



National Service in Your Neighborhood

A Guide to Leading a Successful District Office Meeting with Your Member of Congress

Introduction

As members of Congress make difficult budget decisions in Washington, they want to know which federal programs are making a difference in the lives of their constituents. They want to understand the results federal programs are bringing to the communities they represent.

Congressional recess periods offer a valuable opportunity to meet with your members of Congress and their staff to let them know the critical role national service programs are playing in your area. By leading a meeting in your member of Congress' district office, you can help to make the case for continued funding for national service and you can help to save AmeriCorps and Senior Corps from proposed budget cuts.

This guide offers resources to help plan and lead a successful district office meeting with your member of Congress or their staff. This guide includes:

- Step-by-step instructions for scheduling a district office meeting;
- Template meeting request letter;
- Recommended meeting participants, meeting agenda, and materials to leave with congressional staff;
- Suggested talking points for your district office meeting;
- Social media tips and sample social media posts;
- Template thank you note to send to congressional staff.

Every district office meeting is a valuable opportunity to develop congressional champions for national service. We want to make sure you feel prepared and comfortable as you go through the process, so please feel free to contact us with any questions as you schedule and plan for your district office meeting. Questions can be directed to the Voices for National Service team at info@voicesforservice.org or 202-742-7376.

Step-by-Step Instructions for Scheduling a District Office Meeting

Congressional recess periods are a valuable opportunity to schedule a meeting with your member of Congress or their staff to share the critical impact national service programs are having in your area. Here are five easy steps to schedule a district office meeting with your member of Congress:

1. **Ask for the contact information of your member of Congress' scheduler.** Every member of Congress has a scheduler who is responsible for setting up meetings in Washington and back home in their state and district. Congressional offices want to be accessible to their constituents and other stakeholders, and they will gladly let you know who the member of Congress' scheduler is and how to contact that person. Simply call your member of Congress' office and ask for the name and e-mail address of the member of Congress' scheduler. You can find your member of Congress' office phone number at www.house.gov/representatives or www.senate.gov/senators/contact.
2. **Send a formal meeting request.** Even if you've spoken in person with a member of Congress or a member of their staff about having a meeting, make sure to follow-up with a formal meeting request to the member of Congress' scheduler. You can send an e-mail to the scheduler directly, and feel free to use the district office meeting request template on the next page as a guide. If you know a staffer in the member of Congress' Washington or district office, we encourage you to copy that staffer on the e-mailed meeting request.
3. **Be flexible regarding the date and time of the meeting.** Congressional schedules can fill up quickly, and members of Congress often have many meetings and other engagements while they are home during congressional recess periods. We recommend offering several days or a span of time during which you would be available to for a meeting in the member of Congress' district office (e.g. "during August recess"). The more flexible you are with respect to the date and time of the meeting, the more likely you will be to secure a meeting with the member of Congress.
4. **Don't be afraid to follow-up on a pending meeting request.** Members of Congress receive far more requests of their time than they can reasonably fulfill, and sometimes, invitations get lost in the shuffle. If you haven't received a response to a pending meeting request, feel free to call the member of Congress' scheduler to confirm they have received the request. Oftentimes, the squeaky wheel gets the grease!
5. **Once you've scheduled your meeting, let us know.** The Voices for National Service team wants to track all the great work happening across the country, and we want to make sure you feel confident and prepared for your district office meeting. Please let us know when you've scheduled a meeting with your member of Congress or their staff.

Template Meeting Request Letter

The Honorable **MEMBER OF CONGRESS**

United States Congress

Washington, DC 20515

Dear **SENATOR/REPRESENTATIVE LAST NAME**:

As constituents in your **DISTRICT/STATE**, we are requesting a meeting with you in your district office during the upcoming congressional recess, July 29-September 4, 2017.

Our group will include:

- **NAME, TITLE, ORGANIZATION**
- **NAME, TITLE, ORGANIZATION**
- **NAME, TITLE, ORGANIZATION**

Support from AmeriCorps and Senior Corps is critical to our ability to meet the needs of our local community, and these results-driven programs help our organizations improve the lives of your constituents. Federal investments from the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), which we match with private, philanthropic and local contributions, enable our organizations to engage citizens in intensive direct service that addresses the needs of our most vulnerable families and communities. This highly-leveraged investment helps to drive community solutions to pressing challenges in education, disaster relief and preparedness, veteran services, and more.

Our organizations are examples of the many ways in which AmeriCorps and Senior Corps members are supporting our community here in **CITY, STATE**. **ADD A FEW SENTENCES DESCRIBING THE PROGRAMS THAT WILL BE REPRESENTED AT THE MEETING AND HOW NATIONAL SERVICE MEMBERS ENABLE THESE PROGRAMS TO SUPPORT LOCAL RESIDENTS.**

The President's full FY18 budget proposal calls for the elimination of CNCS, AmeriCorps and Senior Corps. During the August recess, we would appreciate the opportunity to speak with you about our work, and what would be at stake if funding is cut or eliminated. If you are unable to meet with us during this recess, we would appreciate the opportunity to meet with a member of your district office staff.

We look forward to hearing back from your office on your availability for a meeting. Should you or your staff have any questions, please contact **POINT OF CONTACT** at **CONTACT INFORMATION**.

Sincerely,

NAME

NAME

NAME

TITLE

TITLE

TITLE

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Recommended Meeting Participants

District office meetings about national service funding are strongest when the congressional office can see multiple community members, representing different organizations or perspectives, speaking about the importance of national service. As you plan for your district office meeting, we recommend inviting other national service leaders, partners or local validators from your area to join you in the meeting.

To demonstrate the breadth of support for national service in your area, consider inviting community members who can speak from the following perspectives:

- Leaders and staff of AmeriCorps and Senior Corps programs
- State service commission representatives
- Alumni of national service programs
- Local service partners (e.g. school or school district representatives, local government representatives, etc.)
- Private sector partners and sponsors
- Board members or community leaders who support national service programs

Recommended Meeting Agenda

While the meeting structure may vary based on whether the member of Congress is present or how much time has been allotted for the meeting, we strongly recommend that you follow the meeting agenda below.

1. Meeting Leader opens the meeting by thanking the member of Congress for his or her time and by distributing materials to leave behind with the member of Congress and staff.
2. Meeting Leader introduces the group, and each meeting participant shares a one-minute overview of their organization and how the organization relates to the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS). In these introductions, make sure to highlight:
 - Describe how your program is helping to solve pressing issues in the member of Congress' state or district. It is important to note how your work is supported by CNCS funds. Explain whether you utilize full-time or part-time AmeriCorps members or Senior Corps volunteers.
 - Use relevant data and statistics to show the benefits your program is providing to the member of Congress' constituents and community. Please be specific about the value added by national service members. If you can, estimate what similar services might cost if they were provided by contracting with another service provider other than a national service program supported by CNCS. Explain that without these national service members it would be difficult or impossible to meet growing community needs and effectively serve the member of Congress' community.
 - If budget cuts and sequester have affected your program in recent years, please explain how the cuts have affected your program's ability to meet local needs.
 - If you are an alumna or alumnus of a national service program, provide a brief overview of your service experience and the impact you had on individuals or the community. Explain how your service experience developed your leadership skills, helped connect you to your current profession, alleviated student debt or helped to make additional education more affordable.
3. If the member of Congress or the staff need additional background, the Meeting Leader should provide a two-minute explanation of the Corporation for National and Community Service and its core programs: AmeriCorps, Senior Corps, and the Volunteer Generation Fund, and state service commissions.
4. Meeting Leader discusses the current state of funding for the Corporation for National and Community Service, with other participants commenting when appropriate. Be sure to urge the member of Congress to ensure continued and robust funding for all of CNCS' programs in FY18.
5. The Meeting Leader closes each visit with our requests:
 - a. Ask the member of Congress to support funding for CNCS in FY18.
 - b. If they are not yet a member, invite the member of Congress to join the National Service Congressional Caucus (the current membership list can be found [here](#)).
 - c. Invite the member of Congress to visit your program.
6. At the end of your meeting, ask the staff member or member of Congress to take a photo with you, so you can share your appreciation and enthusiasm on social media.

Recommended Materials to Leave with Congressional Staff

Congressional staff often refer back to materials given to them in meetings when they develop and consider legislation and draft speeches and talking points for members of Congress. Please bring the following background materials to your meeting to share with the member of Congress and their staff. If you do not have these materials available, or the staff member of member of Congress requests additional detail, we recommend that you offer to follow-up with the staff after the meeting to provide any requested materials.

Create a folder with the following materials to share with congressional staff at your district office meeting:

- Information on your organization, including impact and stories
- Summary of national service in your state (found [here](#))
- One-pager on national service funding (found [here](#))
- One-pager on National Service Congressional Caucus (found [here](#))
- Relevant local news articles that discuss the impact of national service
- #Stand4Service sign to hold in photos for social media (found [here](#))

Suggested Talking Points for Your District Office Meeting

The primary goal of a district office meeting is to build a relationship with your member of Congress and their staff, as well as to ask the member of Congress to invest in the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) and all of its core programs.

Here are some key talking points to help guide your meeting:

- For decades, national service programs have had strong bipartisan support and have provided cost-effective services to individuals, families, and communities in need.
- The President's budget proposal recommends the elimination of CNCS, AmeriCorps and Senior Corps in FY18. This would be devastating to our community and the individuals who depend on the services our organizations provide.
- We are glad to see that the House Appropriations Subcommittee recommended full funding for CNCS and its programs in FY18. We hope Congress will continue to work to ensure these programs receive robust funding.
- As the FY18 appropriations process continues, I encourage you to work with your colleagues to ensure continued and robust funding for national service programs like AmeriCorps and Senior Corps.

Additional points about the value and benefits of national service:

- **American voters want Congress to invest in national service.** A recent poll conducted by TargetPoint Consulting shows that Americans voters overwhelmingly support maintaining or increasing the current level of federal investment in national service.
 - 83 percent of voters across nine battleground states want Congress to maintain or increase the federal investment in CNCS.
 - This support defies partisan politics, including 78 percent of Republicans, 84 percent of Independents, and 90 percent of Democrats surveyed.
- **National service is cost-effective and represents a smart investment for the nation.** The nation is in a period of slow economic growth, and Congress must invest in cost-effective programs that create jobs, deliver results, and provide vital services to our communities.
 - A study by economists at Columbia University demonstrates that national service is a cost-effective strategy to address our nation's pressing challenges, providing a 4-to-1 return on investment in terms of higher earnings, increased output, and other community-wide benefits.
 - The study also finds that every federal dollar invested in national service yields \$2.20 in savings to other government programs.
 - Furthermore, national service programs leverage a unique public-private partnership, and the modest federal investment in national service generates approximately \$880 million in outside support from private, philanthropic, and local sources.
- **National service programs are filling the gap between the services constituents need and what state and local governments are able to provide.** In the current economic climate, citizens are struggling and local and state budgets have been shrinking. As a result, there is a widening gap between the services that citizens require and the supports local governments can provide. Nonprofit organizations have been trying to fill this gap, but are struggling to do so.
 - According to the 2015 Nonprofit Finance Fund survey, 52% of nonprofits were unable to meet demand for services in 2014 due to a lack of person power and resources.
 - CNCS is providing these nonprofit organizations with the person power needed to deliver vital services, including educational support, affordable housing, job training, and social services to constituents.

- **Americans are eager to serve their country through programs supported by the Corporation for National and Community Service.**
 - On average, AmeriCorps programs received five applications for every single available position. For some programs, the applicant to acceptance ratio can be as high as 13 to 1.
 - Hundreds of thousands of Americans who step forward to serve are turned away annually, and many applicants are coming from demographic groups with high unemployment rates, including young adults, minorities, and veterans.
- **National service is vital to our economy.** If Congress were to stop investing in CNCS today, the impact would be significant, leaving approximately 80,000 AmeriCorps members and 360,000 Senior Corps volunteers without service opportunities, nearly 1 million seniors without support that allows them to live independently, and more than 3 million at-risk children without vital educational support. The 50,000 service sites – including schools, hospitals, veteran’s assistance centers, food banks, and more - that rely upon CNCS support would have to eliminate programs and reduce social services. During this period of slow economic growth, we can’t afford to lose critical community resources. It will cost us more money in the long run.
- **Mayors and local leaders across the country support national service.** In April, more than 4,500 mayors and county leaders from communities nationwide participated in the annual Mayor and County Day of Recognition for National Service. These local leaders see the impact AmeriCorps and Senior Corps members are having in the lives of local residents and use national service resources to tackle pressing local challenges.

Social Media Tips and Sample Social Media Posts

After your meeting, it is important to share your experience and thank the member of Congress for taking time to meet with you. One easy way to do this is on social media.

Below are some best practices and sample messages we encourage you to share on Twitter and/or Facebook. You should be prepared to post these messages on the same day as your meeting with any photos you take with your member of Congress.

- **Use hashtags.** Please use the hashtag #Stand4Service in any tweets about your district office meeting. Please also tag @AmeriCorps and/or @SeniorCorps in your posts.
- **Tag your member of Congress.** When posting to thank the member of Congress with whom you meet, we encourage you to include their handle so they can see the message and know that you appreciate their time and support.
- **Share photos.** Please ask to take a photo with the member of Congress or the staffer with whom you meet. We strongly encourage you to include these photos in your social media posts after the meeting. You can also print out our #Stand4Service sign (available [here](#)) and display it in your photo with the member of Congress or their staff.
- **Mention @Voices4Service.** If you tag us, we will retweet your message.

Feel free to use and customize these sample social media posts:

- Thanks *[@MemberofCongress]* for meeting with us to discuss the importance of @AmeriCorps/@SeniorCorps in our *[district/state]*. #Stand4Service (PHOTO)
- *[@MemberofCongress]* knows the impact @AmeriCorps/@SeniorCorps has in *[his/her]* *[district/state]*. Now is the time to #Stand4Service (PHOTO)
- Great meeting with *[@MemberofCongress]*. *[He/she]* pledged to #Stand4Service. @AmeriCorps/@SeniorCorps (PHOTO)

Template Thank You Note to Send to Congressional Staff

Dear **NAME**:

It was wonderful to meet with you and have the opportunity to discuss the critical importance of continued funding for the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), which supports vital AmeriCorps and Senior Corps programs in our local community.

I am writing to express my sincere gratitude for your commitment to these national service programs and to respectfully request that you work to protect and increase funding for CNCS during the current FY18 appropriations process.

As we discussed in our meeting, national service programs **INSERT INFORMATION ABOUT HOW CNCS PROGRAMS ARE BENEFITTING YOUR COMMUNITY**.

Thank you again for your supporting the investment in CNCS. I invite you to visit **PROGRAM NAME** to see firsthand the benefits national service programs provide in our area.

Yours in service,

NAME

TITLE

ORGANIZATION