



Best Practices for Meeting with a Member of Congress

(Updated July 31, 2024)

When lawmakers have to make difficult budget decisions, they must know which federal programs are making a difference in their constituents' lives. A meeting with your member of Congress is one of the most valuable ways to educate them on the impact your program is having in the communities they represent and the important role AmeriCorps funding plays in those results. By educating them of the impact, you can encourage your representatives to become champions of your programs and AmeriCorps.

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. Scheduling a meeting with the district/state office is simple and allows you to establish a relationship that can be deepened over time.

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 Sarah Aldridge (sarah.aldridge@cityyear.org), our Congressional Affairs Director. **And don't forget to email Sarah 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. (You can visit [our webpage](#) for details on the congressional calendar and upcoming recess dates.) 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 Sarah (sarah.aldridge@cityyear.org) once you've scheduled a meeting with your member of Congress or their staff. Sarah can answer questions and help you plan for the 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. To find key data points about AmeriCorps' investment statewide, [review your National Service in Your State Report](#).
 - Download and review Voices for National Service's [talking points](#) to prepare for the meeting.
 - 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:
 - [Voices for National Service's FY25 appropriations one-pager](#)
 - Information on your organization, including impact stats and stories
 - National Service in Your State Report – [Click this link](#) to download the profile from americorps.gov. This report demonstrates the full scope of AmeriCorps and AmeriCorps Seniors presence in your state from January 20, 2023 and January 19, 2024.
 - One-pager on the National Service Congressional Caucus ([found here](#)).
 - Relevant local news articles that discuss the impact of AmeriCorps
 - If you need any support finding documents, please contact Sarah.
6. **Arrive early:** Many 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.

- 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 appropriations and how a lack of FY25 investment in AmeriCorps could impact your work and jeopardize the services the lawmaker’s constituents rely upon, i.e. “Without AmeriCorps, we would be unable to...”
 - To familiarize yourself with FY25 appropriations, review talking points [here](#).
 - Close the meeting with three “asks”:
 - Ask the member of Congress to provide \$1.5 billion in FY25 for the AmeriCorps programs and the National Service Trust Fund, to protect the more than 75,000 AmeriCorps and 143,000 AmeriCorps Seniors positions and sustain critical gains made with American Rescue Plan Act funds.
 - Invite them to join the [National Service Congressional Caucus](#), if not already a member.
 - Invite the lawmaker and their staff to visit your AmeriCorps program for a site visit.
 - 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 soliver2@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. Highlighting the positive impacts of AmeriCorps on your organization will make clear what is at risk in the member’s community without increased appropriations 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” – just be sure to actually follow up!
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; review our [Tips for Handling Tough Questions](#) document to prepare. 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 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 Sarah (sarah.aldridge@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 their office - answer any questions that were left unanswered, and link any materials that were requested.