



A_{FOR}A'S CONGRESSIONAL ADVOCACY TOOLKIT

HOW TO NAVIGATE CONGRESS & WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT:

In today's environment, most advocacy is happening virtually, but hopefully soon we will return to in person meetings so you are able to experience visiting the capitol and members' offices. Advocating to a member of Congress' staff can be daunting, but it is their job to listen to your concerns because they are there to serve their constituents' needs.

These conversations are extremely important to Senators and Representatives as the conversations help inform what policies a member should support in order to represent the interests of their constituents and state. Before considering introducing or cosponsoring legislation, many, if not all, members will consider how the legislation affects their state and if they have received outreach from their constituents on the issue. Hearing from a constituent on an issue can be the deciding factor on whether the member signs onto a bill or advocates for an issue.

Sometimes this process can seem very opaque and daunting, which is why we have created a general toolkit for what you can expect when participating in an advocacy day on Capitol Hill. You are the best person to advocate for the needs of our region - we want you to be empowered to do that!



DEFINITIONS OF POSITIONS:

There are several positions in a member of Congress's office that help keep the office operating. Below are a list of policy staffer positions who you will meet with during your visit on Capitol Hill. It is important to note that no one policy staffer covers all policy areas so you may have multiple staffers meeting with you if your ask covers multiple issue areas.

- **Legislative Correspondent:** Legislative Correspondents are primarily responsible for communicating with constituents of the Representative or Senator through letters, phone calls, and meetings on behalf of the member. They cover specific issue areas and work with Legislative Assistants on policy memos, legislation drafts, and advising the member on the issue areas they cover.
- **Legislative Aide:** Legislative Aides typically have more policy experience than a Legislative Correspondent, but occasionally will also do constituent outreach. They cover specific issue areas and occasionally work with Legislative Assistants on policy memos, legislation drafts, and advising the member on the issue areas they cover.
- **Legislative Assistant:** Legislative Assistants are typically the lead advisor to a Senator or Representative on the issue areas they cover. They have extensive knowledge on the policy areas they cover. This staffer is the lead in advising the member on their issue areas, drafting legislation, writing policy memos, and directing the member's policy agenda on the issue areas the staffer covers.

You will most likely meet with either the Legislative Correspondent or Legislative Aide as they are the primary policy contact for constituents.



HOW TO SCHEDULE A MEETING & WHO TO CONTACT:

All Congressional offices will have an address for their in-state or in-district offices, as well as their location in DC. They will also have contact numbers and a portal or an email address to submit questions or meeting requests. If they provide an email address, that will be more reliable than the online system. If you don't hear back in 3 days, try a phone call and ask for the "scheduler's" email.

Sample meeting request email:

Constituent Meeting Request: *[Your Name or Org Name, Issue]*

Good morning,

I hope this note finds you well. My name is *[Name]*, and I'm a constituent from *[Town, State]*. I'm reaching out today to request a *[virtual or in-person]* 30-minute meeting with *[Rep. Name or Sen. Name]* or *[the staffer that handles your issue]* on *[date]*.

[1-2 sentences about who you are and your group. Ex: I'm a member of Appalachians for Appalachia, a nonprofit that uplifts the voices of progressive Appalachians. We aim to nurture, empower and amplify regional organizations and leadership in order to build robust, vibrant, and just communities throughout Central Appalachia.]

I would be so grateful for the opportunity to speak with your office about *[the issue you are there to discuss]* and other issues impacting Appalachian communities.

Please let me know what availability on *[date range, e.g. April 3 or April 4th]* from *[time range, e.g. 9am to 11am]* might have for this meeting.

Thank you for considering this request. I hope to hear from you soon.

Kindest regards,

[Your name]

[Contact number]



WHAT TO EXPECT IN A MEETING:

One of the most daunting things about taking a meeting with Congress is not knowing what to expect once you walk through the door of a Congressional office. The thing most folks don't know is that these folks are here to serve YOU. They aren't going to ask you any "gotcha" questions, and they aren't likely to be hostile - you're their constituent, and they want you to leave the office having had a good experience.

WHAT KIND OF MESSAGE WORKS:

Be goal-oriented:

- Winning advocacy has clear goals. It's important when entering a meeting with a member of Congress or their staff to tell them your "ask" up-front. That way they can ask the appropriate questions and send the proper information up the ladder. Many Congressional offices list "no clear ask" as the top complaint they have with advocates.

Remember your WHY:

- People respond to authenticity. If you let them know why its worth YOUR time, they'll likely be more likely to believe it's worth THEIR time.

Being an "expert" doesn't matter:

- Contrary to popular belief, expert advocates representing big organizations are not really the people that members of Congress and their staff want to meet with. You are much more impactful as an involved citizen and voter

Tell YOUR unique story:

- We can't stress this enough - storytelling is what makes good advocacy great. Make sure that in every interaction you are highlighting how your issue is impacting you,



your community, your group, your kids, your schools, and so on. Long after members of congress and staff forget facts and figures, they will remember YOU and the story you told.

Make the ask!:

- One of the biggest complaints that Congressional offices have when advocates come into their offices is that they didn't make a clear ask of them. Many times advocates fall into the trap of educating members and staff without asking to do anything, and that can be a deadly cycle for change. So - always make your ask and make it clear!

When you're done with your meeting, always take stock of what happened and what could be better next time. Ask questions like:

- Did I accomplish my goal in the meeting?
- Did I make a compelling argument with a storytelling aspect?
- Did I leave them feeling like they needed to take action?
- What could I have done to make my point better?