Food Research & Action Center

TIPS FOR CAPITOL HILL VISITS: ARRANGING YOUR VISIT

Arranging Your Capitol Hill Visit

- **CALL AHEAD** to schedule an appointment with your Members of Congress ("Members") or the Congressional Aide assigned to work on your specific issue. Requests to meet with Members may need to be in writing. All information can be found through your Members' website, www.house.gov and www.senate. gov. The Capitol switchboard is 202-225-3121.
- **KNOW YOUR MEMBERS.** Do some research: look up your Members' biographical information, resume, congressional committee assignments, caucuses joined, and voting records.
- **PREPARE A CONCISE ONE-PAGE FACT SHEET** to leave behind. The fact sheet should be simple and to the point. You can include any of the following suggestions:
  - Descriptions of the problems you want solved and specifically what actions you want your Members to take to solve them;
  - Information about your organization — services you provide or impacts your program has in the District/State;
  - Local press clippings; and
  - Supplement your leave-behind with photographs and easy-to-understand charts and graphs that make your point. If you have been unable to get your Members to visit your agency, prepare a document that captures the services you provide.
- **RESEARCH OPPOSING VIEWS AND PREPARE TALKING POINTS** that address these concerns. Know how to counter an argument respectfully when it disagrees with your position. Back up your position with facts and statistics; avoid moral or emotionally charged arguments.

Before Your Visit

Keep in mind that your visit may be cut short, so be well organized. Choose one person to serve as a facilitator. This person will organize introductions, make opening remarks, and keep things flowing.

Pre-Visit Checklist:

- ☐ **BE ON TIME:** Allow time to get through building security.
- ☐ **BE PATIENT:** Members/Aides are often running late due to hearings, meetings, votes.
- ☐ **BE PREPARED:** If your appointment gets cut short, make sure you have a "two-minute elevator ask" (i.e., your "quick pitch" if you run into a Member).

During Your Visit

- **DETERMINE THE AMOUNT OF TIME** the group will have with Members/Aides.
- **INTRODUCE ALL MEMBERS OF THE GROUP.** Unless you are part of an extremely large group, be sure every person has something to add to the discussion.
- **STAY ON TOPIC.** Keep the presentation simple and straightforward. Present your issues briefly and persuasively.
- **EMPHASIZE THE DISTRICT/ STATE.** Talk about local examples and the impact your work has in your community. Relate a specific incident or story that describes how the issue/proposal will affect your district, business, the people you serve — your community.
- **BE SPECIFIC.** "The Ask" — Do not leave legislative visits without being clear and specific about what you want your Members to do (e.g., sign a letter to the President, cosponsor a bill, vote for or against a bill).

Have the bill/proposal or bill number with you that you want to discuss. Your Members should know exactly what you expect from him or her.

Lobbying Dos and Don'ts

DO ...

- ☐ Tell them you're a constituent or have programs that serve constituents.
- ☐ Demonstrate your broad community-based support.
- ☐ Be brief and listen respectfully.
- ☐ Find common ground.
- ☐ Focus on specific issues and proposals, not vague goals.
- ☐ Keep the long-term perspective.
- ☐ Tailor your remarks and presentation to the time allotted.

DON'T ...

- ☐ Make long speeches.
- ☐ Ignore the staff — despite their young age, they have substantial knowledge and influence.
- ☐ Be afraid to say, "I don't know." You can always research information and get back to them later.
- ☐ Be partisan or argumentative.
- ☐ Forget to invite your Members to visit your program and follow-up after the meeting.
- ☐ Forget "The Ask" during the meeting (be specific).
- ☐ Forget to thank your Members/Aides for their time, even if they don't agree with your position — there's always a next time!

After Your Visit

HAVE A FOLLOW-UP PLAN to monitor progress and build a relationship:

- Send a thank-you note for the meeting;
- Send any relevant information requested during the meeting;
- Add your Members to your mailing list (newsletters, press releases, invitations to local events);
- Invite your Members to visit your agency, tour your facility, or see a program in action; and
- Keep in touch regularly with your Members/Aides and send studies, reports, and news items related to your program.

Contacting Hill Offices

Email

Email addresses of House and Senate staff usually* follow the format below:

- **House staff:** Firstname[dot]lastname[at]mail[dot]house[dot]gov (e.g., Jane.Doe@mail.house.gov).
- **Senate staff:** First name[underscore]last name[at]Senator's last name[dot]senate[dot]gov (e.g., Jane_Doe@Durbin.senate.gov).

Facebook

- Most Members of Congress have a Facebook account. Becoming friends or "liking" your Members is a great way to follow what he or she is doing in DC and back in the state or District. To see if your Members are on Facebook, go to www.facebook.com and search for your Members.

Twitter

Tweet your Members of Congress! Twitter is an easy way to contact your Members of Congress. Once you have a Twitter account set up, contact your Members by finding their Twitter handle and composing a tweet with his or her handle in it.

- Example: @(Twitter handle) Do you know that 43.6 million Americans rely on SNAP?

Remember, a tweet can only contain 140 characters (including spaces and punctuation marks); so include a link to your organization's website if you can't fit all of the information in one tweet.

When you are composing your tweets, try to use hashtags (#) that other tweeters are using so your message will be part of the larger conversation. You can find out what hashtags others are using by searching for the topics on your homepage on Twitter. #EndHungerNow or #summermeals.

**Sometimes Committee staff use a slightly different format with the name of the committee in the email address (e.g., Jane_Doe@agriculture.senate.gov).*