

HOW TO REQUEST A MEETING WITH YOUR MEMBER OF CONGRESS



One of the most impactful ways to build a relationship with your member of Congress (MOC) and their office is to meet face-to-face with them. A personal face-to-face meeting with your MOC or with their staff builds rapport, explores common interests, and lets your elected official know what is important to you. Remember, the most important people to your member of Congress are those who contribute money to their campaign and those who vote them into (or out of) office every two or six years. As their constituent, take advantage of this fact and know that conducting regular personal meetings and creating personal relationships with your MOC and their staff is perhaps the most impactful way that you can advocate for vulnerable children, who otherwise may be overlooked in our country's Federal policy and funding decisions. Keep in mind that much of the time you will be meeting with staff, which is incredibly important and helpful in developing your relationship with the member of Congress. Oftentimes the staff are the people who do the work on your behalf.

Find your member of Congress

First make sure to confirm your member of Congress. There have been a number of states recently that have experienced redistricting.

Use this [tool](#) to confirm your U.S. Representative.

Use this [tool](#) to confirm your Senator.

If this is your first meeting with your member of Congress, think about where you would like to meet him/her—either in the district/state office or the Washington, D.C. office.

In general, the Washington, D.C. office staff focus on Federal policy and legislation while the district/state staff focus on community relations and support. If possible, meet with the Washington staff, however, if this is not possible, meeting with district/state staff is a good second option.

Please note: During the COVID-19 pandemic, many offices moved to conducting constituent meetings virtually. Some offices have since moved back to in-person gatherings, while others have retained virtual options. It is best to discuss these specifics with your congressional office, as policies will vary.

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Get to know your member

Become familiar with your member's positions and priorities prior to the meeting. A good place to start is our [First Focus Champions Scorecard](#) where we score legislators on their work for children. If they are listed as a Champion or Defender, or have taken key votes in support of children, write them down for your meeting so you can thank them.

Then look at your Representative or Senator's [website](#) and notice which issues he/she is discussing in their biography, press releases and social media feeds. If you do not agree with your member on what he/she has to say on the issues, find something where you share common ground. For example, you might like a specific social media post they made, or perhaps you both attended the same university, were born in the same town or attend the same place of worship. Think about what is in their background that you might connect to on a personal level when you meet.

Next, think about how you can connect children to the issues they prioritize. For example, if your member of Congress is active in their religious community, share your belief that caring for vulnerable children is the right thing to do. If your member of Congress is a parent, share how your volunteer work in the community has opened your eyes to the holistic needs of kids. If your member of Congress is fiscally conservative, lead with how investing in children early in life produces great returns on investment for society as a whole and therefore makes good economic sense. **Every issue is a kids' issue**, so it is likely that there is a kid angle in whatever policy area your member prioritizes.

If you are having trouble coming up with a connection, know that you can always simply thank your member of Congress for their public service and for the opportunity to share your priorities.

Reach out to request a meeting

Call **(202) 225-3121** to be connected to the Capitol Operator and ask to be connected to the office of your member of Congress. When connected to the office, ask to speak or leave a message for the scheduler. Or in the alternative, search for your MOC's office contact information by name or by state [here](#). The U.S. House of Representatives does not provide email addresses for members of Congress, but some offices provide contact information for the office or a request form that can be filled out to ask for a meeting.

When requesting a meeting, consider the congressional calendar and whether your [Representative](#) or [Senator](#) will be at home in the district/state or in Washington, D.C. Make your request roughly 2-3 weeks in advance for House meetings and 4 weeks in advance for Senate meetings.

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Give the office 7 days or so to respond to your meeting request. Additional wait time is to be expected for Senate meeting requests. If you do not hear back from the office in response to your request within that time frame, call the office and ask to speak to the scheduler or email the scheduler to politely check on the status of your request.

Once you have a day and time for your meeting confirmed, you can provide the office with the specific requests you will be making in the meeting so the staff can provide background to their boss.

If the scheduler comes back to you with the message that the MOC is not able to meet with you and offers a meeting with staff instead, be sure to accept. Congressional staff are key points of contact for your advocacy efforts and cultivating your relationship with them is equally as important as developing your relationship with their boss.

Prepare for your meeting

As you prepare for your meeting, please contact **Leila Nimatallah at leilan@FirstFocus.org to let her know and to receive additional support.*

Think about the purpose of your meeting and what you want to get out of it. Your priority should be developing a positive relationship with the office that over the long-term results in them viewing you as a trustworthy local resource on children's issues.

Think about how you will introduce yourself and ground yourself in the community. For example, how long you have lived in the area, where you volunteer, where your kids attend school, your favorite part of town or annual town event. You will want to convey that you are there to work together so avoid political arguments or divisive cultural issues that are outside of the matter you are there to discuss. Instead, seek to connect with them on areas of mutual agreement.

Do not worry if you do not know the answers to all their possible questions. If you are asked a question that you are unsure about, let them know you will circle back with the answer. It is always better to say "I do not know but will get back to you" than to make up an answer. This also gives you an excuse to contact them again! The important thing to congressional offices is that you are a constituent with an opinion, not that you are a policy expert, so never worry about admitting you are not sure of an answer.

Next, think about who you might want to include in your meeting. Are there other local advocates or friends who would be an asset in your meeting and who have similar interests and goals? If there are and they agree to join you, great! If not, do not let that stop you.

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If you have others to go with you, assign a note-taker for the meeting and set up at least two planning meetings beforehand to prepare and practice. During these meetings, divide up responsibilities. For example, you should agree who between you will lead the meeting and who will conduct the follow up.

Whether you are meeting in a group or on your own, write out your agenda and talking points and practice what you will say. Plan for a meeting length of no more than 15 minutes with the member, although on occasion they will be able to give you more time. Remember, members of Congress and staff have many priorities and constraints on their time, so plan ahead to ensure that the meeting does not end before you make your requests. It is good practice to begin the meeting by asking the member and staff how much time they have and to briefly preview for them why you requested the meeting and the issues/requests you will be making.

A recommended agenda includes:

- Introducing yourselves (who you are personally and within the community).
- Thanking the member for something he/she has done or said (see above) and connecting with them on an area of mutual agreement.
- Asking how much time they have so you can adjust accordingly.
- Previewing why you requested the meeting and what you will be asking.
- Sharing a personal story about why you care about children's issues and are reaching out to them now.
- If your meeting is with staff only, ask them about themselves (where they are from, what brought them to Congress, etc.).
- Make the requests and close the meeting by providing leave behind documents (Contact **Leila Nimatallah** at leilan@FirstFocus.org for the most relevant requests for your MOC.).

Note: Remember to print out your leave behinds beforehand reiterating your requests and to bring them with you if your meeting is in-person (or to provide them to the office before your meeting if your meeting is virtual).

On the day of your meeting

Check in that morning with your congressional office to confirm the details of your meeting. If your meeting is in person, be sure to confirm where you should meet with office staff to be escorted inside of their building and be sure to have a telephone number for the office at the ready should circumstances change.

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If your meeting is virtual, be sure to double check your ability to access the link the office provides and that your microphone is working. Have a back-up plan to connect by phone should a technical issue occur.

For both in-person and virtual meetings, business attire is recommended.

Always remain flexible and always be respectful to office staff. Your meeting may be delayed due to unforeseen circumstances, or you may have to meet with staff in the hallway rather than meeting with the member of Congress in the office. These curveballs are common occurrences in Congress, and it is best to follow the lead of the office and convey appreciation for the time and attention they are able to give you. Your good humor in the face of upended plans will go a long way to strengthening your relationship with the office.

Follow up and share your meeting with First Focus

After your meeting, be sure to send an email thank you note to the staffer and ask that the staffer convey your thanks to the member of Congress. The thank you note is a good place to reiterate your requests. Ask the staffer when to check back in on the status of your requests and mark down the date they say in your calendar so that you remember to do so.

Members of Congress love positive media too so consider tweeting or posting a thank you and tagging your MOC's office. If you took a picture with the member of Congress, include it when you tag the office. **Be sure to use First Focus hashtags highlighting children.**

[Record the meeting here](#) so that First Focus can keep track of your success.

Celebrate!

Be sure to celebrate your success and acknowledge your achievement! Let your friends and family and social media feeds know about it too! Let your Ambassador community know about the meeting, so we can congratulate you as well!