

GUIDE FOR EFFECTIVE MEETINGS WITH MEMBERS OF CONGRESS AND STAFF

Members of Congress have very busy schedules and cannot meet with all of the constituents who request a meeting on a given day. A constituent meeting that the member planned to attend might be interrupted or cancelled by an unscheduled vote. As a result, members rely heavily upon their staff members who have a great deal of influence and can be helpful in conveying the significance of an issue to the member.

10 Tips for Effective Meetings with Your Members of Congress

1. Be punctual—Arrive to the meetings on time; not too early and not late.
2. Select a spokesperson—If you are in a group of people, you should select a spokesperson. Although everyone should contribute to the conversation, you should have one person who will begin the discussion. Generally after introductions are made you might be asked why you are in Washington. The spokesperson should be prepared to briefly explain and then highlight the main issues that the group members want to discuss. Decide in advance who will discuss each issue so that your visit will run smoothly.
3. Do your research—Research your Members' backgrounds, committee assignments and voting records on education issues.
4. Emphasize local concerns—One of your biggest assets is that you understand how things work at the local level. Members and their staffs are always eager to hear how federal programs and funding are being implemented at the local level. This is your chance to relay this information. Lobbying with real life experiences is your most persuasive tool.
5. Ask directly for your Congress members' support—If your member of Congress is supportive, ask him or her to lobby other members of Congress to support your position. If your member of Congress disagrees with your position, hear him or her out politely, express respectful disappointment, and rebut his/her argument if you have the facts to do so. Be courteous; you'll have other issues to take up in the future.
6. Distribute minimal paperwork.
7. Know how to handle a difficult question—If during the meeting you are asked a question and you do not know the answer, inform the member or staffer that you will need to look into that issue and that you would be happy to get back in touch with the requested information. Be certain to get a business card so that you can contact the person with the information as soon as possible.
8. Thank your members of Congress—Everyone likes a pat on the back.
9. Invite your members of Congress back home—Invite your members of Congress back home to visit your schools. Ask for the name of the person who handles scheduling requests for the member so that you can follow-up with a formal invitation.
10. Write a follow-up letter—Send the member a follow-up letter thanking him or her for meeting with you. This is an excellent opportunity to reiterate the issues that were discussed during the meeting.