

NAGC Leadership & Advocacy Conference

March 13-15, 2022
Alexandria, VA



NAGC Guide to Meeting with Your Members of Congress

- 1) **Identify your members of Congress.** If you don't already know who represents your state and district in the United States Congress, you can find that information [online via this database](#) and enter your address on the homepage. You will find general information about your Representative and Senators, including a link to their web site, and contact information for both their district and Washington, DC offices.
- 2) **Find the way your member of Congress prefers to take meeting requests and IF they are taking meetings virtually or in-person.** Some members of Congress will take requests over the phone, while others will take requests for a meeting via their web page. To find out what works best for your member of Congress, go to his/her web page to see what information he/she provides.
 - a) In your meeting request, provide some brief background information on why you want to meet with your representative and when (March 15th). Be sure to mention that you are representing your state affiliate (and if appropriate, that you are a constituent), and that you would like to meet either in-person or virtually.
- 3) **After several days, follow up the request with a phone call.** When you call, ask for the office scheduler. When you reach the scheduler, introduce yourself, identify yourself as a constituent or representing your state affiliate, and let he or she know that you are following up on a request to schedule a meeting. Be sure to let the scheduler know when you sent your request, and the issue you would like to discuss.
 - a) The demands upon Congressional staff are great, so you may not reach the scheduler on your first try. Leave a message with your phone number and the reason for your call. If the scheduler does not return your call by the next day, try again the following day. Be patient and persistent – it may take several calls before you are able to set the meeting time. *Don't give up!*
- 4) **Determine meeting logistics.** Discuss with the scheduler the time and method of communication for the meeting (phone, Zoom, or in-person). Members of Congress and their staffs are extremely busy, so most meetings are scheduled in 15-minute increments.
 - a) Please bear in mind that depending upon your representative's schedule, you may not meet with your member of Congress directly. Members of Congress depend upon their staff, so if you speak to the right aide you have the ear of the representative!
- 5) **Tell the scheduler you will be calling again to reconfirm the meeting.** Once the meeting time is set, let them know that you will be calling to reconfirm a week before the meeting.

Additional Tips

- **Consider starting with a friendly audience.** If you will be meeting with legislators that have historically not been supportive to your issues, you may want to schedule meetings with legislators who have been supportive first. It might help you ease into your meetings and let you “practice” for a tougher meeting.
- **Try to coordinate your meetings with other conference attendees from your state and/or Congressional District.** There is power in numbers and this will also allow you to brainstorm different points and issues to bring before your representative. Be sure to check out the conference Engage group to communicate with other attendees to plan your meetings and prepare.
- **If you are with a group, assign someone to serve as the moderator/leader during your visit.** Work together and be organized! Know what you want to say and how you want to say it.
 - Plan your appointment time like you would plan for a workshop—quilt it together/put things in order. Go in with hooks to hang your stories on.
 - Who we are in and what we do
 - How we go above and beyond using our funding (our reach)
 - See for yourself! (Invitation to a local program or other event)
 - Be sure to connect your work to your gifted and talented program or community. Legislators value your thoughts as a constituent. They rely on local stories and sources for their own work.
- **Establishing relationships with legislative staff is key.** Encourage the education aide to use you as a resource in your area of expertise. If you do not know the answer to a question, offer to get the information and send it to the aide after your meeting. Remember: the goal is to educate!

After Your Visits

- Your meeting is not the only opportunity you have to talk to your senator or representative. Send success stories, media clips, and updates all year long, and consider inviting legislative staff to visit your school or program.
- Send a thank-you email after your appointment to express your appreciation and to reinforce any commitments made during the meeting. Remember to honor any requests you made in the meeting, such as providing more information.
- Send an email to dcutler@nagc.org and let NAGC know how your meeting went. Your visit will help in formulating the overall legislative strategy for the Association.