Preparing for a Persuasive Meeting

Homework Assignment

1. Prepare an Information Sheet
   The information sheet is a persuasive, at-a-glance summary tool that you can leave behind after your meeting. It should provide all the information a reader needs to take action, but no more; it is a “just enough” document.
   > Key elements are:
     • A succinct statement of the problem,
     • Your “take home” message,
     • Key data to support the position.

   > A persuasive information sheet is:
     • Self-contained; it should not refer to other documents or information;
     • No longer than one page (both sides if necessary, but one is better);
     • Readable and visually persuasive – use large font, bullets, lots of white space, text boxes, bold face type, columns, and graphics for emphasis;
     • Give only key information. Use references for additional information;
     • Lists other supporters (this may be a good or bad idea depending upon the issue and the supporters);
     • Uses messages pitched for general audiences;
     • Makes an “ask” and gives readers the tools necessary to take action (i.e. gives legislators the bill number and asks them for their vote; gives a member of a professional society the phone number and email of the legislators you’d like them to contact)
     • Includes your contact information

   ** Tip: you may modify information sheets you find in the course of your research **

2. Research your audience
   Knowing your audience is essential to a persuasive meeting. The information sheet sets forth messages for a general audience, whereas the goal of researching individuals is to enable you to shape more personalized messages.

   Consider:
     • What party is your legislator? Does the party have a position on the issue? Is it strongly enforced?
     • How long has this official served in the legislature? Has he/she held previous elected positions? What issues does he/she care most about? How has he/she voted on similar issues in the past?
     • What area of the state is your legislator from? Who is the constituency the legislator represents? What is the source of the legislator’s voting support? What is the area’s major industry? Major challenges?
     • What is your legislator’s personal background? Where did he/she grow up? What type and level of education did he/she receive? How did he/she make their living prior to entering the legislature?
• Considering how the answers to the above questions might shape this legislator’s position on your issue:
  o What constraints might he/she face in supporting your position?
  o Can you anticipate any of the questions or concerns this legislator is likely to raise in your discussion?
  o What other influences do you think might be competing with the information you are providing?

3. Prepare your presentation
• Select and shape your key talking points based upon what you have learned. Are there arguments or areas of discussion you will make a point to avoid?
• How will you divide up the presentation among the group?
• Practice, practice, practice. Take turns pretending to be the subject of the presentation. Anticipate problems. It can be helpful to use your information sheet to guide your presentation. Be sure to leave the meeting with a definite “ask” for the legislator, staff member, or professional society.

What you will be turning in for evaluation and feedback:
• The information sheet
• A paragraph that, based upon your research, summarizes your meeting strategy.