

Meet Face-to-Face with Your Member of Congress

Meeting and developing relationships with our representatives and senators and their aides has been one of the key components of our success over the last 20 years. You can use this page to plan and practice for upcoming meetings with your members of Congress. If you need information or support in setting up a meeting, contact your regional coordinator, a organizer, or Kristin Sundell, Jubilee USA Outreach & Advocacy coordinator at 202 783 0215 or kristin@jubileeusa.org.

Tips on Scheduling a Meeting with Your Member of Congress

1. Make a list of what you want to say to the scheduler and have it with you when you make the call. It may sound silly, and you may never even look at it, but it will definitely boost your confidence. They will ask for the date, of course, what you would like to speak to the congressperson about, and approximately how many will be attending the meeting.
2. Call the Capitol Switchboard at (202) 224-3121 and ask to be connected to your member of Congress's office or dial the number directly if you have it, or dial their local office number to schedule a local meeting. If you don't know who your representative is, **visit the Jubilee USA website** <http://www.democracyinaction.org/dia/organizationsORG/JubileeUSA/getLocal.jsp> and plug in your zip code.
3. Ask to speak to the scheduler. If he or she is unavailable, leave a message with your name and phone number requesting a meeting. Most likely they will return your phone call; however, if you do not hear back from the scheduler by the next day, call again the following day. Remember that these people are very busy, but ultimately they work for you, and it is fully within your rights to ask to see and speak to your member of Congress. Keep making follow-up calls until you speak to the scheduler directly. This could take eight or ten calls, so don't get discouraged. When you speak to him or her directly, ask to have a face-to-face meeting with your member of Congress and the aide who works on our specific issues.
4. Be ready to tell the scheduler what the meeting will pertain to. Inform the scheduler you will be faxing a request for the meeting with all of the pertinent information they required. You may want to ask if they would like it emailed as well.
5. Thank the scheduler for their time and let them know you will be reconfirming your meeting the week before.
6. Congratulations! The hard part is over and you have the meeting secured. Last, but certainly not least, make a note in your planner to reconfirm your meeting the Friday before your appointment is scheduled. It is always better to be safe than sorry.

You may or may not be able to meet with your member of Congress directly, but don't be discouraged. Meeting with key aides who handle poverty issues is of vital importance in developing a relationship with your representative or senator and getting our bills through

Congress. This is an excellent opportunity to start a great relationship with the aide, or further develop your relationship. Developing a good relationship with a congressional aide can open the door for a face-to-face meeting with your member. **Get the ear of a good aide, and you've got the ear of the Congressperson.**

Tips for a Powerful Meeting with Your Member of Congress

BEFORE THE MEETING:

1. **Do your homework.**

Find out what issues your representatives or senators care about and put out as their priorities. You can do this by taking a look at their website (available at: <http://www.house.gov/> or <http://www.senate.gov/>), asking their local offices for their newsletters, reading the members' biographies in *Politics in America*, or finding out what Congressional Committees they sit on (available on their website).

2. **Be prepared—practice speaking.**

After you create an agenda for the meeting each person with a speaking part should create a brief two or three minute laser talk for their section and practice it with at least one other person. Be brief, clear and to the point and don't be afraid to show your passion.

3. **Choose a secretary and manager for the meeting.**

Choose one person who will be responsible for taking notes and writing down any commitments your member of Congress made and any follow up that needs to be done after the meeting. Also, choose someone who will "manage" the overall meeting, keeping the group on task and making sure all the requests are covered.

4. **Inspire yourselves.**

Prior to the meeting, spend at least a few minutes having each person speak about why he/she cares about this issue and why you are going to this meeting.

AT THE MEETING:

1. **Connect with your representatives, senators and aides.**

Establish a personal connection with your member of Congress and their aide in the meeting by asking them to share their goals and the issues they care about. Share your own vision and concerns.

2. **Acknowledge your member of Congress.**

It is rare that our representatives and senators hear the words "Thank You" from their constituents. Always thank them for the supportive actions they have taken or just be sure to thank them for taking the time to meet with you. Most likely your point person in the office will be a legislative aide, but sure to take time to thank them as well. Praising a good legislative aide in front of their boss is always

a good thing.

3. **Be concise.**
Summarize your request in 5 minutes or less.
4. **Be prepared to summarize opponents arguments on the issue.**
Know the other side of the coin. There may be very articulate arguments against what you are asking for. Be prepared and do your homework on any opposition. Have talking points prepared to defend you position. Never attack. If you don't know the answer or how to respond tell the aide or Congressperson you will get them further information.
5. **Don't be a zealot.**
Fair, balanced and thoughtful conversations will keep the door to your member's office open even if you don't find common ground. Always leave with a thank you and a commitment to follow up with relevant information.
6. **Don't be a know-it-all or talk down to an aide.**
Many aides are very young and may not know about our issues. Our professionalism and knowledge can be an example of effective, savvy grassroots lobbying.
7. **Make the issues real.**
One of the most powerful ways we can advocate for our issues is to have someone speak who has been directly affected by these issues and can tell their experiences. Another possibility is to tell the story of a specific family or to show a video during your meeting that puts your legislator in the shoes of others for a few minutes and makes the issues real.
8. **Paint the big picture and the small picture.**
For example, one person could tell their story about how the issue has affected her/him personally (the small picture); then, someone else could flesh out the current national or global statistics and impact (the big picture).
9. **Make specific, clear requests and ask for an answer.**
Often, the main reason groups have unsatisfactory meetings is that their requests were not clear and specific enough. Your members of Congress need to know what you want them to do (what bill you want them to sponsor, what other representative or senator you want them to speak to, how you want them to vote). However, in addition to the specific requests you bring, don't be afraid to ask the senator or representative what else they see they could do on your issue (whether they say yes or no to your original request).
10. **Know your next steps.**
In the meeting, ensure that the next steps for follow up are clear (what your group will do next, what the legislator/aide will do next) and that you know which aides

to contact for follow up. After the meeting, send a prompt thank you note and follow up on requests with the aide.

AFTER THE MEETING:

1. Fill out the [Lobby Report Form](#) to use as a guide in following up, and a record of your group’s activity with your members of Congress. Send a copy to the appropriate Domestic or Global grassroots staff person so the staff can know where you are on building a champion of your member of Congress.
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A Typical Format for Meeting with a Member of Congress

1. Introductions. A specific partner should facilitate this opening section.

Name of volunteer: _____

When will you practice? _____

Key steps within the Introductions:

- ∞ Introduce RESULTS briefly.
- ∞ Allow each participant to say who they are and what they do in the community.
- ∞ Ask the member of Congress and aides to introduce themselves with a specific question, such as, “What was your vision in coming to Congress?”
- ∞ Overview the issues you would like to discuss and ideally give the member of Congress and aides a typed agenda and requests for the meeting.

2. Acknowledgements. Acknowledge your member of Congress for any previous actions.

Name of volunteer: _____

When will you practice? _____

If your group needs information about a specific Representative or Senator, consult a recent Legislative Scorecard or contact the RESULTS legislative staff at (202) 783-7100.

3. Presentation of our issues and requests. This is a great chance to involve all of your volunteers and community members, and perhaps show a video. Strategize which issues you would like your member of Congress to take more of a leadership role on. Choose one or two issues to feature and work with the RESULTS staff to come up with powerful, specific requests.

Issue #1: _____

Specific request: _____

Issue #2: _____

Specific request: _____

Work on speaking the issue powerfully with others in your group.

Name of volunteer: _____

Issue: _____ When will you practice? _____

Name of volunteer: _____

Issue: _____ When will you practice? _____

Make specific requests and ask for their answer right then. If they are unwilling to make a commitment, set a date to follow up. Also, carefully record any questions, objections, promises or concerns.

4. Plan for follow up. During the meeting set a specific timeline for follow up with the Congressional staff. Be sure to have someone record your plan for follow up.

Issue/Request: _____

Key aide? _____ Follow Up Date _____

Issue/Request: _____

Key aide? _____ Follow Up Date _____

5. Send a “Thank You” letter.

Name of volunteer: _____

When will you send the letter? _____

6. Follow up. Be sure to follow up with the appropriate aide(s). Without follow up, your effort in scheduling a meeting and speaking powerfully about our issues could be wasted.

Aide #1: _____

Specific request(s): _____

Name of volunteer: _____

When will you follow up? _____

Aide #2: _____

Specific request(s): _____

Name of volunteer: _____

When will you follow up? _____

Source: RESULTS web page “*Meet Face-to-Face with Your Member of Congress (Activist Milestone #9)*”