

Tips for Meeting with Congress Virtually 2021

Meeting members of Congress in person is an excellent way to communicate your concerns and priorities to your representatives in Washington. A physical meeting may not be possible this year due to COVID-19 safety measures. The following are a few tips to keep in mind as you meet with your senator's or representative's office virtually.

Preparing for Your Meeting

- NCSHA strongly encourages you to contact your representative's office and schedule an appointment one or two weeks **in advance**. Using the office's appointment web form or scheduling by email is highly encouraged. Many offices may not be staffed due to COVID-19 safety measures, but you may leave a voicemail by finding the phone numbers for your representatives [here](#) and your senators [here](#).
- When you call or email, give your contact information to the staffer in case they need to reschedule your meeting.
- Provide the office with the option to meet using their preferred virtual platform.
- Try to get a meeting with your member of Congress. However, if he or she is not available, it is worthwhile to meet with their staff.
- Know on which relevant committees and subcommittees your member of Congress sits, as they will have the most sway over bills under the jurisdictions of those committees.
- If you wish to discuss a particular bill, know its name, number, and sponsors. It is also good to know other cosponsors, especially cosponsors from your delegation. Further, see if there is companion legislation in the other chamber and know its name, number, and cosponsors, too. You can find information on legislation [here](#).
- You may want to share a day or two in advance of the meeting [links](#) to relevant FAQs and factsheets on issues you plan to discuss.
- Be ready to deliver a short, concise message on your issue. **Your objective is to be brief and clear in what you would like your member of Congress to do (e.g., cosponsor legislation) and how your state benefits (or would benefit) from the legislation.**

The person with whom you are meeting may not be familiar with your organization or your priorities, so avoid acronyms and lingo. Be prepared to give a quick overview of your organization and, if you are discussing an existing program, the program's benefits/impact in your state.

On the Day of Your Meeting

- Keep an eye on your phone and/or e-mail. Unplanned, last-minute activities may delay your meeting. The situation on Capitol Hill can be very fluid as new bills and amendments are brought to the floor or other circumstances arise.
- Don't take schedule changes personally, as often the change is due to circumstances outside the member or staffer's control. Always be gracious and flexible.
- **Plan for you and your group to "arrive" on the video platform (Zoom, GoToMeeting, etc.) or conference line 15 minutes early** to ensure you have time to resolve any technical issues and feel ready to welcome your member. Have on hand the email addresses and phone numbers of the participants from your group, so if you encounter an issue you can update them in real time.
- If you are using a new platform, you may have to download software. We suggest reviewing the platform requirements, downloading any software, and practicing to become familiar with using the platform with well in advance of your meeting.
- Make sure your background is not distracting. If you are taking the meeting in front of a window, if possible, cover the window so you do not appear as a silhouette on screen, with all the light behind you.
- If you would like to use a virtual background, test it in advance of your meeting. Here are "how-to" links for using backgrounds on the various platforms:
 - [Zoom](#)
 - [GoToMeeting](#)
 - [Teams](#)

Making the Most of Your Meeting

- Be prepared to fill in for other members of your group in the event someone loses internet connectivity or experiences other technical difficulties.
- In the meeting, introduce yourself, everyone in your group and your organization. Thank the member or staffer for their time, and if applicable, for their past support of your priorities.
- Be brief and clear in your message. The member or staffer may have only a short time to meet with you, so get your point across quickly.
- Listen carefully to the member or staffer's response. Even if they disagree with your position, be cordial.
- Sometimes the staffer with whom you are meeting may be unfamiliar with the issue and may be able to tell you only that they will pass along your message. Be understanding, as this staffer is most likely your best chance to influence your member of Congress.

Following Up After the Meeting

- Follow up later with a thank-you email. Express appreciation for the member or staffer's time and reiterate your main points. Briefly go over your priorities and what you would like to see done. If the member or staffer requested additional information, supply it in an easy-to-understand manner.
- Include [links](#) to relevant FAQs and factsheets on issues discussed during the meeting.
- **Bonus!** Tweet your members of Congress to thank them or their staff for meeting with you. Include a photo of the video conference if you have one. This public expression of gratitude can strengthen the relationship.

When tweeting during NCSHA's Legislative Conference:

- ➔ Mention (@) your members of Congress, @[YourHFA], and @NCSHAhome.
 - ➔ Include the hashtag #HFAsOnTheHill.
- Please see these additional [communications tips](#) from NCSHA to further maximize your meetings "on the Hill."