

# Washington, DC Congressional Visit Guide

*It is highly effective for NARFE members and chapters to visit their members of Congress in their legislative offices on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC.*

## **Asking for the Meeting**

*Timeline: 4 - 6 weeks before you intend to have the meeting*

The first thing you should do is send a meeting request to the member of Congress' scheduler. You may make this request by email or fax using the [sample meeting request](#) (so that it is in writing) and then follow up the initial request shortly thereafter with a phone call. Do not send mail through the postal service to your member of Congress – due to security concerns, mail experiences considerable delays in reaching the Capitol. Many congressional offices now also make it possible to request a meeting on their website.

### **Tips:**

- Suggest specific times and dates for the meeting. Please make sure to indicate the time constraints around your visit to Washington.
- Let them know you'd like to discuss issues relating to active and retired federal employees.
- List potential or confirmed attendees for the meeting if you will be bringing others along.
- If the lawmaker is unavailable to meet with you, ask for a meeting with the staffer responsible for budget or federal workforce issues.
- Be respectful, but be persistent! Make sure to follow up with the office if they don't get back to you. If they tell you they have no availability, call back in a couple of days and ask if there have been any cancellations.

## **Preparing for Your Meeting**

*Timeline: 1 - 2 weeks before the meeting*

### **Step #1: Where Do They Stand?**

The first thing you'll want to do when preparing for a meeting with your legislator or his or her staff is to find out where they stand on NARFE's legislative priorities. You can find this information by exploring their website or NARFE's Legislative Action Center. NARFE legislative staff also can assist you. See the "[Know Before You Go](#)" checklist.

## **Step #2: Print Your Talking Points and Handouts**

Once you're familiar with your legislator's views and where current legislative proposals stand, the next item on your agenda should be to begin to assemble the materials you will need for your visit.

**Talking points** are what you will use to educate **yourself** to effectively communicate with your legislator.

**Fact Sheets and Issue Briefs** are the written information that you will provide to the **member or their staff** as a leave-behind. Please refer to the [Issue Briefs and Fact Sheets Toolkit](#) to access documents that can be used as leave-behinds.

## **If Attending the Meeting With Others**

### **Step #3: Recruiting Attendees**

Your legislator's time is valuable, so you'll want to maximize your efforts by inviting others to attend your meeting with you. You should aim to have no more than six people at the meeting for the most effective outcome. These can be NARFE members, active or retired non-NARFE members, community leaders or members of a federal employees' union. If your representative's district includes several NARFE chapters, you may want to work with all of the chapters to send a representative.

It's always good to bring a variety of voices and perspectives to these meetings if you can, but if you don't have an entourage, that's OK as well. One-on-one meetings are still extremely helpful!

### **Step #4: Conduct an Attendees' Training Meeting**

One of the most important pre-meeting activities you will conduct is assembling your team to plan out how the meeting is going to proceed.

- **Prioritize** - With input from your team members, you should decide in what order you are going to present and who will play the lead role in the discussion. This is very important, as you never know how long a meeting is going to last; some meetings last 30 minutes or more, while others last for only five.
- **Delegate** - You should plan on assigning roles for each member of your group. One person should be the lead facilitator, while others speak to specific pieces of legislation or issues. This is a good place to highlight a personal story. You should also make sure that one person takes good notes during the meeting for future reference.
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- **Review** - You should review the materials you'll be giving your legislator and discuss the talking points NARFE provides. This will go a long way toward making sure that your group members are knowledgeable and consistent during the actual meeting.

### **Step #5: Confirm Your Meeting**

*Timeline: 2 days before meeting*

Make sure you confirm your meeting with your legislator's scheduler a couple of days before the meeting is to occur.

### **Step #6: Attend the Meeting**

Be sure to show up on time, but no more than 10 minutes early. Allow plenty of travel time to arrive at your member's office in Washington. Particularly if you aren't familiar with the location, you'll want some flexibility in case you hit traffic or get lost. Capitol Hill offices can be very busy places, so it may be difficult for your member to postpone or delay a meeting with you.

Bring any leave-behind material with you. Reference the [Sample Agenda](#) to guide your meeting's content. If possible, ask your member if they would be willing to take a photo with you to share with your NARFE chapter and NARFE HQ.

### **Following Your Meeting**

*Timeline: No later than a week following meeting*

#### **Step #1: Send a Thank You**

Following your meeting, send the member of Congress and staff a thank you note for the meeting. If you promised follow-up information, this is a prime opportunity to send it. If the member agreed to take action on legislation, politely remind them or thank them again for taking action. See [sample thank you letter](#).

#### **Step #2: Tell Headquarters About Your Meeting**

Email [advocacyinaction@narfe.org](mailto:advocacyinaction@narfe.org) to tell Headquarters about your meeting. This information is important in our continued communications with members of Congress.