

AMS Grassroots Advocacy

A Guide for Effective Meetings with Members of Congress

Overview

A Member of Congress is elected to represent the people in a district or state. Therefore, it is important that mathematicians and scientists meet with members of Congress to discuss issues pertinent to mathematics and science research and education. Constituents should not be intimidated to meet with members and/or their staff. An important part of the Member's job is to listen to constituents and then make informed decisions based on these conversations. Congress will make decisions that will impact mathematics and science research in the future. You have firsthand knowledge of the importance of basic research and its role in innovation. Members of Congress listen to constituents, particularly those who have knowledge in the area they are advocating.

Meeting with the Member and/or staff

Members of Congress have very busy schedules and cannot meet with all of the constituents who request a meeting on a given day. As a result, Members rely heavily on their staff. "Staffers" have a great deal of influence and can be instrumental in conveying the significance of an issue to the Member.

11 Tips for Effective Meetings with Your Members of Congress

- Tip 1 Be punctual**—Once you have scheduled meetings with your Members of Congress and/or staff, you should arrive to the meetings on time.
- Tip 2 Select a spokesperson**—If you are in a group of people, you should select a spokesperson. Although *everyone should contribute to the conversation*, you should have one person who will begin the discussion. A spokesperson should be prepared to say that the group is here to discuss federal support for mathematics and science research, particularly through the National Science Foundation and/or the Office of Science of the Department of Energy. Decide in advance what and how each person in the group will contribute to the discussion so that your visit will run smoothly.
- Tip 3 Do your research**—Research your Congress Members' backgrounds, committee assignments and know if he/she has supported funding for mathematics and science research and education in the past. If so, make sure you thank the Member/staffer for this support.
- Tip 4 Emphasize local concerns**—One of your biggest assets is that you understand how things work at the local level. Members and their staffs are always eager to hear how federal programs and funding are important to your department and institution. This is your chance to relay this information. Lobbying with real life experiences is your

most persuasive tool. Make sure to include in your discussion how funding from the NSF and/or the Office of Science of DOE impacts your department and institution.

- Tip 5 Ask directly for your Congress Members' support**—If your Member of Congress is supportive, ask him/her to lobby other Members of Congress to support your position. If your Member of Congress disagrees with your position, hear him/her out politely, express respectful disappointment, and rebut his/her argument *if* you have the facts to do so. Be courteous; you'll have other issues to take up in the future.
- Tip 6 Distribute minimal paperwork**—The AMS Washington Office will provide you with concise information to leave with the Member and/or staffer.
- Tip 7 Know how to handle a difficult question**—If during the meeting you are asked a question and you do not know the answer, inform the Member or staffer that you will need to look into that issue and that you would be happy to get back in touch with the requested information. Be certain to get a business card so that you can contact the person with the information as soon as possible.
- Tip 8 Thank your Members of Congress**—Everyone likes a pat on the back. Remember to thank each of your Members of Congress for past support of mathematics and science research and education.
- Tip 9 Invite your Members of Congress**—Invite your Members of Congress and/or staff to visit your department and institution; follow-up with a formal invitation.
- Tip 10 Offer yourself as a resource to the Member**—Remember to bring your business card so that the Member and/or staff can contact you in the future about mathematics and science research and education.
- Tip 11 Write a follow-up letter**—Send the Member and/or staffer a follow-up letter to thank them for meeting with you. This is an excellent opportunity to reiterate the issues that were discussed during the meeting.