



ADVOCACY TOOLBOX

Congressional Office Meetings

There are many ways to engage with your members of Congress (MOC) and to build relationships: regularly writing letters/sending emails, making phone calls, attending town hall meetings and fundraisers. But one of the most effective ways to educate Congress on key issues is by setting up an office meeting with the MOC or his/her staff.

In order for a congressional office meeting to be as successful as possible, solid planning and an understanding of the needs of the office are required. Here's how to plan a successful congressional office meeting.

Requesting a Meeting

- Contact the MOC's office and ask to speak with the appointment secretary/scheduler.
- Explain who you and your company are and the nature of your desired meeting with the MOC. Ask the scheduler how you can arrange a meeting.
- Inform TFI Director of Political Affairs & Communications Christopher Glen of the meeting so that TFI can note the outreach. Christopher can be reached at cglen@tfi.org or (202) 515-2719.

Preparing for a Meeting

- Do your homework by preparing in advance.
- Always develop printed materials to leave behind summarizing the nature of your meeting, the issues you plan to discuss and information you would like them to know about your manufacturing company or facility.
- Members appreciate data that demonstrates how a certain policy will affect the local community, its economy and its residents. Develop your talking points to reflect the local impact on the community and your MOC's district.

Making an Impact at your Meeting

During your meeting, keep your message focused and straightforward. It also may be beneficial to repeat the message throughout the meeting. The mark of a successful congressional office meeting is leaving them with a perfectly clear understanding of why you were there and what you want them to do.

Below are some more helpful tips to remember during your congressional office meeting.

Practice Legislative Etiquette

- Be positive and firm, but not confrontational.
- Establish yourself as a resource.
- MOCs deal with many issues, so don't expect them to have familiarity with details.
- Be on time and let the receptionist know you've arrived.
- In a team visit, work with your colleagues, allowing all to participate in the meeting.

Keep it Brief

- If you are requesting action, communicate that up front.
- Support your request with rationales and examples witnessed through your experiences.
- Summarize the meeting and answer any questions.
- Because the MOC's time is limited, have a plan and budget your time.

Tell the Truth & Tell Your Story

- Credibility is critical to a successful relationship.
- Limit finger pointing.
- If asked a question about the other side of your argument, answer the question as completely as you can, giving your particular perspective.
- Use facts and research.
- Include in your message the size of your company/facility, the number of employees, the positive impact it has on the local community and economy, etc.

Never Promise More than You Can Deliver

- If you say you are going to do something, do it.
- If you don't know, say you don't know, but offer to find the answer and get back in touch with the MOC or staff as soon as possible.

Listen

- Remember that being a good listener is crucial because it will help you have a better dialogue with your MOC. Listening will also help avoid misunderstanding any commitment the MOC may make to you.
- Don't hear only what you want to hear. For example, "*I want to be with you on this,*" does not mean that they are. "*I want to help you,*" is not a commitment that they will.
- If necessary, follow up with specific and focused questions to make sure you understand what the MOC means. Remember not to be confrontational.

Frame Your Issue as it Affects the MOC and District

- Be sensitive to the particulars of the MOC's district. For example, it's hard to ask a MOC to decrease military spending if there is a large military base in the district. Your case will be stronger and more compelling if you present the issue as the MOC and staff see it.
- Acknowledge difficulty MOCs may have. They may be more likely to fight for you if they know you have an appreciation of what's at stake for them.
- Remember that the MOC wants to get re-elected to keep his or her job, just as you want to keep yours. Therefore, MOCs want to please as many people as possible. Help them do it.

Work *With* Staff

- Never view staff as second resort. MOCs depend heavily on their staff.
- Get to know key staff people in an office – receptionist, chief of staff, legislative director, legislative assistants, etc.
- Understand that over time, staff tends to take on the traits, outlook and judgment of their boss.
- Learn the needs of the staff, as well as their style, and be able to work with them as well as the MOC.
- Build a relationship with staff. Always return their phone calls and act as a resource whenever possible.

Be Flexible

- Visits rarely go exactly as planned. MOCs may get delayed in a committee hearing or a vote may occur in the middle of your meeting. If you stay flexible and positive, the visit will be much more successful and pleasant.
- Be ready to meet with staff, even if you were expecting to meet with the MOC.

Thank and Follow Up With MOCs in a Timely Fashion

- MOCs hear complaints all the time and, just like anybody else, they feel rewarded when they are shown appreciation for actions they may have taken with which you agree.
- Make sure your thank-you note includes a brief summary that repeats the major points or specific requests for action you discussed during the meeting.
- Please close the loop with TFI so we can help with any follow-up action and integrate your information with other actions or visits.