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SBTC Congressional Visit Manual

**2020 note: due to the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, in-person meetings with congressional offices are discouraged, and in some cases prohibited. Virtual meetings via computer or phone are encouraged until the pandemic is under control and restrictions are lifted.*

How to schedule a meeting with your Congressional Office

The first question you should ask is if it makes more sense to meet in the member of Congress's district office or their Washington office. Getting a meeting in a district office is usually easier, and makes more sense if your issue is related to casework, rather than policy. If you are trying to organize a visit from your member of Congress to your company site, it also makes more sense to coordinate through their district office.

On the other hand, if you want to discuss policy, promote or oppose a specific piece of legislation, or have a meet-and-greet with the member of Congress, you'll want to work through the Washington office. But even in that case, your local district office can help coordinate and network you with the correct staffer in your member's Washington office.

By phone

You can find the main office phone number for your member of Congress's Washington and district offices, usually listed under "contacts". In most cases, it is easier and simpler to work through your member's district office to help coordinate with their Washington office, particularly if you already have a relationship with the district office. If you want to reach your member's Washington office directly, Senate office numbers begin with (202) 224-, while House office numbers begin with (202) 225-. Or, you can call the main Capitol Switchboard at 202-224-3121 (Senate) or 202-225-3121 (House), and ask them to connect you to the office you are trying to reach

If you are trying to speak to a staffer on a policy issue, you should ask to speak to either the Legislative Aide in charge of the relevant policy (ie small business, technology, etc), or the Legislative Director. The Legislative Director is often more difficult to get a meeting with, and he or she may delegate the meeting to the relevant LA regardless. If you are trying to set up a meeting with the member, ask to speak with the Scheduler, who will ask you what the purpose of your visit, who will be attending the meeting, and other relevant questions. In either case,



be sure to record the name of the staffer you want to speak to from the receptionist in order to circle back later.

By email

Congressional staffers are often extremely busy, and don't always take calls or return voice mails from unknown callers. You will frequently get a better response from an email instead. If you call a Congressional office and ask the receptionist for a staffer's email address, in most cases they will give it to you. The House and Senate both use a standard email format, which makes it easy to guess a staffer's address if you know their name:

House: *firstname.lastname@mail.house.gov*

Senate: *firstname_lastname@senatorslastname.senate.gov*

Be sure to be direct and concise in your message, as staffers have to respond to a lot of emails and don't always read through everything, particularly if the email has a lot of text with unnecessary exposition or background. If you are emailing to request a meeting or a call, be sure to put that in the subject of your email.

About Washington, DC Congressional Offices

Both the Senate and the House of Representatives have three main office buildings where the majority of Congressional offices are located. The three main Senate Office Buildings are on Constitution Avenue just north of the Capitol and are named the Russell, Dirksen, and Hart Office Buildings. The three main House Office Buildings are on Independence Avenue just south of the Capitol and are named the Cannon, Longworth, and Rayburn House Office Buildings.

All six are open to the public during working hours, and entrants must pass through an x-ray machine and metal detector. You do not need an appointment to get into the buildings, and can drop in on your member of Congress's office any time, though it is unlikely you will be able to meet with anyone without an appointment. Most Committee Hearings are also open to the public, though seating is limited, and visitors are seated on a first-come, first-serve basis.

There are some offices in the Capitol building itself, such as the Speaker's, Majority, and Minority leader's offices, but it is much more secure and difficult to enter, and in most cases you will not be permitted to enter without an escort.

There is no on-site parking lot or garage open to the public on the Capitol Hill complex, and you should not expect to find a parking spot nearby. There are a few pay garages - the biggest garage close to the Capitol is at Union Station, three blocks north. Taxis are usually the quickest



way to get to and from Capitol Hill, and taxis can commonly be found outside all Congressional office buildings. You can also use the metro – The closest metro stop to the Senate side is Union Station, on the Red Line; the closest metro stop to the House side is Capitol South, on the Orange/Blue/Silver Lines.

Scheduling a Congressional Visit

A member of Congress will often visit small businesses in his or her district whenever they get the chance. It is a good way to get their name in the paper, and generate publicity shots bolstering their image as being connected with the community and bolstering prosperity and entrepreneurship. For the small business, it is an opportunity to build a relationship with their legislator that could pay dividends down the road, and show off the business's services, products, or facilities publicly.

Unless you already have a personal relationship with your member, the best way to schedule a Congressional visit is by coordinating with their district office. Be sure to contact the office weeks, if not months in advance, since members of Congress usually have very busy schedules with many public appearances to make when they are in their home district. It is also helpful if you can schedule the visit with other companies, this will make it more likely your member will agree to visit.

You will likely only have a brief time with the member, so be sure to plan carefully. The member will have his or her own agenda, which often is a set program that involves brief prepared remarks, tour of the facility, meet and greet with employees, and posing for photos with the press. It is often a good idea to assign an employee to take pictures during his or her visit so both you and the member have plenty to choose from.

Be prepared to discuss your concerns and issues in a concise, elevator-pitch type format, as the member may not have time in his schedule to discuss the matter at length. Keep an eye on the clock and make sure the visit is moving along smoothly, otherwise the member may be forced to leave before you are able to discuss your issues. If there is a bill you'd like the member to support or oppose, make sure you know the bill number and sponsor. Any documents or materials you can leave with his staff to review will also help.



Congressional Office Staff Roles

When dealing with congressional offices, it is helpful to know the various titles and roles you will encounter. Each Member of Congress can fill his or her staff in any way they deem necessary, so there is some variation from office to office, some titles and roles in certain offices but not others. However, there are certain roles that are commonly found in all offices, below are the ones you are most likely to come in contact with.

Chief of Staff/Administrative Assistant (AA)

Usually the top ranked staffer in a congressional office. This individual is in charge of office operations, reports directly to the member of Congress, and hands out assignments and tasks to staff.

Legislative Director (LD)

Responsible for managing the various policy portfolios and their respective legislative aides, monitors the legislative schedule, and offers pros and cons to major bills. He or she usually also has a portfolio of policy areas to manage personally. If the member of Congress is a Chair or Ranking Member of a committee, the LD will often manage the policy portfolio related to that committee.

Legislative Aide (LA)

The most common staffer you will meet with when discussing policy is a legislative aide. A congressional office will have several of this type of staffer, each with a portfolio of policy areas. When meeting with a Congressional office at a staff level, you will usually be given a meeting with the LA in charge of small business issues, but also science/technology LAs and occasionally Defense LAs if your issue is DOD-specific.

Scheduler

The scheduler is responsible for managing the member of Congress's schedule and appointments. Unless you have a personal relationship with the member, this staffer is the gatekeeper for arranging a meeting with your member, and you will need to work with him or her to get an appointment or a visit to your company site scheduled.



Caseworker

Caseworkers usually work in the member's district, rather than in Washington. Their role is to assist with constituent requests and give assistance to individuals or companies who have a problem with the Federal government. If you have a issue with an agency, office, or government official that is a specific case rather than a broad policy issue, the caseworker is usually the staffer that handles it.