

TIPS FOR CONGRESSIONAL VISITS

There are a variety of potential reasons for meeting with your Member of Congress or Congressional staff: to provide information, to build relationships with Congressional offices, to ask for support, to request a specific action, to request that an action not occur. These meetings are an effective way to communicate your message. Whether the visit occurs on Capitol Hill or in your home district, your visit also provides an opportunity for you to build a relationship with you member of Congress and his or her Congressional staff. Your visit should help establish you as a resource or expert on the issues. Below are some suggestions to consider when preparing for a meeting with a Congressional office.

Prior to Your Meeting:

1. Be prepared and do your homework ahead of time; bring written supporting materials to leave with the member of Congress or staff.
2. Determine who in your group will talk about what in the meeting so as to sequence the set of speakers.

Your Meeting:

1. Observe Security Measures

- Heightened security measures have dramatically increased the time it takes to enter a building so expect long lines and delays.
- Plan to arrive at an office building at least 15 minutes before your scheduled meeting.
- Remove coins, metal objects, and heavy jewelry from pockets and place all materials on conveyor belts.

2. Be punctual, patient, and courteous

- Turn off your cell phone priority going into the meeting.
- Express appreciation to the person you are visiting for the time spent and the opportunity to present your case.
- Expect interruptions, tardiness, cancellations and rescheduled visits. Expect mistakes in scheduling, bells ringing, and early departures. Anticipate changes with whom you meet. Be flexible.

3. Be Personable

- Be prepared to tell a personal story that illustrates your connection to the issue. Telling personal stories is an important way to connect with members of Congress and demonstrate why your issues are important.
- As a constituent, you are very important to your member of Congress. Make sure to explain how your issues affect you and other constituents.
- Offer further resources or assistance in the future. Remember, you're the expert.
- Exchange contact information, follow up on your meeting and work to maintain your new relationship in the future.

4. Be Prepared

- Know with whom you are talking, what they do, and their position in the office.
- Be prepared and equipped to state the reason for your visit: if you want action taken, then what action, and when or for whom, and why.

- Hill offices are busy and you might not get more than 15 minutes to meet. Plan your presentation to last 15 minutes to ensure you get your major talking points across. You may have the opportunity to meet longer so be ready to spend additional time educating members of Congress or staff.

- Make your most important points clearly, succinctly and specifically.

5. Be Political

- Be honest, candid and relaxed. Use a conversational tone in your presentation.
- Members of Congress want to represent the best interests of their constituents and have many demands of their time and attention. Your #1 interest may not be their #1 interest. Whenever possible, demonstrate the connection between what you are requesting and the interests of the members' constituency. Put a "face" on the issue.
- Where appropriate, ask for a commitment.
- Expect a neutral reaction as you rarely will get a firm commitment on the spot. A favorable response is a commitment to "do the best possible." A more likely response is to consider the proposal.
- Don't be surprised by the lack of interest or negative response.
- Don't respond by being argumentative and don't be defensive.

6. Be Responsive

- Be prepared to answer questions or provide additional information.
- If you don't know the answer to something, state that you will get back to them.
- Express thanks for the opportunity to meet and discuss your issues.
- Describe how you or your group can be of assistance in the future.
- Follow up the meeting with a thank you letter outlining your points and include any information requested.

Planning Your Visit Carefully

1. Be clear about what it is you want to achieve; determine in advance which member or committee staff you need to meet with to achieve your purpose.
2. Visits should be planned with sufficient time to account for late meetings, to allow time to get from one place to another and to expect down-time between meetings.
3. Establish your appointment with the appointment secretary or scheduler for a member of Congress or arrange it directly with the staffer.
4. Explain your purpose and whom you represent.
5. Determine length of time you will have for the meeting.