



American Society of Plant Biologists

Cultivating a better future through plant biology research

CONGRESSIONAL MEETINGS GUIDE

Everyone has the right to meet with and/or contact their Members of Congress. 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 representatives. 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.

HOW TO SCHEDULE A CONGRESSIONAL MEETING

Washington, DC

- 1) Look up the contact information for your Representative at <http://www.house.gov> and for your Senators at <http://www.senate.gov>.
- 2) Contact the Member of Congress's DC appointments scheduler in the DC office and ask for a 15 minute meeting. Be sure to include your name, affiliation, the names of the other people attending the meeting, and the purpose of the meeting. This should be done three to four weeks in advance of the proposed meeting. If you do not receive a response after one week, be sure to follow up.
- 3) Select a date when you will be in Washington, DC, and when Congress will not be in recess.
- 4) If the Member of Congress is unavailable, ask for a meeting with the legislative assistant who handles science, agricultural, energy, or health issues as appropriate.

State/District

- 1) Look up the contact information for your Representative at <http://www.house.gov> and for your Senators at <http://www.senate.gov>.
- 2) Select a date when Congress is in recess, which is when your Representative and/or Senators will be at home.
- 3) Contact the Member of Congress's district appointments scheduler in the district office and ask for a 15 minute meeting. Be sure to include your name, affiliation, the names of the other people attending the meeting, and the purpose of the meeting. This should be done three to four weeks in advance of the proposed meeting. If you do not receive a response after one week, be sure to follow up.
- 4) OR invite the Member of Congress to your lab, facility, or a special function. Contact your institution's government relations officer for assistance with this.
- 5) If the Member of Congress is unavailable, ask for a meeting with the District Director.

DURING THE MEETING

DOs

- Wear business or business casual attire and bring business cards.
- Research the Member of Congress and his or her stance on pertinent issues in advance. Determine whether or not they sit on a relevant congressional committee, such as the House or Senate Appropriations Committee or the House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology.

- Be on time or, better yet, arrive early.
- Discuss your research in lay terms and its local impacts; avoid using acronyms, jargon, or abbreviations. Be sure to hit your talking points early in the conversation and to stay on message.
- Engage in a conversation and ask questions; be polite.
- Be cognizant of Members' and staff's tight schedules and limited time availability.
- Have an "ask" for the Member of Congress. This may be asking him or her to sign on to a letter, support a specific bill or position, etc.
- Offer yourself and your expertise as a resource.
- Invite the Member of Congress to your lab or institution.
- Follow up within 48 hours with a thank-you email. Follow up later, as appropriate, with an invitation to your institution. Stay in touch as relevant issues arise.

DON'Ts

- Wear jeans, t-shirts, or sandals.
- Lecture at the Member of Congress and his or her staff or engage in a debate; be negative.
- Continue the conversation if it has naturally come to an end.
- Provide long, technical documents to read.

FEDERAL VS. NON-FEDERAL EMPLOYEES

Federal Employees

Meeting with your Representative and Senators is allowed. However, 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.¹ If you have questions or concerns, contact your agency's congressional affairs liaison.

Non-Federal Employees

Even if you are funded by a federal grant, you may advocate for specific funding levels. 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.

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

¹ 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>.