



TIPS FOR MEETING YOUR MEMBERS OF CONGRESS

ARRANGING THE MEETING

Plan your visit carefully, be clear about what it is you want to achieve, and determine in advance which Member or staff you need to meet with to achieve your purpose.

Remember To:

- Prepare a meeting request letter that you can send to your Senate/House of Representative office
- Call Senate/House of Representative office and ask to speak with the scheduler or appointment secretary
- Be specific about your reason for wanting the appointment. You would like a meeting with your Member of Congress to discuss United Way's Education, Income and Health policy priorities. Be prepared at the phone with a 5 minute brief about your topic of discussion.
- Ask for a fax number/email address where you can send the meeting request letter
- Follow up three days later to check on the response
- Ask United Way Worldwide for assistance if you encounter any problems.

LEGISLATORS WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU

The first time you meet with the office of your legislator, you may be nervous. Keep in mind that legislators and their staff repeatedly say that the information nonprofits provide helps to inform their decision making.

Remember that:

- Legislators are almost always very eager to win your support
- Legislators want to put their best foot forward with their constituents
- Legislators are sincerely interested in your point of view
- You are the expert on your issue-you have the information that your legislator needs

MEETING WITH A STAFFER

Legislators try to meet with as many constituents as possible. However, if the legislator is unavailable to meet with you, DO NOT turn down the opportunity to meet with legislative staff. **Remember that:**

- Be prompt and patient. When it is time to meet with a Member, be punctual and be patient. It is not uncommon for Members to be late, or to have a meeting interrupted, due to their crowded schedule. If interruptions do occur, be flexible. When the opportunity presents itself, continue your meeting with a Member's staff. Legislative staffs wield considerable power and often are able to give more time and attention to the issues than legislators can.
- Be prepared. Whenever possible, bring to the meeting information and materials supporting your position. Members are required to take positions on many different issues. In some instances, a Member may lack important details about the pros and cons of a particular matter. It is therefore helpful to share with the Member information and examples that clearly demonstrate the impact or benefits associated with a particular issue or piece of legislation.



MEETING WITH THE LEGISLATORS

Remember that:

- Be political. Members of Congress want to represent the best interests of their district or state. Whenever possible, demonstrate the connection between what you are requesting and the interests of the Member's constituency. If possible, describe for the Member how you or your group can be of assistance to him or her.
- Be responsive. Be prepared to answer questions or provide additional information, in the event the Member expresses interest or asks questions. If meeting with a group, the group should meet, at least briefly, in advance to prepare for the visit. Be certain that members of the group agree on the objectives for the meeting and on the points to be addressed
- Ask the legislative staff in attendance for their business card(s)
- Be concise
- Present your view with conviction, but don't put your legislator or legislative staff on the defensive
- It helps to cover your issue from the legislator's perspective, tying it in with his or her past votes or interests
- Always tell the truth! Don't bluff-if you don't have the answer to a question, that's perfectly fine. Tell the legislator and/or staff that you will provide the information....and then be sure to provide it
- Make the ask
- Provide information, both orally and in leave-behind materials. Given the limited amount of time Members of Congress and staff have to read materials, you may want to write a one-pager summarizing all of your materials.

Suggested Agenda for Congressional Meetings

1. Introduce yourself and ask about staff
2. Present briefly about the United Way system and your United Way
3. Detail your agenda
4. Leave time for questions from the legislators

AFTER THE VISIT

Remember that:

- Be sure to summarize your discussion in a letter as a follow-up.
- You may also want to send a copy of your letter or other correspondence you receive from the legislator to United Way Worldwide. We are in contact with congressional offices and your visit is important information for future lobbying work
- **AFTER THE VISIT, WRITE A LETTER OF THANKS TO THE LEGISLATOR AND/OR STAFF. BE SURE TO REMIND HIM/HER OF ANY AGREEMENTS REACHED, AND PROVIDE ANY INFORMATION PROMISED DURING YOUR MEETING.**