

THE MEETING

WHOM TO MEET. You can find information about the legislators that represent your district and the districts you serve at <https://www.congress.gov/members/find-your-member>.

If you have any questions on which offices to reach out to or for information on how to reach your federal representatives and their staff, please call ABC at (202) 393-5725.

WHEN TO MEET. Generally, your Members of Congress will be more readily able to see you and to spend time with you without distractions when you visit them in their home districts. Federal lawmakers usually return to their districts on the weekends. They also have “district work periods” scheduled throughout the year, notable during most of the month of August. For the best times to schedule an appointment, please refer to the calendar for the Senate and House of Representatives.

While it is always nice to meet with Members of Congress, it is essential to educate and build a relationship with their legislative staff that handles health care issues. These staffers are responsible for educating their boss and often have a great deal of sway in the issues their boss engages on (as well as doing much of the day to day work of actually making things happen). Meeting with the legislative staff that handles health care issues are often located in Washington, DC; however, these staff often travel to the district at least once a year and are willing to schedule local meetings or meet virtually.

ABC’s annual Day on Capitol Hill (virtual) is a great way to start building that relationship.

SETTING UP THE MEETING. To meet with a Member of Congress in their district office, call or email the Scheduler (follow up a written request with a phone call).

Many Congressional websites identify this person and include a way to contact them, otherwise you can call the office and ask for the scheduler’s email (note: most have a district scheduler and a separate DC scheduler).

If you cannot identify this person, reach out to ABC and we can help. Explain who you are and who you represent. Explain the purpose of the meeting – either a “courtesy call” or to discuss a specific issue. It is best to assure the Scheduler that the meeting will be brief (15-20 minutes), however, a visit to your facility can be scheduled for longer.

In scheduling the meeting, try to be accommodating about whatever scheduling arrangements are suggested by the Member’s office.

Scheduling meetings with congressional staffers is a much less formal process and should generally be done via an email requesting a meeting. Most offices are willing to engage in phone or other virtual meetings, though in person meetings are always great for relationship building.

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Email the staffer with your availability, but also recognize these staffers are very busy (note: if you are asking for a meeting in the district, remember that they have limited time in the district) so be flexible with meeting times. It's always important to note that talking to the legislative staffer is often a great way to move forward a request to meet with the Member in the district, while they don't control the schedule, they can often flag a meeting or visit to your facility as a priority.

THE "COURTESY CALL" & "THE ISSUE MEETING." There are two types of meetings. The Courtesy Call is a brief 15-20 minute visit, intended to either introduce yourself to a Member you have not met before, or touch base with a Member with whom you have not had contact recently.

This is an educational meeting to let them know your center serves their constituents and to explain how you are a part of health care and let them know your footprint in their district (both collections and hospitals). (A sample "Courtesy Call" agenda follows in the next section.)

The second type of call is the Issue Meeting, to express your concerns about a specific topic. The ABC office can provide information and talking points on specific legislative issues to prepare you for your Issue Meeting.

PREPARING FOR MEETINGS. Whenever possible make sure you have as many constituents as possible. This might include blood center staff, Board members, donors, or even blood drive sponsors. It always helps when a Member of Congress hears the same message, either individually or collectively, from constituents and/or community leaders at home.

If you meet with the Member of Congress or their staff as an informal group, it is critical that you plan your discussion strategy in advance of the meeting. Consider preparing an agenda in advance and providing copies to those participating in the meeting, but also don't feel like you can't go "off script" if the Member has questions. The very best meetings are often the ones that become a conversation.

Clearly designate the lead person who will deliver the key message you want to leave with the Member of Congress or their staff. This way you make sure you get your core message out no matter what.

Be on time for the appointment.



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MAKING YOUR POINTS CLEARLY. Start by telling the Member of Congress what your blood center does, most people just know that blood is always there, give them a little more details. It's fascinating, plus it shows just how important what you do is.

It's always important to share the challenges you face, especially ways they can help. Be clear in your concerns and provide specifics whenever possible.

Be clear with any asks for help and whenever possible get them to self-identify as a champion for the blood supply.

Pay attention to the staff member taking notes and responsible for follow-up after the meeting. It is often helpful to reach out to them individually as they often are the ones responsible for actually doing the work and getting their members to engage.

Provide the Member and staff with written materials (hand-outs and information on the specific issue, on your blood center and the role you play in the blood supply in your area).

And always send electronic copies. Be sure to provide information and statistics that are particular to your state and/or region so that the relevance to the Member is apparent.

Make sure you are aware of any opposition to your position on the issue. Explain and respond to the opposition's position, but of course also emphasize who supports your position and why.

It's ok not to have all the answers. If a question is asked you aren't sure about, simply let them know you will follow up. Then make sure you ultimately do follow up with the information.

Be a good source of information and make sure they are aware you are available if they have additional questions or when other related issues arise. You will gain credibility if you can both educate and persuade.

FOLLOWING UP. Every participant should write an individual thank-you letter to the Member of Congress or their staff immediately after the meeting. These thank you notes are a great relationship building tool.



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They don't need to be formal. Briefly outline the most important points covered during the meeting and include any additional information requested. Be sure to express appreciation to any of the Member's staff who were involved in scheduling, facilitating, or attending the meeting.

Get to know the right people on the member's staff (e.g., Health Legislative Aide, Legislative Director, Administrative Assistant, District Office Director). The quickest way to a Member of Congress' heart and mind is through the staff. Include a personal note to your key staff contact when you send a letter to the Member thanking them for their efforts to help you and offering to supply additional information or help whenever necessary.

Maintain contacts throughout the legislative process. If Members of Congress vote with you, thank them for their support. If they vote against you, thank them for considering your ideas, then look for new angles and new developments to share with your representatives to update them, change their minds, etc.

Let ABC know who you are meeting with. Better yet, include a photo we can share on social media (make sure to get the ok from the Member or their staff).

OTHER THINGS TO REMEMBER. Be patient and flexible. Due to their crowded schedules, Members of Congress are sometimes late, and are often interrupted during meetings.

Don't be political. Clearly define how your blood center is important to the welfare of the Member's constituents, and how you can be of assistance to him/her but avoid getting political. Remember, regardless of their politics they represent you and the people they serve.

