

# CONGRESSIONAL MEETINGS 101

## How to secure a meeting with staff of a member of the House or Senate:



1. Think virtual. Congressional staff have embraced virtual meetings, and now is the time to arrange one or more!
2. Focus on your Representative in the House and your two Senators. It is difficult to secure meetings if you are not a constituent of the member's district or state.
3. Call the Washington, DC office of the member; phone numbers are in the [House](#) and [Senate](#) directories.
4. Ask to speak with the staff person who handles health-related issues, indicating you hope to set up a meeting with that person. (If this avenue proves unsuccessful, [email Samantha Miller](#) and we'll help come up with a plan B!)

## Two key goals for meetings with congressional staff:



1. Form an authentic connection with the staffer.
  - a. So they can trust the information you provide is factual and the asks you are making are reasonable.
  - b. So they will consider you a resource when relevant issues arise.
2. Successfully make the case for the "ask" that led you to arrange the meeting.

## The best meetings begin with homework:



- Does the member of Congress address any relevant issues on his or her website? Websites are listed in the [House](#) and [Senate](#) directories.
- Are they the sponsor or cosponsor of any NIH-relevant legislation? Most members of Congress identify the legislation they've sponsored and cosponsored in the "About" section or a dedicated "Committees and Legislation" section of their website. If not, you can find the legislation they have sponsored or cosponsored by [looking up the member on congress.gov](#); once there, you can use the filters to look for bills focused on subject areas (like "Health") or originating in certain Committees (like "Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions") to make it easier to find relevant legislation.
- Is the member of Congress a member of the NIH Caucus, the [R&D Caucus](#), or any other caucuses that resonate with you? Their website will list their caucuses.
- How much NIH funding flows into the state of this member of Congress, and what is the economic impact of those dollars? [Use this interactive map](#) from United for Medical Research to get those answers.
- If you are an advocate for research focused on a particular disease, look for statistics about the prevalence of that disease in your state; if it's a rare disease, look for national or global statistics.

- Think through how you might serve as a resource to the office going forward. Can you help answer constituent questions about a certain type of research? Can you connect the office with experts or with a civic organization in your city or town? Note that personal office staffers (with limited exceptions) do not handle campaign matters, so this is not the right meeting to volunteer to work on or donate to the member's campaign. Contact their campaign office for those purposes.)



**Plan for a 10-minute meeting:**

With few exceptions, meetings with members of Congress or staff are 15 minutes on the outside, 10 minutes ideally (from the staffer's perspective). That means you need to have an elevator pitch prepared for your ask, because you'll need the rest of the time to begin forming an authentic connection with the staff member(s) with whom you are meeting.

**Follow these rules of the road (or improvise!):**



1. Thank the staffer for the meeting.
2. As an icebreaker, tell the staffer what town or city you live in and ask where they are from.
3. Make the case. Specify the action you would like for the member of Congress to take. Draw from your homework to connect the dots between research and the state. Draw from personal stories to engage the staff member on the personal significance of NIH funding.
  - a. Do you want them to join the NIH Caucus or a disease-specific caucus? Thank them for being part of any other relevant caucuses and ask what information would be useful in helping the member of Congress decide whether to join the NIH Caucus.
  - b. Do you want them to champion robust growth in the NIH budget? Ask them to speak with their congressional leadership about providing an increase of at least \$2 billion in the NIH budget in the Fiscal Year 2023 Omnibus appropriations package.
4. Ask for the staffers thoughts about your request(s), and whether additional information would prove useful. Ask if you can check back in a couple of weeks on your request.
5. Close by offering to serve as a resource going forward if you've identified a way you can be helpful.
6. Send a thank you email, including any additional information you have been asked to provide. Ideally, include a relevant article or website link – it could provide information useful for answering constituent correspondence on a current issue, relate to an NIH funded project in your district or state, or otherwise makes sense to include.

You can identify the staffer's email address this way:

- a. House email addresses: `firstname.lastname@mail.house.gov`
  - b. Senate email addresses: `firstname_lastname@senatorlastname.senate.gov`
7. Pat yourself on the back! You just made a difference. Even if your meeting results in no immediate action, you have made a new connection and raised awareness. Those seeds may not bear fruit right away, but if you sustain these connections, they will bear fruit!