



Visiting Your Local Congressional Office:

Tips to Establish a Relationship with your Member of Congress

PREPARATION:

Arranging the Visit

- Call the district office where you live and ask to arrange a meeting with your member of Congress or a senior staff member in the local office.
- Explain that you would like to talk with this individual about issues related to hearing and balance care and/or specific legislation that has been introduced.
- Prepare materials to distribute at the meeting. They should be brief and easily readable. Supply a business card from your practice with contact information for the member of Congress or staff should they have questions (issue briefs are available on the Academy Web site).
- If possible, arrange the visit when the member of Congress will be back in the district office.
- The timing of the meeting and the length of the session are critical. Accommodate the schedule of the member and their staff whenever possible.
- Before going to the office, practice your presentation so you are not nervous. Remember, your member of Congress (or their staff) simply wants to understand the issue. You are the expert in providing hearing and balance care and can relay this information and the impact of legislation to them. If they have questions you cannot answer, explain that you will get back to them or refer them to Academy staff.

Component Parts

- Arrive five minutes before the scheduled time.
- Leave your business card and a small descriptive statement or the issue brief 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 the area, e.g. some activity occurring or some general concern developing in the community.
- Deliver greetings from a friend or acquaintance that you both may know.
- When conducting the meeting with a group of individuals:
 - 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 reiterate the action items you are requesting from the member. Important: if this is a first meeting, keep the request modest.

- Listen carefully to the member's responses to you. One participant should note the responses either during the meeting or immediately thereafter to permit an accurate record to be maintained.
- End the meeting on a personal note, evoking a positive memory or connection to local events. Even if the meeting included an exchange on an issue which you believe the member and/or staff was not supportive, it is nevertheless important that you conclude the session on a positive note. Always offer to consult with them on any issues related to hearing and balance care.
- Be certain to leave your business card and at least one printed document that includes the group's name, address, phone and fax numbers, as well as a description of the group's objectives and contact information for the Academy. Let them know that the Academy is happy to serve as a resource for them on hearing health matters.

AFTER THE MEETING

Follow-up

- Within forty-eight hours, send a thank you note to the member and staff. Enclose a second piece of printed material regarding the issues discussed.
- Three months after the initial visit, send a letter to the member's local staff person and the corresponding staff member in Washington to share new information or another supportive document. Continue this process once every three months or ask to meet with the member when they are back in the district again.
- Within six months, invite the member's local staff person to a social/promotional occasion where your associates are gathering for an information exchange and enjoyment (local state academy gatherings) or invite them to your practice so they can learn more about audiologic procedures.
- Continue updating and contacting the member every 3-4 months with issue updates or other related correspondence.

COMMUNICATION MECHANISMS

Methods

- At every stage, please relay updates regarding your visits and contacts to Academy staff.
- The updates should delineate meetings that have occurred, and information exchanged.
- A short email to Academy staff will allow them to follow up with the member's Washington office.

PLEASE REMEMBER:

- Show interest in the member of Congress' statements as well as your own...**BUT DO NOT LOSE FOCUS.**
- Convey a connection between your issue and the public interest.
- Always encourage your Member to co-sponsor legislation that reflects your current views.

- If you feel comfortable, volunteer to support your member's re-election by volunteering on their re-election campaign, donating to their re-election, etc.