



Meeting with a Congressional Office In-District

(Updated August 9, 2023)

One of the best ways to engage your members of Congress is to seek a meeting with their office. A one-on-one meeting will carry more weight than signing a petition, sending a letter, or making a phone call, and there are many advantages to holding your meeting in the local office, not Washington, DC.

Through the meeting, you can inform your lawmakers or their staff about the impact AmeriCorps has on your local and state-wide communities. By educating them of the impact, you can encourage your representatives to become champions of your programs and AmeriCorps.

Below are some tips for requesting and leading a successful in-district meeting with your member of Congress or a senior member of their staff.

If you have any questions or need help at any stage in this process, contact Ray AlQaisi, our Congressional Affairs Director, at raymond.alqaisi@cityyear.org. **And don't forget to email Ray when your meeting is scheduled!**

- 1. Selecting a date for your in-district congressional office meeting:** When seeking a meeting, try to contact the local office at least two weeks before your preferred meeting date. If it is important that you meet with the lawmaker, you should seek an appointment during a congressional recess or on a Monday or Friday, when the legislator is most likely to be home (to search for congressional recess dates, refer to the [Senate Legislative Calendar](#) or the [House Legislative Calendar](#)). We recommend offering several days or a span of time when you would be available to meet. If you cannot secure a meeting with the lawmaker, you should consider seeking an appointment with their District or State Director, both senior members of the congressional office staff. Developing a relationship with the District or State Director can really benefit your organization for the long term. (To learn more about the importance of the district staff – [check out this series of interviews with Brian McNabb, State Director for Senator Bill Cassidy \(R-LA.\)](#))
- 2. Scheduling a one-on-one meeting with your local congressional office:** First, call the local office and let them know that you are seeking to schedule an in-district meeting with the lawmaker or their District/State Director, and find out who you need to email to secure an appointment. Second, draft an email message that includes: general description of your organization, the purpose of the meeting, who will be in attendance (note any constituents from the member's district), and dates of availability. Voices for National Service has a template email to help you get started [here](#). Be prepared to follow-up on your meeting request if you have not received a response after a week or more.
- 3. Once you've scheduled your meeting, let us know:** Voices for National Service wants to track all the great work happening across the country, and we want to make sure you feel confident and prepared for your meeting. Please email Ray (raymond.alqaisi@cityyear.org) once you've scheduled a meeting

with your member of Congress or their staff. Ray can answer questions and help you plan for your district meeting.

4. **Decide who should attend the meeting and can help demonstrate the breadth of support for AmeriCorps in your area:** District office meetings about AmeriCorps funding are strongest when the congressional office can see multiple community members, representing different organizations or perspectives, speaking about the impact AmeriCorps has locally. As you plan for your district office meeting, we recommend inviting another AmeriCorps program, a service partner, board member, AmeriCorps alumni, or other local validators from your area to participate in your meeting. If appropriate, ask your meeting participants to show clear co-branding with AmeriCorps or AmeriCorps Seniors – for example: they can wear AmeriCorps branded clothing or a lapel pin to the appointment. If it is an online meeting, you can utilize an AmeriCorps Zoom background or incorporate branding into your visible frame.
5. **Prepare for your meeting:** Review background information about your members of Congress and see if they have taken any positions on relevant issues. Download Voices for National Service’s talking points and leave-behind materials to help you prepare ([found here](#)). To find key data points about AmeriCorps’ investment statewide, [review the National Service Report for your state](#). Congressional staff often refer to materials given to them in meetings. We recommend you create a folder with the following documents to share with the congressional staff at the start of your meeting:
 - Information on your organization, including impact and stories
 - Summary of national service in your state ([found here](#))
 - Voices for National Service’s one-pager on FY24 funding for AmeriCorps
 - One-pager on the National Service Congressional Caucus ([found here](#))
 - Relevant local news articles that discuss the impact of AmeriCorps
6. **Arrive early:** Similar to Capitol Hill, some district offices are located in government buildings, and you must pass through security at the entrance. Give yourself enough travel time so you are not late for your meeting.
7. **Be prepared with a 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 recommend that you try to follow this meeting flow –
 - Open by thanking the office for their time and by distributing meeting materials, including any leave-behind documents from Voices for National Service.
 - Introduce the group. Each participant should briefly share their relationship with AmeriCorps and how AmeriCorps is helping to solve pressing needs in the region.
 - Highlight the connection between AmeriCorps funding and the impact your program has in the lawmaker’s community, i.e. “Because of AmeriCorps, we are able to...”
 - Use relevant data and statistics to show the benefits your program is providing the community.

- Explain how you must match your AmeriCorps grant with funds from private and local sources, and how this public-private partnership returns \$17 in community benefits for every \$1 Congress appropriates to AmeriCorps.
 - Discuss the FY24 spending bills and how cuts to AmeriCorps funding could impact your work and jeopardize the services the lawmaker’s constituents rely upon, i.e. “Without AmeriCorps, we would be unable to...”
 - Close the meeting with three “asks”:
 - Ask the member of Congress to reject the cuts to AmeriCorps in FY24 and to provide sufficient funding to support planned increases to the member living allowances and to maintain AmeriCorps’ service footprint across the country.
 - Invite them to join the National Service Congressional Caucus, if not already a member.
 - Invite the lawmaker and their staff to visit your service project.
 - At the end of the meeting, ask the staff or lawmaker to take a photo with you, so you can share your appreciation on social media. Don’t forget to tag @Voices4Service in your post and send the photo to sarah.aldridge@cityyear.org so we can help amplify!
8. **Communicating your message:** When meeting with a member of Congress or staffer, it is important to be disciplined, positive, and transparent. Stick to general themes and the appropriations talking points [provided by Voices for National Service](#), adapting them to emphasize your organization’s work and points that resonate with your member of Congress’ views. Highlighting the positive impacts of AmeriCorps on your organization will make clear the potential impact of funding cuts on the member’s community and demonstrate the moral and cost-effectiveness arguments for AmeriCorps funding. If you are asked a question that you do not know the answer to, it is okay to say, “I will follow up with that information, as soon as possible.” Don’t forget to follow up with the office!
9. **Listen and gather information:** Members of Congress and staff are more inclined to speak freely and share information during private meetings, when the press or general public are not present. It is important to take detailed notes and flag any commitments that are made. Avoid being argumentative, even if the member of Congress and/or staffer disagree with your perspective. Be patient and listen to what they have to say; respectfully pushing back is fine if it is constructive and fact-based. Remember to ask members of Congress and their staff how you can help ensure their support.
10. **Follow Up:** After the meeting, thank the member of Congress and/or staffer for their time and get the staffer’s business card or email address. Most offices have staff business cards located at the front desk. Follow up with the member of Congress or staff on anything that was left unclear or unanswered. If you are unable to get the staffer’s business card on your way out, ask Ray (raymond.alqaisi@cityyear.org) for the correct contact information. When sending a follow-up email, you should thank the member of Congress and/or staffer for taking the time to meet with you, summarize the meeting - including any specific asks that were made by you or commitments made by the office - answer any questions that were left unanswered, and link any materials that were requested.