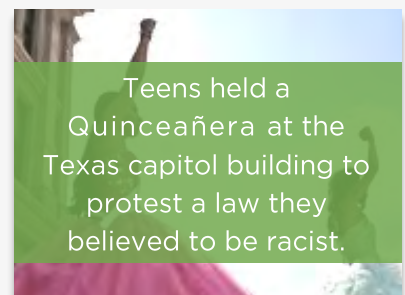
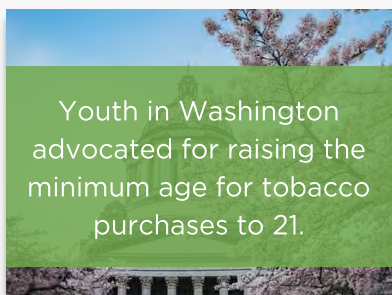
- ⇒ 18 or Older
- ⇒ Citizen
- ⇒ Legal Resident
- ⇒ Registered to Vote
- ⇒ Not a Felon

Who Can Participate?

- ⇒ Anyone with a voice and a passion for making change

Want an example?

Check out the articles below to see teens who are making a difference around the nation.
Make your voice heard!



Step One:

GET TO KNOW YOUR REPRESENTATIVE



FIND OUT

- ⇒ Who are your state representatives? Find out here: <http://app.leg.wa.gov/DistrictFinder/>
- ⇒ What have they done, believed, or fought for that might be helped by supporting your issue? For example: a position they have already endorsed or a family member who is affected by the issues.
- ⇒ What organizations are they involved in? Which legislative committees do they serve on?



MAKE THE APPOINTMENT

- ⇒ Call the Olympia office (during session) or District Office (during interim) and ask for an appointment.
- ⇒ Exchange names and email addresses.
- ⇒ Send an e-mail confirming the appointment, who will be attending, topic, and relevant [one-pager](#).



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- ⇒ See your representative's profile by visiting: leg.wa.gov
- ⇒ You don't have to work alone. Find out about local substance-abuse prevention coalitions in your community here:
[Drug-Free Community Coalitions in WA](#)
[Local, Regional, and State Prevention Contacts in WA](#)



TIP!

Deepen your research by checking out campaign materials and searching on the web.

Step Two:

THE PITCH: DIRECT, CONCISE, & CLEAR

PRIORITY ISSUE

- ⇒ Pick your single issue for discussion.
- ⇒ Do not discuss multiple issues at the same time! What are the few most important bits of background information they absolutely need to understand? Don't assume your representative are as knowledgeable as you about your issue.

FACTS/STATISTICS

- ⇒ Research a fact or statistic that backs up your ask.
- ⇒ For example, if your issue is tobacco use, look up smoking rates among teenagers. Be ready to back up your fact with a credible source!

PERSONAL STORY

- ⇒ Combine your fact/statistic with a personal story from your life to help support your ask.

THE ULTIMATE ASK

- ⇒ What is the action you want your representative to take after talking with you? Be clear about what your specific request is. See more about the "ask" in the next section.

FIVE WORDS TO REMEMBER

- ⇒ Representatives and their staff have a lot going on at once! Come up with just five words that you would want your representative to remember.

TIPS

- ⇒ If there is disagreement about an issue, give both sides fairly. Tell the whole story.
- ⇒ Rehearse your message. Be able to tell your story in five minutes. Note that 300 words translate to about two minutes of speaking.
- ⇒ Use the fill-in template for your pitch on pg. 7!

THE 5 ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF A PITCH:

1. Priority Issue
2. Facts/Statistics
3. Personal Story
4. The Ultimate Ask
5. Five Words to Remember

! ! !
SPEAK UP

Step Three:

COMMUNICATING YOUR MESSAGE: THE ASK



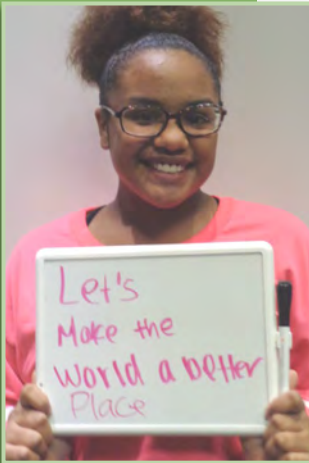
BE PREPARED

- ⇒ Be ready with your pitch! Make the request (your “ask”) specific and reasonable. For example, “Will you sponsor this bill?” or “Will you offer this amendment?” Don’t ask for the politically impossible.
- ⇒ Do your research: be specific as to which bill(s) - numbers included - or budgetary item(s) you are addressing.
- ⇒ If you are contacting a representative about a specific bill, don’t assume they have every bill memorized. Representatives must deal with hundreds of bills and can’t be familiar with the details of each one. Be safe: assume they have little or no specific knowledge about the bill.



GET ANSWERS

- ⇒ When supporting a specific bill, ask where your representative stands on it. Don’t be afraid to ask, “Senator/Representative, how do you plan to vote on this issue?” As a constituent you have a right to know.
- ⇒ Don’t be misled by an evasive answer. A reply such as “You’ve got me 99% convinced” or “I’m voting with my friends,” often translates into a vote against your position.
- ⇒ Be a closer. If your representative is still undecided after your discussion, ask when they plan to make a decision and what information you can provide to help in the process. Be polite, but persistent.



BE POLITE, BUT PERSISTENT!



Step Four:

MEETING YOUR REPRESENTATIVE

Making the initial contact is as easy as picking up the phone or writing an email or a letter.

Suggest a meeting place that is easy and comfortable for him/her, like a coffee shop or a casual restaurant. The initial meeting will likely last between 15 and 30 minutes.

BE POLITE

- ⇒ Arrive 15 minutes early.
- ⇒ Listen carefully and respectfully. When do you talk, stay on topic: stick to the issue at hand!

BE READY TO ADAPT

- ⇒ Have your pitch practiced and ready to go.
- ⇒ In case your time is cut short, start with your most important item first and then get to the rest if you can. Representatives may be running late and may reduce your appointment time.
- ⇒ Sometimes representatives like to talk about their own issues – in which case you will need to gently get them back to your pitch, as the clock is ticking.

BE YOURSELF

- ⇒ Always tell the truth about anything you are asked. If you don't know something, admit it! But offer to get the answer, and follow up promptly.
- ⇒ Don't feel uncomfortable if you didn't –or wouldn't– vote for them. Representatives are elected to serve all of the people in the district. They want to be helpful regardless of your political affiliation or age.



“EVERYONE NEEDS TO SEE A FUTURE.”

— Billy Frank Jr., Nisqually Tribal Elder, and Chairman of the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission



Step Five:

FOLLOW-UP: IT'S NOT ONE-AND-DONE!

KEEP YOUR REPRESENTATIVE UPDATED

- ⇒ Find out how they like to receive their information: phone, email, one-pagers, etc.
- ⇒ Make sure to send along any new information, as well as periodic reminders about your issue.

IT'S PERSONAL

- ⇒ Don't expect a representative to remember your name and face. Introduce yourself every time you meet. Your consideration will be appreciated.
- ⇒ Keep up your contacts. When back home, send a short follow-up email or note thanking the representative for her/his time and briefly re-stating what you asked them to do and why.
- ⇒ Watch and see if the representative did what you requested. If so, send a short and prompt “thank you” email, letter, or note and (if possible) some new or additional information in support of your proposal.
- ⇒ Never burn your bridges. Today's competitor might be tomorrow's ally.



The voices of students must be heard!



BUILD-A-PITCH TEMPLATE



My priority issue is...

My noteworthy fact or statistic that illustrates my issue is...

My personal story that goes with my fact or statistic is...

My ultimate ask is...

The five words I want my representative to remember are...



healthy gen

CONTRIBUTORS

- ⇒ Julie Peterson, Senior Director of Policy, Foundation for Healthy Generations
- ⇒ Dustyn Addington, Assistant Director of Learning and Strategy, Foundation for Healthy Generations
- ⇒ Kate Groen, Graphic Designer

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- ⇒ CCAN, A.C. Davis High School, Yakima, WA

FOR MORE INFORMATION OR FEEDBACK, PLEASE CONTACT:

- ⇒ Julie Peterson, Senior Director of Policy, JulieP@healthygen.org, @healthygenjulie
- ⇒ Dustyn Addington, DustynA@healthygen.org, @healthygendust

THANK YOU!