

# Dos and Don'ts for a Successful Congressional Meeting

## 1. Schedule in Advance

- In whatever manner is best received by that office (phone, fax, e-mail).
- Your first point of contact is the member's scheduler.
- Stay on topic – no bait and switch.
- Constituents first and foremost – they increase the likelihood of getting an appointment and they are the most influential contacts.

*Don't drop by unless you have absolutely no other choice – schedules and resources are already stretched to the limit. Drop by appointments can increase anxiety and sometimes strain relationships. If you must drop by, be gracious about the options available to you.*

## 2. Be Conscientious of Numbers

- Meeting space is very limited and causes anxiety for offices trying to facilitate multiple meetings.
- Don't take 10 people when 3 can make the same case.
- Constituents first – only take non-constituents if they serve a particular role that is relevant to the specific member.

*Don't say 3 people will be attending and then arrive with unexpected guests. Unexpected additions strain resources and meeting preparation.*

## 3. Be on Time (but not too early)

- Allow time for security line delays. You will be re-screened every time you enter a new building.
- It takes about 15 minutes to cross from the House side to the Senate side.
- Leave buffer time for a successful or delayed meeting. If you are unexpectedly running late, call the office as a courtesy.

*Don't arrive late and then be surprised that your appointment has been canceled or is now with someone different.*

#### **4. Be Flexible**

- You may be on time, but the member may be delayed due to floor votes or other meetings. Roll with it; don't fight it.
- Standing in the hall for a meeting is not uncommon. Sometimes that is the only space available.

*Don't complain about the meeting space - make the most of the time and attention you have devoted to you. After all, it is more beneficial to spend all your time talking about the extremely important issue that took you to Washington.*

#### **5. Engage with Staff**

- If the member is unavoidably delayed and you are offered the opportunity to meet with staff, take it.
- Staff members are valuable resources for keeping your issue in front of the member.
- If you do meet with the member, ask which staff member is responsible for handling that issue so that you may keep in touch.

*Don't discuss the member's campaign or campaign contributions. It often places staff in awkward situations.*

#### **6. Be Brief but Make Your Case**

- Get to the point but be prepared to share further information if asked.
- Start positive – thank the member for something they've done.
- Demonstrate knowledge of the member's position on your issue.
- Connect the issue to the member's constituency - jobs, community, etc.

*Don't talk for so long on one issue that you miss any others.*

#### **7. Give and Take**

- Outline specific requests for what you would like the member to do.
- Ask (don't demand) for reaction or feedback on your position.
- Offer to provide additional information or be a resource.
- Invite the member to a site visit, local event, or conference reception.
- Leave behind one page outlining your specific requests.

*Don't be intimidated. Members of Congress and their staff are not experts in all fields. You have as much to offer to them as they have to offer you.*

## **8. Be Passionate, Committed, Persuasive, Clear, and Respectful**

- Even if members and staff disagree with your position or issue, they will respect your feelings.
- People who show they care and are passionate are memorable.

*Don't argue with staff or disparage the Member's position on an issue. Be positive and passionate about your positions.*

## **9. Build Relationships**

- Smile and greet people by name.
- Members and staff need to hear from you as much as you need to talk to them.

*Don't insult politics and politicians in general. Members and their staff have chosen this profession for a reason and are good people trying to accomplish something.*

## **10. Follow Up and Through**

- Say thank you with a follow up letter or e-mail and use that letter to reiterate your discussion.
- If you promised to provide more information – provide it.
- Repeat your invitation to give a local office tour to the legislator when he or she is back home.

*This is your opportunity to prove that you are a resource.*