

ACTION TOOLS



Council on Undergraduate Research, 734 15th St NW #850, Washington, DC 20005
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Federal Government Contact Information

- To learn who your Representative is, visit <http://www.house.gov> and type in your zip code.
- To learn who your Senators are, visit <http://www.senate.gov> and choose your state.
- If you do not have access to the internet, call the Capitol Switchboard at (202) 224-3121.
- **To contact your Senator**, visit <http://www.senate.gov> or write to
The Honorable (First Name_Last Name)
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

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- **To contact your Representative**, visit <http://www.house.gov> or write to
The Honorable (First Name_Last Name)
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515
- **To contact the White House**, visit <http://www.whitehouse.gov> or write to
President (First Name_Last Name)
1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20500

Meeting with Your Legislator

The most effective way to communicate with your legislator is to schedule a meeting to talk face-to-face. While these personal visits are the most effective lobbying tool, they also require the greatest amount of planning and time. Here are a few guidelines to help you plan a successful visit.

HOW TO SCHEDULE A MEETING

- ✚ Ask to speak to the scheduler when you call the office to set up your appointment. Let the scheduler know you are a constituent. They will know which staff member you need to meet with based on your issue. Call at least a week in advance and prepare to allocate 15-20 minutes of time for your meeting.

HOW TO PREPARE

- ✚ BRING A WRITTEN STATEMENT. Prepare a written letter that you can leave with the staffer recapping what you mentioned in your visit. Be sure to address why this legislation is important to you, how it will affect you, your colleagues, your students, your institution, and the research enterprise, and your current unmet research needs. Not only will this letter provide the legislator with a written record of your visit, but also writing the letter will help you prepare for your appointment.

TIPS FOR DURING THE MEETING

- ✚ EXPLAIN HOW PROPOSED LEGISLATION WILL DIRECTLY AFFECT YOU.
- ✚ Bring statistics from your institution and personal stories from students. Highlight both the successes your research has achieved as well as the areas where additional funding and programs are needed. Explain how a cut in funding will affect your research capacity or how a new proposed program will help meet current unmet needs.
- ✚ BE POLITE AND PROFESSIONAL.
- ✚ Always be on time and dress professionally. Even if you disagree with your legislator's position, always be polite. A staffer may make critical remarks about your position or institution, or may ask you tough questions. That is his or her job. If you do not know the answer, remain calm and tell them that you will look into the question and get back to them.

ENDING THE MEETING

- ✚ ASK FOR A COMMITMENT. Your goal is to enlist your legislator's support, so be as specific as possible. Ask the staffer direct questions such as "Will your boss vote for....?" or "Will your boss support....when it comes to the floor?" to elicit direct answers.
- ✚ BRING A BUSINESS CARD. Give the staffer your business card and ask for theirs. The card should contain all your contact information.

FOLLOW-UP

- ✚ FOLLOW UP YOUR MEETING WITH A THANK YOU LETTER. Regardless of how the meeting goes, you should always follow up by thanking the staffer for his/her time and reiterating the points you discussed in the meeting. This can be sent by email or fax.
- ✚ OFFER TO PROVIDE MORE INFORMATION. Always offer to provide staffers and legislators with additional information on your issue. Offer to provide more detailed information about your local institution and research, if necessary.

Top Ten Tips for Conducting a Successful Meeting

- 1) **Always schedule an appointment in advance.**
Time is valuable in legislative offices. Contact the office in advance to arrange a meeting. It is best to fax your meeting request and to follow-up with a phone call. Due to the busy schedule of legislators, meetings are often assigned to staff.
- 2) **Prepare thoroughly for your meeting.**
Do your homework before meeting with your legislator's office. Visit their website to find out about their policy interests and voting records. Particularly, find out how they have voted in the past on your issues, be aware of their party leadership's stance on the issues, and know committee assignments.
- 3) **Have a "message" and stick to it.**
Successful legislative meetings are always narrow in scope. Stick to a few main points of support for your issue and make a specific request for action.
- 4) **Bring it home.**
Always connect your issue to your institution or community. Legislators value your thoughts as a constituent. They rely on local stories and sources for the work they do.
- 5) **Make a specific request.**
The purpose of your meeting is to gain support for your issue. Legislators expect you to make requests. It is important to make the request specific and direct, preferably tied to current legislative activity.
- 6) **Build a relationship with staff.**
Staff can be very influential in getting your requests honored by your elected officials. You should make every effort to establish strong relationships with staff and encourage them to use you as a resource in your area of expertise.
- 7) **Follow-up.**
Send thank you letters after your meeting to express your appreciation and to reinforce any commitments made during the meeting. Remember to honor any commitments you made in the meeting, such as providing more information. You want to remain a reliable source.
- 8) **Do not characterize your issue in partisan terms. Stick to the facts.**
Keep the discussion on policy, not politics. Remember you want legislators, regardless of their political affiliation, to support your position.
- 9) **Be on time.**
Enough said.
- 10) **Remain kind, but not overly comfortable.**
Do not let the informal nature of the meeting stop you from making your request.

Talking Points

Consult these talking points when you meet with your Members of Congress. Most importantly, speak about your experiences facilitating undergraduate research!

What is CUR

- 11) The Council on Undergraduate Research, founded in 1978, is a national organization of more than 11,000 members, representing close to 900 institutions. CUR works with the undergraduate research community to ensure that Members of Congress and others who make decisions about research and education policy better understand undergraduate research, how federal programs support it and why it is important.

What the Member should know about undergraduate research

- 12) Undergraduate research is an inquiry or investigation conducted by an undergraduate student that makes an original intellectual or creative contribution to the discipline.
- 13) Federal funding for programs that support undergraduate research has a far-reaching impact on institutions. [Provide a brief summary of the research you have conducted and (if you are able) how federal dollars are being spent to support work like yours].
- 14) Investments in research agencies and other grant-making agencies are important to undergraduate research on campuses across the country and facilitate research and original scholarship. [Discuss, to the best of your ability, any collaborative research grants, grants for HBCUs and HSIs, or any other funding under these agencies your institution, your colleagues or fellow researchers have received.]

What the Member can do to support undergraduate research

- 15) Federal spending decisions should reflect the important role undergraduate research plays in advancing the country's competitiveness. Appropriators should support agencies and programs that invest in undergraduate research.
- 16) Congress should support research in all disciplines—social, behavioral and economic sciences, as well as geosciences and the physical sciences. Efforts to limit federal support for certain areas of study do not respect the work and goals of the research enterprise.
- 17) The Congress will be working on reauthorizing the Higher Education Act this year. Undergraduate research is a strategy that fosters persistence among low-income, minority and first-generation college-goers, cultivates the workforce, strengthens campuses and grows the research enterprise. A revised law could better support healthy undergraduate research programs.

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We're on the Web!

Visit us at:
www.cur.org
