HOW TO

EFFECTIVELY COMMUNICATE WITH DECISION MAKERS
OVERVIEW

1) Construct a plan
2) Understand your audience
3) Hold a mutual willingness to listen
4) Communicate your needs
5) Provide a professional presentation
6) Follow up with questions
7) Expect and accept disagreement
8) Persist after setbacks

OBJECTIVE

Effective communication between students and decision makers is crucial when tackling education challenges. Decision makers are any individual responsible for making a choice in a situation, such as educators, legislators, policy makers, or funders.

Effective communication is more than just exchanging information from one party to the next, it requires a deeper set of actions. To help make your communication with a decision maker successful, Oregon Student Voice offers the following guide.
1. CONSTRUCT A PLAN

Before heading into the conversation, create a plan for what needs to be accomplished. It will be helpful to answer these questions: What issue would you like addressed? What is your motivation? Why is this an issue? How should the issue be addressed? What support and resources will be needed? What is the timeline? It is important to conduct outside research and collect data to effectively convey your opinions and ideas.

2. UNDERSTAND YOUR AUDIENCE

Knowing your audience allows you to prepare for opportunities and challenges you may encounter while presenting your concerns. Consider these questions: What are their needs? Where do they stand and whom do they represent? What do you anticipate is their reaction to your stance? This information helps you to create a plan for the conversation and to determine how you will persuade your audience to address your needs.
HOLD A MUTUAL WILLINGNESS TO LISTEN

Enter the meeting open to hearing multiple perspectives. Each participant offers important experiences and insights that can help you better understand an issue. There may be divergent viewpoints, but it is important to disagree respectfully and to strive to understand differences. To inspire continued and lasting change, both parties must have mutual respect for one another’s opinions and work to devise a solution that meets all needs.

COMMUNICATE YOUR NEEDS

During the meeting, be prepared to share who you are, why you believe in what you believe in, what issue you would like addressed, and how you would like it resolved. Make sure your points are clear and concise so decision makers fully understand you. It may be helpful to bring a one-page handout that includes the what, why, and how for the issue you would like addressed.
PROVIDE A PROFESSIONAL PRESENTATION

A professional presentation shows that you value the conversation. Make eye contact to show that you are listening. While conversing, present good posture to show your interest. Come prepared and organized with your materials.

FOLLOW UP WITH QUESTIONS

Be sure to ask questions throughout the conversation to enhance understanding about the issue on both sides. Questions provide opportunities to further clarify information or dive deeper. If decision makers do not ask questions during the conversation, be sure to allow time for you to ask them questions, such as: Is this an issue that you will address? What do you think about my plan? Can you support me?
EXPECT AND ACCEPT DISAGREEMENT

Most likely, there will be times where you do not see eye to eye with someone, and that is okay. Remaining respectful and attentive even when there is disagreement will enable both sides to continue the conversation and work towards a mutually beneficial solution.

PERSIST AFTER SETBACKS

You may not accomplish your goals during your first meeting. Do not give up and continue to work with decision makers. They may ask you to find more research or say that they cannot resolve an issue. Persist to continue finding ways to accomplish your goals. Identifying and working with other individuals or organizations that are supportive of your cause can help you overcome roadblocks.
Clear communication is how you are able to help others understand issues and begin to make effective change. With these skills, you can collaborate with decision makers in creating positive change within your educational community.

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