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Congressional Meetings 101

Scheduling Congressional Visits

Face-to-face meetings – even in a virtual environment – are among the most effective ways to influence lawmakers. **If you are unable to see your representative, you should still meet with their staff.** The staff of elected officials work on legislative, regulatory, and policy issues every day and greatly influence the positions and votes of their bosses.

How to Arrange the Meeting

1. If you need to find out who the members of your state’s congressional delegation are, visit www.congress.gov/members/find-your-member and add your address in the search box at the top of the page.
2. Google the representative for contact information or call the U.S. Capitol Switchboard at (202) 224-3121. A switchboard operator will connect you directly with the office you request.
 - Your call will likely be answered by an intern or junior member of the staff. Politely let them know that you are a constituent and would like the scheduler’s contact information to send them a meeting request.
 - Ask them to spell out the scheduler’s name and email address.
3. Send the meeting request via email to the scheduler, asking to meet with the senator/ representative.
 - Attaching the meeting request to the email as a pdf on your organization’s letterhead might lend some extra credibility to the request but is not required.
 - Whether you attach a formal letter or not, make sure the body of the email includes the essential information described below.
4. In the body of the email to the scheduler, include the following points:
 - “I am a constituent from [city or town in their district/state].” Or “I work for X organization (include a link to the website) in the district” or “that serves your constituents.”
 - “I am participating in the [UnidosUS Changemakers Summit](#) and would like to meet with my member of Congress.”
 - If applicable: “I will be attending the meeting with [number] Latino leaders [and/or students] from my district.”
 - Note: Be specific about which issue/s you want to discuss during the meeting, so the scheduler will know which staff person will be appropriate for the meeting.

5. Follow up: call and ask to speak with the scheduler.
 - Let them know when you sent the request and if they have a response to the meeting request. They may ask you to resend it and follow up again. It is not unusual to have to follow up a few times.
 - If the member is unavailable for a meeting, ask to meet with the staff person who handles the issues for the member that you wish to discuss.
6. Leave enough time between meetings.
 - The Capitol complex covers several blocks, so you must allow time to get from one meeting to the next.
 - Try to arrange consecutive meetings in the same buildings or buildings close to each other.
 - It is a 20-minute walk outdoors between House and Senate buildings; ideally, you would group House meetings together and Senate meetings together (the hotel is closest to the Senate side of the Capitol, FYI.)

How to Make the Most of Your Meeting with Members of Congress (Representatives/Senators).

Members of Congress and their staff are busy people and have a lot of demands on their time. Therefore, it is best that you plan your meeting in advance, so that you use the approximately 20 minutes with them as efficiently and effectively as possible.

1. Establish goals for your meeting. Are you there to:

- Introduce yourself/your organization?
- Educate the member about a problem and possible solutions in their community?
- Ask for their support of a policy or specific piece of legislation?
- Meetings are brief: set one or two goals, be prepared and concise, deliver your ask (if you have one) of the member and allow them and/or their staff to respond.

2. Prepare for the meeting in advance

- Become familiar with the congressperson/senator: What's their background? What committees do they serve on? What issues do they care about? Do they have a family, a small business, or a pet? What are their own connections to the district/state they represent?
 - Visit their website to review their bio, press releases, and legislative initiatives.
 - Peruse their social media pages to become more familiar with their priorities.
- Prepare the agenda beforehand
 - What will you meet with the member about?
 - If it is a policy issue, prepare talking points in advance so you can get your point across quickly and effectively.
 - If you want to leave information behind, put it on one page. Too much information will land in the recycling bin.
 - If you have a more extensive background to share, email it to the relevant staffer in advance or soon after the meeting.
 - Who will say what? If you are meeting as a group, divide up speaking roles.

- Have someone share their story or the story of a constituent, to bring to life your organization’s work or the policy issue you want to highlight.
 - What will you ask of the member? Unless this meeting is a meet and greet, you may want to ask the member for something: to sponsor a bill, to give a floor speech to raise your issues, or to visit your organization to further strengthen your relationship.
 - Typical outline of an agenda (plan for a 15 to 20-minute meeting)
 - Thank the member/staff for taking the time to meet.
 - Introductions (introduce yourself, your organization, others in the meeting, and how you are connected to their district/constituents).
 - Lay out, ideally in 3 concise talking points, the issues you want to raise.
 - Share a story from the district that will help to emphasize why the member should care about the issue(s) you are raising.
 - If you have an ask of the member, deliver it.
 - Allow the member to respond.
 - Wrap up, review next steps (if any), and thank the member/staff for the time.
 - What will you meet with the member about?
 - If it is a policy issue, prepare talking points in advance so you can get your point across quickly and effectively.
 - If you want to leave information behind, put it on one page. Too much information will land in the recycling bin.
 - If you have a more extensive background to share, email it to the relevant staffer in advance or soon after the meeting.
3. **Final guidance and reminders:**
- Member offices prioritize constituent meetings; they want to meet the people who they represent.
 - Congressional staff have tremendous influence over Members and are often the resident experts on certain issue areas. Do not be discouraged if you are not meeting directly with the Member.
 - If you feel like the meeting is going off track at any point, go back to your central talking points as agreed upon prior to your meeting.
 - Always thank the Member and/or staffers for their time and follow up with a thank you email and additional documents, if applicable.

Sample Email to Congressional Offices

Subject: Meeting request with Rep./Sen X for [DATE] and [TIME]

Dear [Name of Scheduler]:

My name is [Your Name], [Title] at [Organization].

I write to request a meeting with Senator/Representative X on [DAY, DATE, TIME] to discuss X issue(s).

I am a constituent from [city/town/state/district] or I work for X organization from [city/town/state/district] and am participating in the [UnidosUS Changemakers Summit](#), a major part of which includes scheduling meetings with our members of Congress to discuss issues important to [my organization] and the Latino community.

[Use this space to briefly describe your organization and what you do; name who else will be joining you for the meeting; and/or to elaborate on the issues you wish to discuss OR include these details in your formal meeting request attached as a pdf and say here instead, "For further information, please see the attached meeting request."

Please let me know if further information is needed. Kindly respond to this request by X date, if possible. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Name

Signature

Phone number