



## **The Key to Effective Sierra Club California Advocacy in Sacramento: Effective In-District Advocacy by Club Volunteers**

Legislators care about what their constituents think. Indeed, no matter how much money they receive from special interests, legislators know that they ultimately have to win the votes of their constituents to stay in office.

That's why it is so important for Sierra Club activists to develop a relationship with their legislators in their own backyard—in the district where voters vote. Legislators are generally willing to listen to the views of constituents on home turf. And they need to hear from constituents who care about the environment.

This document outlines the steps you can take to become an effective in-district voice for Sierra Club California.

### **The 10 Steps to Being an Effective In-District Voice**

1. Know who your legislators are and how to contact them. California has a bicameral legislative system, meaning there are two houses: the Assembly and the Senate. There are 40 state senators and 80 assembly members. Every voter lives in an assembly district and a senate district. You can find out which district you are in and who represents you by going online to: <http://findyourrep.legislature.ca.gov>. To learn more about your particular representative, including phone numbers and addresses for district offices, go to <http://www.assembly.ca.gov> for information about assembly members and to <http://www.senate.ca.gov> for information about senators.
2. Get on your legislators' mailing lists. Many legislators regularly send out emails or newsletters about what they are doing. In these updates, you'll find information about local town hall meetings or "meet your legislator" meetings that the legislator will be holding in your area. Contact the district office (see info above for how to get contact info) and ask to be put on the constituent mailing list.
3. Go to events where your legislators will be. Attend local community meetings, town halls, coffees, and other events that you know your legislators will be attending or even hosting. Use the opportunity to introduce yourself to the legislator, but spend most of your time on the first visit to one of these events listening. Listen to what the legislator has to say and how the audience responds or what they ask him or her about.

4. Do a meet-and-greet meeting with your legislators. Call your Assemblymember's and Senator's district offices and ask for appointments with each to meet to discuss environmental issues. If the person answering the phone says the legislator won't be available, ask to meet with the district staff.

5. Be coordinated. Before you meet with a legislator or staff on behalf of the Club, be sure to notify Sierra Club California staff that you are planning to meet with your legislators by calling Molly Culton at 916-557-1100 x1100 or emailing her at [molly.culton@sierraclub.org](mailto:molly.culton@sierraclub.org). Ask if there are specific state policy issues you should bring to your legislators' attention. Sometimes there won't be, but we may have some ideas about other things to discuss. Also, consider teaming up with other Sierra Club members to attend the meeting together. If you do team up, be sure to schedule a brief phone call in advance to figure out who will say what during the meeting.

6. Be prepared. Before you meet a legislator, prepare your talking points. Don't overwhelm the legislator or legislative staff with too much information or too many ideas. Instead, consider one or two environmental issues that the Club is working on that you think the legislator needs to know about (exactly what these are may be informed by your discussion with Sierra Club California staff), and then consider the most important thing about that issue that you can share in a minute or two of conversation with legislative staff or the legislator. Most appointments with legislators or staff last only about 15 or 20 minutes, so be prepared to be concise.

7. Be neat and on time. When you meet with the legislator or staff, be sure to dress neatly. Arrive at the meeting location—usually at the district office—with at least 5 minutes to spare. If you're joining other Club activists, it's a good idea to go over who will say what just before the meeting.

8. Be polite. Legislators and legislative staff are more likely to meet with you again and again if the experience they have with you is enjoyable and productive. Be polite, be concise, and be friendly. This doesn't mean you have to agree with everything the legislator or staff says. It just means you have to be careful not to be argumentative. Listen, calmly state your position, and then listen again. If you are asked a question you don't know the answer to, say you don't know but will get the answer--and then be sure to send it.

9. Report back. Let the Sierra Club California staff know how the meeting went. Molly Culton (916-557-1100 x1100 or [molly.culton@sierraclub.org](mailto:molly.culton@sierraclub.org)) can direct you to the right staffer for reporting purposes.

10. Say thank you. After the meeting, drop an email or written note to whoever you met and thank them for meeting with you. If you promised to supply additional information, do that, too.

*For more information about Sierra Club California and the issues we cover and advocate, visit our website: <https://www.sierraclub.org/california>. You can also follow us on Twitter [@SierraClubCA](https://twitter.com/SierraClubCA) and on Facebook at [SierraClubCA](https://www.facebook.com/SierraClubCA).*