

How to Meet with Your Member of Congress

How to Lobby Your Legislators on the Issues

Meeting with your member of Congress either in your district or in Washington, DC provides the opportunity to build a relationship with an elected official and Planned Parenthood organizations and volunteers. These visits can serve a number of purposes including educating your elected officials on the issues that matter to you, making an ask about current or upcoming legislation, and holding your officials accountable for their past votes. The guidance below includes suggestions for preparing, structuring, and following up on meetings with your member of Congress.

Connecting with Your Local Planned Parenthood Organization

Before you reach out to your elected official's office, we strongly recommend reaching out to your local Planned Parenthood Organization to let them know your plans, get an update on what the current local priorities are, and combine forces whenever possible. If you do not already have a connection with an organizer or volunteer manager at your local Planned Parenthood organization, [look up your Planned Parenthood offices here](#). If you have any questions, you can always reach out to the National Office at actioncouncils@ppfa.org.

Once you have connected with your local organizer, or have the green light to move forward on your own, you're ready to schedule your meeting with your member of Congress.

Requesting a Meeting

The easiest way to schedule a meeting with a Congressional office is to call the local office directly and request one. You can use this page to [look up your members of Congress](#). "Your local Planned Parenthood can also help you find your state legislature's website if you're unsure what their website is. For many states you'll be able to find it and look up your legislators by googling [state] legislature."

When you speak with the staff, introduce yourself, mention that you are a volunteer, and what issues you would like to discuss at your meeting. This will help the office decide which person should meet with you. If possible try to request to speak with the scheduler directly. Be sure to get the name and contact information for the staffer you'll be meeting with and confirm your appointment a few days ahead of time. It's also a good idea to share the names and affiliations of anyone else planning to join you.

Preparing for Your Meeting

Once you have your meeting scheduled, think about who, if anyone, will join you. If your local Planned Parenthood organization has indicated they would like to join you for your visit, reach back out and let them know about your meeting and ask if anyone from the office can join. You should also think about who else can accompany you. If you are lobbying on a specific issue, it is always powerful to bring someone who is directly affected by the issue or policy and can speak to their personal experience and share their own story.

If your attendee list changes prior to your meeting be sure to notify the Congressional office. Note that often times your meeting will be held with a staff person rather than with the elected official personally. Staffers have a direct line to their bosses, so building a strong relationship with them is essential for ongoing advocacy work with the member.

In advance of your meeting, you should plan out what you're going to say and who is going to say it. This is critical because you need to be coordinated in speaking to the issues and you want the most appropriate person filling each role. It will be helpful to schedule a call or in-person meeting with everyone attending the meeting to discuss roles, talking points, and background on the member as well as go over the agenda.

Remember that you can also [register your event on the Planned Parenthood online events tool](#) and use the privacy settings to make it public or private. This is a way for you to let other supporters in your area know that you are meeting with your rep and RSVP to join you! [See the step by step instructions here on how to do that.](#)

Meeting Roles

During your prep meeting, assign roles and determine who will say what during the meeting. If it is your first meeting, you may want to practice what you will say with your group. [Here is a worksheet template you can use.](#)

Some of the specific roles you can assign are:

Meeting Leader: Responsible for leading introductions, meeting overview, closing, and generally keeping things on track. This person should be prepared to pivot back to the message if the elected official begins to give the runaround or to change the topic.

Storyteller: This role can be 1-2 people who can share stories of how that particular issue has impacted them and why they care personally about it.

Pitcher: Makes the hard ask and is prepared to respond depending on legislator's position. This is the person who says "and the reason why we are here today is to ask you to ABC on X today. Can we count on you to vote in favor/against X?" This should be very direct, concise and straightforward. The meeting leader can do double duty and also handle this role, so long as it is clear to everyone going into the meeting who will be making the ask.

Recorder: Takes comprehensive notes during the meeting.

Supporting Actors: These are people who don't have speaking roles, but show strength in numbers or affiliation. If you have enough people, these roles can be dispersed. If there are only two or three of you, one person may play several roles.

Sample Meeting Agenda

1. Introductions
2. Meeting overview
3. Personal stories
4. The "Ask"
5. Respond to questions
6. Wrap-up, thanks, and next steps

Important note: remind your team that they don't need to know all the answers and to never make up an answer or give incorrect information during a meeting! You can always say "I don't know" and follow up with the staffer after you get the right answer.

Materials

Since you will likely be covering a lot of ground in your meeting, you will want to be sure to leave information with the office that will reinforce and support the points you made during the meeting. Here are a few things you may want to provide in a leave-behind packet:

- Fact sheets or leave-behind handout on key policy issues (ask your local Planned Parenthood organization if they have any or email actioncouncils@ppfa.org if you need details)
- Information on any upcoming events that you or your local Planned Parenthood organization are holding.
- Your business card(s) if you are representing your employer or business.

Capturing the Moment

Make sure to take a photo in front of your official's office with your group before or after your meeting. If the meeting goes well, the elected official or their staff may even wish to participate. Post your photos on social media Use the #StandWithPP hashtag or other hashtags relevant to the issues you are meeting about. After your meeting, send your photos and a summary of the meeting to us at actioncouncils@ppfa.org and to your local Planned Parenthood.

Thank you and Follow Up

While the meeting is still fresh, debrief it with your group. Write up and discuss what happened, what went well, what opportunities there are for improvement in the future, and next steps. Make sure you also follow up with your elected official immediately following the meeting. Send a thank you email expressing your appreciation for the meeting, reinforce any positive statements or commitments that they made, and follow up with any additional information that you offered to provide. Some offices may prefer to have electronic versions of the materials in the leave behind packets, so also consider attaching those to your follow up message.

If the meeting went well, keep an eye out for opportunities to continue to build your relationship and reinforce the messages and asks. This could include sharing stories about the issues or new research, providing opportunities to co-sponsor bills or to sign onto letters of support, and opportunities to speak out in Congress and in the media. If you are running other events in the area, you can also invite your elected officials to participate in events or social media campaigns with you.