

PREPARING FOR YOUR TRIP TO CAPITOL HILL

Coordinate with People in your Organization

- Meet with your Director/Administrator to discuss your visit to Capitol Hill.
- Let your university lobbyist or the Government Relations liaison for your Dean know that you will be going to the Hill. He/she may have some useful tips based on personal knowledge of your Congressional delegation. Share a copy of all the information that you take to the Hill with this person. They are an important ally in supporting Extension funding, may have little first hand knowledge about us.
- Establish state teams to visit legislators. Try to target your discussion to a few programs of interest to that Member and their Congressional District. A constituent of the Member should take the lead in each discussion. Coordinate your plans so that those wishing to visit a particular legislator do so together with one appointment. Don't attempt to visit a member of Congress who doesn't represent you unless you have a specific, compelling reason for doing so.

Conduct Research

- Find out which issues are important to the Member of Congress you will be visiting. Go to <http://www.senate.gov/> or to <http://www.house.gov/>. There are web sites for each Member of Congress that will give you information about their interests, committee membership etc.
- Find out about the member's views and positions on issues involving Extension programming.

Prepare Your Presentation and Supporting Materials

- Select no more than two or three recent educational programs or issues and focus on them.
- Don't talk in Extension jargon, or even about our program areas. Those are internal issues which aren't important to our funders. They want to know how we are making a difference in the lives of their constituents.
- Emphasize the outcomes of a program and how it makes a difference in people's lives. Remember the people who participate in your programs are constituents of the Congress person. Share tangible facts whenever possible. These include the economic impact, money saved, etc. If the program doesn't lend itself to these facts, have a compelling story to tell.
- Develop your presentation so it will be direct, concise, and short (plan on 15 minutes total for your group). Also, have a two-minute version prepared just in case their schedule changes.
- Thank the Member or staff person for their past support of Extension programs.
- Prepare a brief one-page written account of the points you wish to make, complete with contact information and leave it with your legislator or staff person. Include only two or three key points on the page emphasizing the relevance of your programs to constituents' needs and program outcomes. Make sure you include your email address and phone and Fax numbers with this page.
- Do not overwhelm the Member or staff with materials. A large packet of information will probably never be looked at. Specific, targeted, brief materials are greatly preferred.
- It can be a nice touch to take a small gift. Take several, one for the Member and one for any staff people with whom you meet. Let your university lobbyist know what you are taking and its value. Token gifts such as lapel pins, pens, etc. are not an ethical concern, but individual will still appreciate being informed.

Schedule Your Capitol Hill Appointments

- Make appointments with the members of Congress you plan to visit. You should allow lead time of about a month. To do this you will need to call and speak to the scheduler. Be prepared ahead of time with a letter that states the topic of your appointment and that you are a constituent of that Member of Congress. Name the city and state where you live. After you speak to the scheduler, ask them if you can FAX them the written appointment request. Some offices are moving to internet-based scheduling requests. You will need to ask how the

scheduler prefers that the request be made. If you do not get a quick response, this is often a sign that the scheduler is trying to help you see the Member of Congress. Their schedules are often not set until a day or two before they occur.

- You can get your Senator or Representative's address and phone number from their website. Links to member's websites can be found at the Senate and House sites listed above.
- Explain who you are and that the purpose of your meeting is to share with the member important information about Extension programs in his/her district.
- Indicate the specific topics you will discuss. This alerts the scheduler to inform the appropriate assistants (Member's aides) about the upcoming meeting. The staff person that you will usually meet with is the agricultural staff person because Extension funding comes through agricultural appropriations.
- Confirm your appointment when you make it by FAX, email or phone. Confirm again just before you leave for Washington D.C. or the day before the appointment to make sure schedules have not unexpectedly changed. After your visit, follow up with a thank you note. This can be typed or hand-written and faxed to the office for the member or staff. E-mail can also work for follow up thank you notes if you meet with a staff person.

When You Visit

- Check in with the receptionist about 5 minutes prior to the scheduled appointment time. But, be prepared to wait if needed.
- Your meeting may last for 30 minutes or you may have only two minutes. Have your "elevator message ready in case the appointment is brief.
- Be flexible, you may meet in the hallway or in part of the office's reception area. Space is at a premium.
- You may meet with an aide or assistant instead of your Congress person. Don't be disappointed if you meet with a staff person. They prioritize information that reaches the elected official. These individuals are most often young, may or may not be from your state and may or may not be familiar with Extension or your issue. They have assigned issues upon which they focus for the elected official.
- Obtain business cards from those with whom you meet. Use that business card to properly address a thank you note. Faxing the note is the best way to send it.

Navigate Your Environment

- Business attire is appropriate, but wear comfortable shoes. You will do lots of walking.
- If you take the Metro to Capitol Hill, local custom is that when on the escalators in and out of the Metro station you stand on the right and walk on the left side of the escalator.
- Look at a map before you go. There are maps of the House and Senate office buildings in the back of the Congressional Directory that you received. The closest Metro stop to the Senate office buildings is Union Station (red line). The closest Metro stop to the House office buildings is Capitol South (blue line).
- If you take a taxi, know the name of the building where you are going. Know whether it is a House office building or Senate office building.
- Arrive at the office building 20 minutes prior to your appointment to allow time to go through security. Knives, mace, etc. are not permitted.
- Once you are inside the House side or the Senate side of the Hill, you can connect to the other two buildings on that side through underground tunnels. This avoids the need to go through security screening between buildings more than necessary.
- There are cafeterias in the basement of most of the six office buildings that are open to the public.