

ADVOCACY GUIDE: RESOURCE 9

Adapting to Audiences and Navigating Power Dynamics

Before your remarks, ask:

- **Who is your audience?**
 - What type and level of decision-making are they involved in?
 - What is their top priority?
- **What do they already know?**
 - What do they think they know about you?
 - What background knowledge do they have on this topic?
 - What past experiences have they had with this topic?
 - How are their lives different or similar to yours?
- **What do they want to know?**
 - What are they worried about?
 - What are they excited about?
 - What motivates them?
- **What keeps their attention?**
 - What level of detail interests them?
 - What level of detail do they need to be persuaded?
 - Which are they more likely to believe: research and data or personal experiences told through stories?
 - What helps them learn (examples, slides, visuals)?

During your remarks, observe:

- **Signs of power** (i.e. who people look at for approval, how people are seated, who speaks the most, who controls the conversation)
- **Affirmative and interested behavior** (i.e. nods, smiles, note-taking, leaning forward, direct eye contact, relaxed body language)
- **Signs of confusion** (i.e. furrowed brow, scowls, looking around at others, stiff and uncomfortable body language)
- **Signs of disinterest** (i.e. vacant eyes, looking at phone or clock)
- **Type of follow up** (i.e. whether people respond with interested follow up or changing the subject)
- **Topics for follow up** (i.e. what topics people focus on during any follow-up (i.e. are they getting caught up on particular details, do they need more clarity, are they exploring possibilities and ideas)

During your remarks, adjust:

- **Restate relevance and credibility.** Be clear about why your content is relevant to them and why you know what you're talking about.
- **Take the time to teach, without being condescending.** Offer more examples, explain what they don't already know, and define terms.
- **Modify your time.** Spend more time on something of interest and move on more quickly when losing attention. Pose rhetorical questions when you feel you are losing them.
- **Build background.** Make comparisons to something they know and build upon their prior knowledge. Highlight stories and examples that are unexpected, surprising, and different from their experiences.
- **Revisit top priorities.** Address their questions and concerns before they even mention them, based on what you know they care about.

