



ADVOCACY TOOLBOX

Working with Legislative Staff

Legislative staff members are incredibly important and are relied upon *heavily* by members of Congress (MOCs) for policy research, constituent outreach and relations, keeping the legislative process moving forward, administrative support and keeping the legislator informed of important issues and district sentiment.

As an engaged advocate, you will interact with legislative staffers a great deal. Below are a few insights and tips on how to best work with legislative staffers.

Treating Staff Well

Legislative staffers can have a dramatic impact on the ultimate success or failure of your advocacy efforts. Unless you know your MOC personally and can reach him or her directly, no person or information is going to get to the MOC without first going through staff. Think of them as not just gatekeepers, but gatekeepers that are treated as trusted and reliable sources of information and advice by the MOC.

Treating legislative staff well sets you up to have positive interactions with your MOC's office. A well-treated staff member can be your best friend, ensuring that your messages, materials and requests get through to the MOC quickly and directly. Additionally, legislative staff, especially on the district level, are generally small, close-knit groups and the MOC often sees these individuals as an extension of his or her family. Your MOC will know how you treat their staff and will appreciate you treating them well.

Meeting with Staff

Meetings with Congressional offices are often with staff rather than the MOC themselves. Not always meeting with the MOC sometimes surprises new advocates, but it is not a bad thing and it does not mean that your MOC doesn't think your issue is important or disagrees with your point of view.

One of the benefits of meeting and working with staff is their high level of understanding the issues important to you. In addition to all staff members playing the role of gatekeeper, others are policy experts with years of experience in their given area. When scheduling a meeting to discuss issues related to fertilizer, the staffer you meet with is likely to handle all agricultural issues for the office.

General Tips

Please and Thank-You – Being polite and respectful goes a long way with legislative staffers. They often get the brunt of unhappy constituents and industry insiders, so please and thank you is a welcome change for them. And remember, a happy staffer can make your job easier. A disrespected staffer is going to make it more difficult.

Work With Them – Legislative staff are trying their best to keep a lot of competing interests happy in an ever-changing environment. Scheduling meetings and facility visits often take longer than expected and sometimes come together at the last minute. **BUT**. . . .

. . . **It Is Not the Staffer's Fault** – If the meeting is late, or the MOC is running behind schedule, or the visit is being postponed or rescheduled, it is not the staffer's fault and frustrations should not be taken out on them. A MOC's schedule is fluid and ever-evolving due to unexpected votes, committee meetings, or chaotic issues coming to the forefront.