



Contacting Your Representative or Senator's Office: the Nuts and Bolts on How to Do It and Who to Bring with You

Because each member has his or her own office staff and there is no uniformity to the process, we recommend you contact the member's DC office to ask what their procedures are to request a meeting in their district/state. Some members have a scheduler in their home state or district to deal with state scheduling requests. Some use their DC scheduler. Checking with the DC office will ensure that your request gets to the proper person in a timely manner.

While the format of your meeting is completely up to you, think outside of the box! We encourage you to hold your event or meeting in a venue that can best showcase the work that you do. You are more than welcome to create a new event or venue, but keep in mind that you probably have a number of already existing venues that the member or senator can be invited to. These include breakfasts, lunch meetings, regional trainings, receptions, annual conferences and giving report unveilings, just to name a few. The sky is the limit! The random sampling below will help give you an idea of the variety of formats possible. These were all actual meetings held with Members.

Project Connect

Project Connect, organized by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, helps grantees build relationships with Members of Congress. Several times a year, grantees arrange site visits or meetings with their representative. The meetings promote the work of the foundation and grantees to critical audiences including the media, potential corporate funders, community organizations, and the general public.

Akron Foundations Group

This group of grantmakers hosts an annual luncheon meeting in the Member's district to inform him about philanthropy at work in his district. Many years after the initial event, the Member of Congress continues to value this annual meeting as an important source of information about his nonprofit constituency.

Minnesota

The regional association in Minneapolis plans annual meetings with each of its representatives, seeking balance among those attending to include foundation type (corporate, community and private foundations) as well as in size and grantmaking interest. The resulting perspective provides to the Member is of a grantmaking community that, while diverse in its approach to philanthropy, is unified in its purpose.

Who gets invited to the meeting/events well as who hosts the event is entirely up to you. Invites can range from board members to grantees, depending on the type of event or meeting you decide to host. However, if you are aiming for a smaller, more intimate breakfast for example, you may want to invite board members alone. Think strategically: Who on your board or staff have established relationships with these offices? Do you want to invite the press? Is this an event for 200 people or a smaller event for 10? Would your Member of Congress prefer a larger crowd or more intimate gathering? The choice is completely yours.

As you can see, there is no set formula for a successful meeting. The important factors to have in place are that a meeting is scheduled and takes place, the Member hears the story of foundation philanthropy from the people who know it best and as a result he or she becomes sensitive to and appreciative of the contributions of foundations to constituents in his/her state or district. Also, remember to include an invitation to staff as well. Creating or fostering a relationship with staff is just as important.