



Direct Lobbying

By meeting and developing relationships with your representatives and senators and their aides, you will demonstrate that there is a constituency who cares about your issue. You can use these resources to prepare for meetings with your members of Congress (MOCs).

Tips on Scheduling a Meeting with Your Member of Congress

In Washington, DC

1. Make a list of what you want to say to the scheduler and have it with you when you make the call. It may sound silly, and you may never even look at it, but it will definitely boost your confidence. The scheduler will ask for the date, the topic of your meeting and approximately how many will be attending the meeting.
2. Call the Capitol Switchboard at (202) 224-3121 and ask to be connected to your member of Congress' office; dial the number directly if you have it.
3. Ask to speak to the scheduler. If he or she is unavailable, leave a message with your name and phone number requesting a meeting. Your phone call will most likely be returned; however, if you do not hear back from the scheduler by the next day, call again. Remember that these people are very busy, but ultimately they work for you, and it is fully within your rights to ask to see and speak to your MOC. Keep making follow-up calls until you speak to the scheduler directly. When you speak to him or her directly, ask to have a face-to-face meeting with your MOC and the aide who works on the specific issue.
4. Inform the scheduler you will be faxing a request for the meeting with all of the pertinent information they require. You may want to ask if they would like it emailed as well.
5. Thank the scheduler for his or her time and let him/her know you will be reconfirming your meeting the week before.
6. Congratulations - the hard part is over and you have the meeting secured. Last, but certainly not least, make a note to reconfirm your meeting the Friday before your appointment is scheduled. It is always better to be safe than sorry.

In Your Local District

1. Every MOC handles scheduling differently, so it's best to begin by looking at your MOC's website and learning how his/her office would prefer you to request the meeting.
2. Most MOCs have multiple district offices - you can find a list of offices on their websites. Make sure to submit your meeting request to the office where you intend to have the meeting.
3. If you are interested in meeting with your member of Congress, not just the staffer, it's best to consult [the Congressional Schedule](#). Request a meeting during a congressional recess, when MOCs are working in their district offices, or request a Monday meeting, when MOCs may still be in-district after a weekend at home.

4. When requesting the meeting, it is not necessary to know the name of the staffer or the scheduler; you can simply direct the request to “scheduling.”
5. A staff member should be in touch with you in a week or two. If you submit your request via e-mail, it is likely you will receive an acknowledgement e-mail telling you when to expect a follow-up. If you do not hear from the office, you should call and ask to speak with the district scheduler. Clarify that you have already submitted a written meeting request.
6. It may take several weeks to finalize your meeting, so make sure to send in your request well in advance of the proposed meeting date.

You may or may not be able to meet with your member of Congress directly, but don't be discouraged. Meeting with key aides is of vital importance in developing a relationship with your representative or senator. Developing a good relationship with a congressional aide can open the door for a face-to-face meeting with your member. Get the ear of a good aide, and you've got the ear of the congressperson.

Tips for a Powerful Meeting with Your Member of Congress

Before the meeting:

- **Do your homework.** Find out what issues your representatives or senators care about. You can do this by taking a look at their websites (available at <http://www.house.gov/> or <http://www.senate.gov/>), asking their local offices for their newsletters, reading the members' biographies in *Politics in America* or finding out what congressional committees they sit on (available on their website).
- **Be prepared.** Practice speaking. After you create an agenda for the meeting, each person with a speaking part should create a brief two or three minute talk for their section and practice it with at least one other person. Be brief, clear and to the point and don't be afraid to show your passion. If there are a few of you attending the meeting, prepare a mock session with each other in advance.
- **Understand the counter-argument(s)** to the issue and prepare a rebuttal as to why your proposal is best.
- **Choose a secretary and manager for the meeting.** Choose one person who will be responsible for taking notes and writing down any commitments your member of Congress made and any follow up that needs to be done after the meeting. Also, choose someone who will “manage” the overall meeting, keeping the group on task and making sure all the requests are covered.
- **Inspire yourselves.** Prior to the meeting, spend at least a few minutes having each person speak about why he/she cares about this issue and why you are going to this meeting.

At the meeting:

- **Connect with your representatives, senators and aides.** Establish a personal connection with your member of Congress and their aide in the meeting by asking them to share their goals and the issues they care about. Share your own vision and concerns.

- **Acknowledge your member of Congress.** It is rare that our representatives and senators hear the words “thank you” from their constituents. Always thank them for the supportive actions they have taken or just be sure to thank them for taking the time to meet with you. Most likely your point person in the office will be a legislative aide, but be sure to take time to thank him or her as well.
- **Be concise.** Summarize your request in 5 minutes or less.
- **Be prepared to summarize opponents’ arguments on the issue.** Know the other side of the coin. There may be very articulate arguments against what you are asking for. Be prepared and do your homework on any opposition. Have talking points prepared to defend your position. Never attack. If you don’t know the answer or how to respond, tell the aide or congressperson you will get them further information.
- **Be open for discussion.** Fair, balanced and thoughtful conversations will keep the door to your member’s office open even if you don’t find common ground. Always leave with a thank you and a commitment to follow up with relevant information.
- **Make the issues real.** One of the most powerful ways we can advocate for our issues is to have someone speak who has been directly affected by these issues and can tell their experiences. Another possibility is to tell the story of a specific family or to show a video during your meeting that puts your legislator in the shoes of others for a few minutes and makes the issues real.
- **Paint the big picture and the small picture.** For example, one person could tell how the issue has affected her/him personally (the small picture); then, someone else could flesh out the current national or global statistics and impact (the big picture).
- **Make specific, clear requests and ask for an answer.** Often, the main reason groups have unsatisfactory meetings is that their requests were not clear and specific enough. Your members of Congress need to know what you want them to do (what bill you want them to sponsor, what other representative or senator you want them to speak to, how you want them to vote). However, in addition to the specific requests you bring, don’t be afraid to ask the senator or representative what else they see they could do on your issue (whether they say yes or no to your original request).
- **Know your next steps.** In the meeting, ensure that the next steps for follow up are clear (what your group will do next, what the legislator/aide will do next) and that you know which aides to contact for follow up.
- **After the meeting**, send a prompt thank you note and follow up on requests with the aide.
- ***Don’t forget to ask for a business card!***

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