

COMMUNICATION TIPS



Council on Undergraduate Research, 734 15th St NW #850, Washington, DC 20005
www.cur.org 202-783-4810

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

Tips for Writing Your Legislator

Identify yourself as a Constituent.

The most important thing to do is establish yourself as a constituent, since non-constituent mail rarely gets a response. Put your name and complete address on the letter. Legislators will only feel obligated to respond to constituent correspondence, so it's important to establish a district connection.

Email Letters

- ✚ Due to the security measures in place for mail going to the U.S. Congress, letters should never be sent via snail mail. Instead, email the letter. An e-mail address or comment portal can be found on your lawmaker's website.

Use Proper Forms of Address

- ✚ Remember to address your lawmaker as “The Honorable.” Be sure to get their title correct such as Senator, Representative, or Chairman. Use “The Honorable” in the address and the office title in the salutation (Dear Representative Doe).

Be Brief and Simple

- ✚ Preferably, your letter should be one page. Make your request in the first paragraph. Do not feel the need to explain the legislation in your letter.

State and Repeat Your Position

- ✚ Make your position or request clear in the opening and closing of your letter. Be specific, such as asking for a yes or no vote or cosponsoring legislation.

Personalize Your Message.

- ✚ A personal letter is much more effective than a form letter. This ensures that your message will have an impact. Though forms, postcards, and petitions are read and counted, they do not have the same impact as a personalized, individualized letter. Connecting your issue to your personal situation will set your email above the rest in the inbox. If a sample letter is provided, incorporate your own words and personal perspective into the text.

Always proofread before sending

- ✚ This is essential to making a credible argument.

Make Your Message Timely

- ✚ Do not procrastinate. Be aware of the legislative process (where the legislation is in the process-is it up for a vote tomorrow in committee or on the floor?) and time your letter accordingly. Faxes serve better in getting to legislators at critical times in the process.

Send a Copy of Your Letter to the National Office

- ✚ It is important for you to notify the CUR office in DC when you’ve contacted a legislator, as it helps the governmental relations staff coordinate legislative strategy and additional lobbying. Make sure you also send a copy of any response you receive.

Calling Your Legislator

If you find that you do not have the time to write a letter, making a phone call is one of the quickest and most effective ways to contact your legislator.

Sample Telephone Script:

“My name is <<name>>. I am a constituent and I work at <<institution>>. I urge <<Representative or Senator’s name>> to support full funding for the America COMPETES Act.

Programs authorized by the America COMPETES Act, which make improvements to federal math and science initiatives and a strong commitment to the research enterprise, should be fully funded. Federally funded grants for undergraduate research have far-reaching effects at my institution and become more vital to U.S. competitiveness every day.

If you have any questions or if I can provide you with additional information, please feel free to contact me at <<number or email>>. Thank you.”

TIPS TO REMEMBER WHEN MAKING A PHONE CALL:

- First, as always, if you are a constituent, identify yourself as one.
- Second, ask to speak to the specific staffer working on research or higher education issues.
- Be brief and specific. Congressional staffers are busy people and they will appreciate your effort to keep your conversation concise.
- Finally, offer to send information you have on the subject so that the staffer can be better informed on the issue.

More Tips:

- *Prepare ahead of time.*

It is imperative that you plan for your phone conversation. You can use the sample talking points found earlier in this manual, and jot down a few notes before making your call. Be prepared to leave a clear message with your contact information.

- *Conversation.*

When calling a lawmaker’s office, ask to speak with the aide responsible for handling research or higher education issues. If this person is not available, leave your name and contact information, the issue you are calling in regard to and the specific action you want the legislator to take.

- *Follow-up.*

Always follow-up with an email thanking the legislator and the staff for their time, and also use this opportunity to reiterate your position and provide any additional materials.



**CALL YOUR
REPRESENTATIVE**

Thanking Your Legislator

Not only is it important to contact your Member of Congress when an issue arises that concerns you, it is also important to thank your legislator for voting a certain way, speaking up on an issue important to you, or attending an event you organized. Showing a Member of Congress and their staff your appreciation for his or her efforts is a great way to build a relationship and let the legislator know the voting constituency supports his or her *decisions*.

Follow these tips when writing a thank you letter:

- If you are a constituent, begin your letter by saying so.
- Make clear what exactly you are thanking your legislator for: supporting a bill, making a speech, or attending an event.
- Remind the legislator why this issue is important to the constituency and why his or her support is necessary.
- Offer to provide additional resources for the legislative office.
- Be sure to include all your contact information in your letter.

Use this sample letter to thank your legislator. It can be sent by fax or email.

The Honorable <<First Name Last Name>>

United States Senate

Washington, DC 20510

-or-

United States House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515

<<Date>>

Dear Representative/Senator <<Last Name>>:

On behalf of myself and my colleagues at <<institution>>, I would like to thank you for supporting funding for the America COMPETES Act.

The programs authorized by the America COMPETES Act, which make improvements to federal math and science initiatives and a strong commitment to undergraduate research and the research enterprise, are an important component of our work at <<institution>> in <<Congressional district or state>>. Hands-on undergraduate research goes beyond learning through computer simulation, distance learning, or traditional lectures. It enhances student learning with faculty mentoring relationships and is the very type of learning experience that leads some students to pursue previously unplanned graduate and doctoral study in the very fields that are crucial to maintaining the country's competitiveness.

If you have any additional questions about undergraduate research, I can be reached at <<phone number>> or <<email>>. We look forward to continued collaboration with your office.

Sincerely,

<<Name>>

<<Institution>>

**Council on
Undergraduate
Research**

Address:

734 15th St NW #850,
Washington, DC 20005

Phone:

(202) 783-4810



We're on the Web!

Visit us at:

www.cur.org
