

Candidates are people, too!

Tips for engaging with your candidates

Election season may feel like a time when we're inundated with information and flashy political ads, which can be a major turn-off when it's time to learn more about the people who seek to represent us. But as voters, election season is a prime opportunity for us to get to know our candidates and help them see what's most important to the people in their district. Think Babies Michigan has put together some tips to make engaging with candidates less stressful...and more personal.

1. Look up their bio and learn about their personal history. Do they have children? Are they a grandparent? Do you have any interests in common? Take this opportunity to make a personal connection with them.
2. Share your story. Why?
 - Most brains are wired to remember stories and to empathize with the experience.
 - Data alone won't move hearts and minds.
 - Personal stories help show how systems impact people's lives and reveal the whole person behind the issue.
3. Position yourself as an expert, whether you are a parent, a provider, an advocate, or all three. You know best about your child and the community you serve. This is an opportunity to share what the candidate needs to know about what you need to make sure parents and babies can thrive in your area—don't assume they already know.
4. Listen to their ideas and responses. Give them a chance to share their views.
5. Be prepared to hear their opposition. And be prepared to respond with more support for your issue, but try to remain neutral and composed.
6. Provide handouts or other written materials so the candidate will be able to review the materials after your conversation.
7. Prepare. The candidate will not have a lot of time to spare, so make sure you're clear and concise with your message. Use the guide on the back of this sheet to help yourself organize your thoughts.



Plan out your questions in advance

To ask the most powerful question you can, that will elicit an equally powerful response, it is important to create and practice your question before an event or meeting with a candidate. Use this worksheet to create your own message-based question.

Start with an introduction.

Give the candidate a simple introduction. This is as easy as stating your name and one other fact, such as why you are attending the event.

Hi, my name is _____ and I am here because _____.

Provide a short story.

Giving a short story helps the candidate connect the question back to real life situations and gives more power to the question. Write a quick two or three sentences to tell a story related to the issue you would like to ask about.

Tie in the issue.

Give a follow-up to your story that connects your personal story to a particular policy issue. Again, this doesn't need to be long, just a quick sentence or two.

Make the hard ask.

This is where you directly ask the candidate what they would do to help solve your problem. Do not offer them a solution, just ask the most basic question about the issue that you can and let them elaborate on it in their answer.

Put it all together to finalize your opening statement and question.

Here's an example of this strategy in action:

Hi, my name is Jordan Jones, and I'm here because my community needs a strong voice in the legislature that will fight for what we need.

A few years ago, I was working full time at a retail store, and things were tight financially. My two kids were in day care, and we qualified for child care subsidies, but our co-pays were still really high. My hours got bumped down—just slightly below full time—and it became impossible for me to work AND afford child care. I ended up quitting my job to stay home with the kids, and it caused me to make some scary decisions, like whether to go to the doctor when we were sick, whether to skip meals when we were low on cash, or whether we could get by with our electricity cut off.

Things are better now, one of the kids is in school and I was able to get my full time job back, but I never want to live like that again, and I don't want anyone to have to deal with that stress. **What will you do to make sure families like mine can afford child care?**



Think Babies Michigan is a collaborative of thousands of members—leaders, experts, families, organizations and providers—working together to improve the lives of babies prenatally through age 3 in Michigan.