



Photo by Philip Laubner/CRS



# SET UP MEETINGS WITH YOUR MEMBER OF CONGRESS

Scheduling in-person meetings with your members of Congress can be challenging, but research shows that nothing proves more impactful. The guidance below should help you successfully schedule your meeting, communicate effectively and follow up afterward.

## Step 1: PLAN AHEAD

- Join your member of Congress' mailing list. This way you can find out what issues they focus on and when they will be back in your home state so that you can set up a meeting.
- Familiarize yourself with your member's jurisdiction, voting record, ideology and why he or she may be likely to agree or disagree with your point of view.
- Call the member's district or Washington, DC, office 4 to 6 weeks before the desired meeting date. Have multiple dates and times available.
- Contact your local district office staff, who may be more available for meetings than their counterparts in DC, and may be able to meet for longer periods. The DC office can often provide names of the best district staffers to contact about meetings. Staff members to meet with may include the district director, field representative or regional director.
- Contact your Catholic Relief Services diocesan director, the diocesan social action director or your state's Catholic conference to find out about advocacy training they offer and whether they organize visits to members of Congress. This will help you network with people who may have established relationships with members, or allow you to join a group visit to a member's office.

## JOIN US

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**Step 2: MAKE YOUR REQUEST**

**MAKE IT PERSONAL AND LOCAL**

- First and foremost, let the office know that you're a constituent. Then, be sincere and emphasize your own connection to the issue. A personal experience or emotional connection will make you stand out.
- Tie your request to what is happening in the member's district or state. Demonstrate that their constituents care about the issue. Members of Congress tend to give priority to their local issues.
- Always address the member by name.
- Use consistent and correct contact information. Make sure that the member's office can reliably reach you.

**MAKE IT CONCISE BUT RELEVANT**

- Provide as much detail in the meeting request as possible, but keep it short and to the point. Include background information on yourself or your organization and as many logistical details as possible: when you would like to meet, where, what time, with whom.
- Limit the number of issues you want to discuss to two or three. Use each issue you want to discuss as an opportunity for another meeting.
- Establish a correlation between the member and the cause. Did the member vote for similar legislation or show past support, or do they have connections to the cause?

**MAKE IT WELL-TIMED**

- Request a meeting for when your member will be in the district and will be more likely to have time to meet.
- Try to make your request during a time when there are no "hot-button" issues swamping the member's office.

**Step 3: BE PERSISTENT**

- If a meeting is scheduled, call or email a few days before to remind staff of the upcoming meeting.
- Don't flood your members' offices with repeated requests for the same meeting. This will have a negative effect. Instead, space your follow-up.
- Use a variety of methods to contact the member about issues: phone, email, web forms or postal mail. Some members are more responsive to one type of communication.
- Check with your state Catholic conference, local CRS diocesan director or CCHD director to see if they have a relationship with the member or their office. An established relationship may help you get a face-to-face meeting.
- If you can't get a meeting with the member, request a meeting with a staff member. This may be just as good, since staffers decide which issues to put before the member.

**Step 4: FOLLOW UP**

- Engage your members of Congress and their offices in follow-up activities. First, make sure to send a thank you letter pointing out that you can be a resource to the member or connect them to experts such as CRS and USCCB staff, and request a follow-up meeting. Invite the member and their staff to relevant local events. Other ideas include asking a question at a town hall meeting over a recess, coordinating a site visit for the member to see your organization's work firsthand, or inviting the member to a fundraiser or other event.
- One meeting is not enough to develop a commitment from the member. Work on long-term relationship building with local district staff, so you have a basis for future meeting requests and can more easily schedule in-person meetings when the member is visiting the district. Try to meet a few times a year with one of your district contacts about the same issue or new issues that have come up.

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