

## **Getting Ready: A Quick Guide to Meeting with Your Legislators**

This page provides a quick guide to gathering useful information along with some general talking points for a Congressional meeting. When planning a meeting, do not be discouraged if you meet with a staff person instead of the lawmaker; members of staff handle policy issues and will communicate your views to your legislator.

Knowing something about the Member will give you some idea about how to approach your conversation. Of particular interest are the Member's background, party, ideology, voting record, tenure in Congress, and whether the Member belongs to a Committee that plays a role in nutrition, science or biomedical research funding or other issues.

### About the Legislator

#### Biography:

- Name
- Party Affiliation
- Ideology
- Educational Background
- Year elected

#### District Information:

- Academic and Research Institutions in the district/state
- Type of district (urban, suburban, rural, mixed)
- Major industries and other large employers

#### Positions in Congress:

- Committee assignments
- Leadership positions (Committees chaired, etc)
- Public positions on nutrition and biomedical research issues
- Personal connection to nutrition programs, research or practice

### Congressional Visit Pointers

- Do your homework. (See above!)
- Determine what outcome you wish to see from the meeting. Rehearse a brief opening statement, or “elevator pitch,” that explains what you want and why. Keep it short and to the point.

- On the day of the meeting show up on time. Do not be surprised, however, if you have to wait.
- When you arrive for a meeting with the Member of Congress, you may meet instead with a staff person. Do not be offended, this is common. It is also common for the staff to be quite young. (You have a better chance of meeting with a legislator, especially a Senator, personally if you come as part of a group).
- During the meeting, be courteous (even in the unlikely event they are not).
- Avoid overly scientific jargon and acronyms. This can create a barrier to understanding and diminish the effectiveness of the presentation. Also, begin at the beginning. First gauge the staffer's background on a given issue, so you will know how to proceed when discussing the issue at hand. Do not assume they are familiar with the topic or issue.
- In the face of a disagreement, do not threaten or claim to have vast political influence. Also, do not argue, but instead try to determine the reasons for opposition and what it would take to change the Member of Congress' mind.
- Keep on message and avoid being distracted.
- Always answer questions clearly and truthfully. If you are asked a question to which you do not know the answer, say so and promise to get the answer to the person you met with as soon as possible. Be sure to follow through on such promises.
- Ask for a business card and if you have one, give it to the person with whom you met.
- Follow up! Write a thank you note as soon as possible after the meeting that restates talking points and extends an offer of future assistance.
- Share your experience with your colleagues. Encourage them to advocate for science and their profession with Congress.