

THE PERFECT CAPITOL HILL VISIT

PREPARATION: Arranging the Visit

- Arrange the visit *locally* using communication from your local people to the most senior staff person in the local office of the Member of Congress.
- Materials that you use and distribute in the meeting should be brief, easily readable, and graphic.
- The timing of the date, the meeting during that day, and the length of the session are critical. Always conform to the schedule of the Member and their staff. Choose times which are during slow periods for the Congress.

Before going to the Hill, practice your presentation. Simulate the session with one another. If possible, videotape the session and critique it.



THE MEETING: Component Parts

- Arrive five minutes before the scheduled time.
- Meet and chat with the receptionist.
- Leave your business card and a small descriptive statement with the receptionist. Note his/her name, address, and phone number for the follow-up.
- Remember, for the Member of Congress and their staff, time is quite limited.
- Begin the meeting with "news" from back home, e.g. some activity occurring or some general concern developing in the community.
- Deliver greetings from a personal friend of the Member from home.
- Have a single spokesperson present the substance of your message.
- Use a separate individual to provide illustrations to exemplify the point.
- Have an assigned person conclude the presentation and "ask for the order", i.e. what you are asking the Member to do. Important: if this is a first meeting, keep the request quite modest.
- Listen carefully to the Member's responses to you. Someone should note the responses either during the meeting or immediately thereafter to permit an accurate record to be maintained. Do *not* use any recording devices.
- End the meeting on a personal note, evoking a positive memory or connection to back home. Even if the meeting included an exchange on some point where you believe the Member and/or staff was not supportive, it is nevertheless important that you conclude the session on a positive note.

- **Be certain to leave behind your business card and at least one printed document which includes the group's name, address, phone and fax numbers, as well as a description of the group's objectives.**

AFTER THE MEETING: Initial Follow-up

- If there are simultaneous meetings occurring, all of the notes from the individual meetings should be collated and assimilated (two documents) by a single individual, as soon as the meetings are completed.
- A copy of the two summary documents should be distributed to all meeting attendees within your group, with a request for feedback by a date certain. ***No proprietary information should appear in these documents. Information which is personal and critical should not be included. If there is a need to communicate a point which is personal and critical, it should be done verbally and on a one-to-one basis.***

AFTER THE MEETING: Later Follow-up

- Within forty-eight hours, send a separate thank you note to the Member, staff, and receptionist. Enclose a second piece of printed material if you have one ready.
- When you return home, call the local staff person from the Member's office to brief them on the Washington visit with the Member and staff.
- Three months after the initial visit, send a letter to the Member's local staff person and the staff member in Washington to share some new piece of information or another document. Continue this process once every three months.
- Within six months, invite the Member's local staff person to a social/promotional occasion where your associates are gathering for information exchange and enjoyment.
- **Within a year, invite the Member's Washington staff person to attend one of your national conferences as a panelist on current issues facing the group.**

SEVERAL POINTS TO KEEP IN MIND

- Show interest in the Congressman's statements as well as your own. **BUT DO NOT LOSE FOCUS.**
- Show connection of your issue to the public interest.
- Large election day turnovers are not unusual in the House and Senate. Many Members simply decide not to run for re-election. If they do not run again, they have even more flexibility to consider that which they believe to be right and in the best interest of their constituents. This may present an opportunity for you.
- Encourage your Member to co-sponsor legislation which reflects your current views.
- Finally, when you return home, stop by the Member of Congress' home office to thank her or him for the time you were given by the Washington staff.

Adapted from GATE Grassroots Advocacy Training Exchange