

Guidelines for a Site Visit by Members of Congress

Overview: One of the most effective ways to educate members of Congress about occupational therapy and the many Government Relations issues which affect the profession is to have them visit a facility to see firsthand what services you provide and how they help so many of their constituents. Such visits can leave a lasting impression that can help the profession when it comes time to vote on important legislative initiatives.

Members of Congress are receptive to opportunities to tour programs in their district or state. It gives them a chance to meet constituents (who are voters and potential supporters) and learn about their concerns firsthand. With health care policy being such an important issue to so many Americans, every member of Congress wants to be informed about the issues.

Following are some guidelines for planning and accomplishing a site visit. Do not hesitate to contact ANCOR staff members to assist you in any way.

Plan the visit carefully. Be clear about what you want to achieve, determine in advance which issues you want to address, and assess how the site you choose for the visit can illustrate those issues. Work with all the staff and clients at the site to assure that everyone is informed and prepared to speak to the issues.

Make an appointment. When attempting to set up a site visit, contact the local, state or district office of your Representative or Senator. Ask to speak with the appointments secretary or scheduler. Explain your purpose and whom you represent. You may want to submit a written request and follow up very soon afterwards with a telephone call. You may also work through the member's Washington, D.C. office.

If you are prepared to set up a site visit, ask for that first and take an individual private appointment as an alternative. If you are unable to set up a site visit, private meetings can also be effective.

These Visits Should:

- Be organized during a recess. Members of Congress often return home on weekends too, so visits or meetings may be scheduled at this time as well.
- Help you to become more involved with other health care activities of the member, such as town meetings they may hold. They may also have health care or budget advisory committees or groups that help Members get information from key health care professionals and other citizens.

Be prompt and patient. When it is time to meet with a Member of Congress, be punctual and be patient. It is not uncommon for them to be late, to have a meeting interrupted (due to their crowded schedules), or to allow too little time for a thorough visit. If interruptions do occur, be flexible. When the opportunity presents itself, continue your meeting with the staff if possible. For site visits, schedule the heart of the presentation at the beginning. Get right to the point in case the Representative or Senator must depart early.

These Visits Should:

- Focus on the issues important to individuals with disabilities, demonstrating them through state-of-the-art examples that quickly show the importance of providers.

- Allow the member of Congress to ask questions and to have informal discussions about experiences and problems.

Be prepared. Have available at the visit site materials that concisely present your issues. Personalize any materials with stories of individuals or with concrete examples of issues. Contact the ANCOR Government Relations department for up-to-date materials on the current legislative issues.

These Visits Will Be Most Effective If:

- Everyone involved knows what they will do and say.
- Rehearsal is done to make sure everything goes smoothly.
- Everyone works together to convey a positive message.

Be political. Members of Congress want to represent the best interests of their district or state. Wherever possible, demonstrate the connection between the issue and the his/her constituents. For instance, discuss local problems with health care access in particular communities or discuss specific provider problems using local examples. If possible, describe how you and your group can be of assistance to the member of Congress. Where it is appropriate, ask for a commitment on a particular issue.

These Visits Should:

- Be focused on real examples from real people.
- Give a local flavor while representing national issues.
- Give the member of Congress specific ideas about what changes are needed.

Be responsive. Be prepared to answer questions or provide additional information in the event the member expresses interest or asks questions. Follow up the meeting with a thank you letter that outlines the different points covered during the meeting, and send along any additional information and materials.

These Visits Should:

- Be the starting point for an ongoing, positive relationship with the member of Congress.

Give us feedback. What you learn during these visits is very important to the ANCOR Government Relations program. Please share pertinent information by completing [the Congressional State/District Visit Report](#), and send us copies of any follow-up correspondence. Please return the form to Mary Pauline Jones, e-mail mpjones@ancor.org, or fax to 703-535-7860. Please contact us at 703-535-7850 ext. 108 should you have any questions, concerns, or need more information.