Members of Congress Want to Hear from YOU

Members value staying in touch with constituents...
- Constituent conversations guide policymaking
- Reelection hinges on their ability to serve the constituents who vote them into office
- Members trust their staff to help them listen to constituents, so advocates should not be surprised if they meet with staff instead of a Member

...and find personal communications persuasive...
- Individual letters and e-mails can have greater influence on member decision-making than form letters
- Advocates should focus on sending more personal messages to their member of Congress to capture their individual voice or perspective

…but visitors with first-hand knowledge of policy impacts are most compelling

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>% Effective</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In-person issue visits from constituents</td>
<td>94%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contact from constituents’ reps</td>
<td>94%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Individualized email messages</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individualized postal letters</td>
<td>88%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Local editorial referencing issue…</td>
<td>87%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Comments during a telephone town hall</td>
<td>87%</td>
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Successful Advocacy Efforts Take Time

Bills and Resolutions in the 115th Congress

By Final Status

- Enacted laws: 443
- Passed resolutions: 758
- Got a vote: 867
- Failed Legislation: 14
- Other Legislation: 11,474

Only 6% of bills introduced made it to the floor of either the House or Senate, a marker that the bill underwent serious deliberation.
Hill Staffers Outnumber Members of Congress

Members and staff of Congress

- **Members**
- **Congressional Committee Staff**
- **Personal Office Staff**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>House</th>
<th>Senate</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Members</td>
<td>435</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CC Staff</td>
<td>1,164</td>
<td>951</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PO Staff</td>
<td>6,030</td>
<td>3,917</td>
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</tbody>
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Expect to speak to staffers during meetings on the Hill

Sample organizational structure of a congressional office

- **Member of Congress**
  - **Chief of staff**
    - **Policy staff**
      - Legislative director/counsel
      - Legislative aide
    - **Communications staff**
      - Communications director
      - Legislative correspondent
    - **Office staff**
      - Personal assistant/scheduler
      - Staff assistant
    - **District staff**
      - District director
      - District caseworkers

Members of Congress have busy schedules – staffers will often have more time to devote to Hill meetings.

Staffers Usually Have More Time to Meet with Constituents than Members of Congress

**Member of Congress**
Members tend to be highly overscheduled; they average 70-hour weeks in D.C., often achieved by double-booking meetings.

**Chief of staff**
Visitors may not realize how often chiefs are in communication with a Member; the tight bond means that chiefs are often delegated to speak for the Member to constituents.

**Legislative director**
LDs tend to be specialists in the policies of the committees on which the Member serves; they may focus less on other areas.

**Legislative assistant**
LAs tend to be young; their average age is under 29.

**Legislative correspondent/staff assistant**
LCs and SAs tend to be even younger than LAs, often recent college grads.

It is not uncommon for members to show up halfway through a meeting or leave part of the way through.

Meetings are most often scheduled with and run through one or more of these staffers.

LCs/SAs may join in meetings as a junior staffer or note-taker.

Sources:
Legislative Process: How a Bill Becomes Law

Representative
- Introduces bill in the House

Senator
- Introduces bill in the Senate

House committee/subcommittee
- Bill is debated and amended
- Simple majority needed to proceed

Senate committee/subcommittee
- Bill is debated and amended
- Simple majority needed to proceed

House floor
- Bill is debated and amended
- Speaker must allow a floor vote
- Simple majority needed to pass

Senate floor
- Bill is debated and amended
- 3/5 majority needed to end debate
- Simple majority needed to pass

Final votes/conference committee
- If both chambers pass an identical bill, the bill is sent directly to the president
- If each chamber passes a similar bill with some differences, a conference committee is formed to reach compromise and combine the bills

President
- The president can sign bills that have been passed by both chambers into law
- The president can reject a bill with a veto; Congress can override a veto by passing the bill in each chamber with a 2/3 majority

Prepping for a Face-to-Face Meeting with a Member of Congress

Prior to meeting a Member of Congress or their staff, evaluate their priorities and any current activities related to your issue. Consider how you might convey the following elements in telling your story, highlighting your personal connection to their office.

1: Geographic connection

Introduce your geographic connection and convey appreciation for their work.

“We appreciate Congressman Smith’s efforts on behalf of families in Rochester and I’d like to share my story, because it illustrates why this issue is so critical now.”

2: Issue connection

Summarize the Member’s connection to the issue in one sentence.

“We know Congressman Smith is a strong supporter of paid family leave, as evidenced in her recent Twitter chat.”

3: Urgency

Provide a one-sentence overview of why the story is important now (i.e., an upcoming vote or current events).

“With the vote coming up, we wanted to make sure you had stories that demonstrate just how important her position on the issue is.”

4: Additional details

Share your story and call-to-action, offering access to more information as appropriate.

“While I’m here to talk about my experience, there are more at www.strongfamilies.org... We hope our stories and data can assist Congressman Smith in the debate.”

5: Future contact

Reference any upcoming outreach that will be taking place between your counterparts.

“Our senior legislative director plans to connect with [name] to share more details about this campaign.”

Advocates can leverage face-to-face meetings with members of Congress and their staff to communicate their positions and build enduring relationships with their representatives. However, meetings are brief and Members are busy; advocates should keep the tips below in mind to get the most of their meetings.

1: Be on time
- Arrive no more than 5 minutes before the meeting
- Inform the scheduler if you are going to be late

2: Be flexible
- Prepare to meet with either the Member or the member’s staff; treat both with equal respect.
- If the Member arrives in the middle of your meeting, continue as usual; the Member will ask questions if needed.

3: Stay on topic
- Raise only the issue you scheduled to discuss to keep the meeting focused and persuasive.

4: Keep politics out of it
- Do not discuss elections or campaign support in your meeting.
- Respect the Member’s political views and relationships outside of the issue at hand.

5: Leave behind brief information
- Leave behind a 1-2 page briefing with data points on the issue discussed.
- The document should serve as a helpful resource.
Prepping for a Face-to-Face Meeting with a Member of Congress

Advocates can become trusted resources for lawmakers and their staff by following up and keeping in touch with them after face-to-face meetings.

Send a thank you message and valuable information
- Send a brief follow-up e-mail
- Thank the Member and/or staffer for their time
- Include the meeting topic
- Include any promised information to keep the office aware of your issue

Attend events in the district
- Attend town hall meetings or other public events in your district
- Find opportunities to engage in policy matters in the district
- Build relationships with district staff serve as trustworthy resource

Stay in touch
- Don’t over-communicate
- Pass along new information as it is released
- Be respectful and informative to gain their respect