



Federal Advocacy:

Effective Meetings with Congress

Getting Started

Congress can be confusing, but the Office of Federal Relations is here to help! We are happy to help coordinate meetings, message and outreach. Contact us at (202) 624-1420 or www.washington.edu/federalrelations/.

What is the Hill Like?

THE OFFICES: Particularly on the House side, the offices are small and have limited space. Additionally, there will be other groups there to meet with other staff at the same time. It can and will be crowded. **In fact, many offices are so cramped that meetings may occur in informal settings like the reception area, cafeteria, hallway or even in an elevator as the legislator is on the way to vote. This is not a sign of disrespect.** Be patient and prepared to wait.

THE WALKING: United States Capitol Complex is a group of about a dozen buildings and facilities. North of the Capitol building are three Senate office buildings and to the south are three House office buildings. The Senate and House buildings are approximately a quarter mile apart. Meetings will be spread out across all three of these buildings. Be prepared to walk.

THE SECURITY: To get in and out of the office buildings you will have to through security. Much like an airport, you will have to walk through a metal detector and have belongings screened. Plan on having a bag to carry your personal items so you can have empty pockets to facilitate screening.

THE DRESS CODE: The Hill is a conservative place where the suit and tie are the office attire of choice. Be aware that dress tends to be more formal than everywhere else in the country.

Why Meet with Congress?

A Member of Congress is elected to represent the people in a specific district or state. Elected officials and their staff make decisions on funding measures and grant programs; support tax incentives to encourage federal investment in research and education, and a host of other issues that directly impact the UW, and their decisions are based on information they seek out or provided to them. Therefore, it is critical to meet with Members of Congress to discuss issues pertinent to federal research and education.

Don't be intimidated! An important part of the Member's job is to listen to constituents and then make informed decisions based on these conversations. **You** have firsthand knowledge of the importance of research, its role in innovation and its impact on the region, nation, and global community. Members of Congress listen to constituents, particularly those who have knowledge in the area they are advocating. Additionally, someone from the Federal Relations team is happy to guide you through the meetings and accompany you all day.

According to Members of Congress and staffers, in-person visits from constituents are the **most influential way** to communicate with a Senator or Representative on an issue of federal concern. This was just one of the findings in the 2011 Congressional Management Foundation report *Perceptions of Citizen Advocacy on Capitol Hill*. Most of the congressional staff surveyed said constituent visits to the Washington office (97%) and to the district/state office (94%) have "some" or "a lot" of influence on a legislator, more than any other strategy for communicating with a Member of Congress.

Advocacy takes many forms. It is educating the Hill to instill a better understanding of the discipline and its contributions to society. It is briefing Members of Congress to reinforce the connection between research and policy goals. It is lobbying for budget appropriations that support research and education programs throughout the federal funding infrastructure.



Know Your Audience

When crafting a message, consider the recipient. Congressional offices are busy places. Though constituent contact is extremely important, the congressional schedule and demands can make this challenging. Members and staff are bombarded from all sides with data and opinions, many of them unsolicited. Though Senators and Representatives want to meet with constituents, because of these competing demands, getting on their calendars and influencing the policy decision-making process requires preparation on the part of advocates. Members rely heavily on their staff. Staffers have a great deal of influence and can be instrumental in conveying the significance of an issue to the Member.

There are two inherent types of congressional staff: personal office and committee staff. Most personal staffers are similar to students. They are a bit older, but most have just finished college. Many are consuming an overwhelming amount of information on a disparate number of topics within a short timeframe. They are generalists, who have portfolios with a diverse set of topics and issues but typically they do not dive too deep into the nuances. Most personal staff have been with the Member or issue for less than five years but tend to know the state or district. Information is most impactful in small bites.

Successful advocacy happens over time; there are no overnight successes.

Committee staff tend to be holder with extensive expertise, such as a masters of PhD in a specific area, most have worked in the area for a significant amount of time (many years). Committees have staffs for both the minority and majority sides, as does each subcommittee. Because of the nature of working on the committee, the staffs tend to know the issue very well, but might not be as knowledgeable about the local aspects and impacts.

Elements of a Successful Meeting

PICK A LEADER: Pick a spokesperson who will kick off the meeting with an introduction, giving context for why you are there.

BE ON TIME: Congressional offices are busy, crowded places. Try to arrive no more than five minutes before an appointment and let the front desk know if attendees are going to be even a few minutes late.

SAY THANK YOU: Their days are busy and stressful. Everyone likes a compliment and it helps kick the meeting off positively.

BE BRIEF: Expect meetings will last from 15-20 minutes. Members and staff have high demands on their time, so meetings tend to be short and to the point. Plan on having an "Elevator Speech" that communicates your issues or concerns.

HAVE AN ASK: Have a specific way they can help. Typical requests would be to support or sponsor legislation, vote a certain way, write a letter, fund an account, alter federal policy, attend an event or just be supportive of your efforts. Regardless of the request, make sure you clearly communicate what you want them to do and express why.

DISTRIBUTE MINIMAL PAPERWORK: Have a one pager that covers the essentials of the meeting's. Use it as a reference point during the meeting and not additional materials brought to leave behind. Remember, you have limited time and want to have time for questions, so be prepared to have an "Elevator Speech" ready.

BE A RESOURCE: Offer to be a resource for the office on this topic and invite the Member and staff to visit.

FOLLOW UP: After your meeting, follow up with a thank you email to the people you met with. Also if new information about the issue is released, attendees should contact the office to call their attention to it. That said, there is a fine line between timely and reinforcing and inundation. Be judicious in your correspondence and cc' Federal Relations.

The Elevator Speech

You never know whom you might bump into on the Hill. Prepare a brief "elevator speech" that summarizes your concerns in case you run into an elected official or stakeholder and have the opportunity for a very brief conversation.

This speech should be **three to five sentences** that communicates the crux of the reason you are in DC as well as what you are asking offices to do. It should last no more than **one minute**.