



American Society of Plant Biologists

Cultivating a better future through plant biology research

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT ADVOCACY

1. Do I have a Member of Congress?

Yes, every U.S. citizen has three elected Members of Congress—one in the House of Representatives, who represents your congressional district, and two in the Senate, who represent your state. However, U.S. citizens residing in an American territory or the District of Columbia have a Delegate (who only can vote in a committee and not on the floor) in the House of Representatives and they do not have Senators.

2. Am I allowed to advocate?

Yes, the U.S. Constitution grants the right to every U.S. citizen to advocate. The First Amendment says, “Congress shall make no law respecting [...] the right of the people [...] to petition the government for a redress of grievances.”¹

If you are a federal employee, you cannot advocate for specific funding levels. Instead, highlight your research and its local impacts, thereby implying that funding for your research is critical. Additionally, meeting with a Member of Congress must occur during unpaid leave or vacation time—it cannot be conducted during paid time or sick leave.² If you have concerns, contact your agency’s congressional affairs liaison.

If you are not a federal employee, but are funded by a federal grant, you may advocate for specific funding levels or priorities. If your employer is a university or research institution, you may have a government relations officer who can assist you in scheduling a meeting or inviting your Representative and/or Senators to your institution. It is also a good idea to contact your government relations officer because many universities and research institutions have advocacy-related policies. Your university/institution may require you to clarify that you are not advocating on behalf of your employee and to not use your university computer or e-mail account, etc.

3. When is the best time to advocate?

You can come to Washington, DC, at any time when Congress is in session. However, it is often easier to reach out to your Members of Congress during congressional recess periods when they are at home in the district/state. Congress generally is in recess around holidays and during the month of August.

4. Why should I advocate? Does advocacy even matter?

Yes, advocacy matters! How can Members of Congress know about your concerns and address them if you don’t communicate those concerns? Although ASPB diligently works on your behalf, you can help amplify ASPB’s broad messages, while adding specifics that are important to you,

¹ First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. Retrieved from http://www.law.cornell.edu/constitution/first_amendment.

² U.S. Department of Agriculture Office of Ethics. (2008). *USDA Guidance Regarding Anti-Lobbying Laws*. Retrieved from <http://www.usda-ethics.net/rules/rule9.htm>.

through your personal advocacy. Meeting with your Members of Congress can bring issues you care about to the forefront and can begin a relationship between you and your elected officials. This will allow science to play a more prominent role in the decision-making process and may result in increased funding for scientific research, improved regulations, and the implementation of other policies that benefit plant biology.

5. What are ASPB’s policy priorities?

More information on ASPB’s policy activities and priorities are available on ASPB’s Plant Biology Policy Blog (PB2) at <http://my.aspb.org/blogpost/612565/Plant-Biology-Policy-Blog-PB2>, on ASPB’s Advocacy page at http://my.aspb.org/members/group_content_view.asp?group=68890&id=99035 and on the ASPB Position Statements page at http://my.aspb.org/members/group_content_view.asp?group=68890&id=99039.

You can keep up to date by following the blogs, liking ASPB on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/myaspb>, and following us on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/aspb>.

6. What can I expect?

It’s hard to predict exactly how a meeting with a Member of Congress or their staff will play out—expect a wide range of possibilities. Members and their staff can range from disinterested to passionate depending on the office, which is often hard to predict in advance. If you request a meeting with a Member of Congress, don’t be surprised if you meet with a staffer instead. Do not be offended by the fact that staffers generally are young and may not be as knowledgeable about the detailed specifics of science and agricultural issues as you are. Staffers often have broad portfolios and massive amounts of work that make it impossible for them to be experts on every topic. That said, think of this as an opportunity to educate and build a relationship.

7. Should I meet with my Members of Congress even if I don’t agree with them?

Yes, you should still meet with your Members of Congress. Advocacy is the art of “influence” and when you meet with your Members of Congress you are trying to persuade them and gain their support. In general, most Members of Congress are supportive of scientific research. Be sure to stay on message and to not argue or debate over non-pertinent issues such as healthcare, taxes, foreign policy, etc.

8. If ASPB sends out an action alert, what does that mean?

ASPB is very cautious about sending out action alerts. We know your time is precious and we take that seriously. If ASPB sends out an action alert, it means we have determined that an important issue has arisen and membership engagement is critical to achieving an outcome that benefits and/or prevents harm to the plant biology community.

If you have further questions, please contact ASPB’s Public Affairs office at PublicAffairs@aspb.org.