

Factsheet

Public Speaking

■ Tips on Public Speaking

- **Know the room.** Be familiar with the place in which you will speak—arrive early and walk around the speaking area; practice using the microphone and visual aids.
- **Know the audience.** Greet some of the audience as they arrive. It's easier to speak to a group of friends than to a group of strangers.
- **Know your material inside and out.** Don't memorize it—*practice, practice, practice!* If you are not familiar with your material, it'll show!
- **Know that people want you to succeed.** Audiences are rooting for you! They want you to be interesting, stimulating, informative, and entertaining, and they are listening to you, so seize the opportunity!
- **Don't apologize.** Mentioning your nervousness or apologizing for perceived problems with your speech will work against you; it'll get the audience to look for flaws in your presentation and make you seem uncertain, thereby damaging your message. Take a deep breath and exude confidence.
- **Concentrate on your message.** You're the expert—that's why you've been asked or invited to speak, so keep your eye on the prize and your focus on getting the audience to embrace your message.

■ Tips on Speaking at Public Meetings

- **Arrive early.** Check in to make sure you are on the agenda, and introduce yourself. When speaking to the committee or council, identify yourself and state your position on the bill.

- **Speak to the governing body through the chairperson** (committee, board, or council chairperson). It is best to address the chair as "Madame Chair" or "Mr. Chair" or the city/county council member as "Council member So-and-so" or board member as "Supervisor So-and-so" so that it will be easy to follow the testimony when listening to tapes of recorded meetings.
- **Be concise.** Make your key points, and provide specific information about why your position is in the state's/city's/county's best interests. Legislators and officials want to know what, if anything, has been done in other states, what the costs might be, and what groups support or oppose your proposal. Include the answers in your statement.
- **Be prepared to answer questions.** The best way to make your case is to provide straightforward answers to the legislators'/officials' questions. If you don't know the answer, say so and promise to find out and get back to them.
- **Hand out written summaries** of the key points of your presentation to each committee/council member.
- **Offer to help.** Citizens play a key role in writing state or local policy. Ask if there is anything you can do to help get the proposal in question approved or defeated.
- **Be respectful.** Your views are important and you have a right to be treated courteously by all members and staff. Likewise, legislators and officials are more likely to respond to polite treatment than to browbeating. There are many sides to every issue. Understand the difficult position that legislators are in when reaching their decisions.