

## Key Tips for Congressional Visits

As part of the 2012 USHCC Annual Legislative Summit, you will be meeting with your individual Senate and House member offices. This is an opportunity for you to share information about your local chamber and discuss legislative priorities. At every meeting, you will be accompanied by a Podesta Group principal who will help facilitate your introduction to the member or congressional staffer. However, it is your responsibility to be prepared to discuss all policy objectives.

Here are a few tips for building a constructive meeting and relationship with a congressional staffer:

- **Do your homework.** You should familiarize yourself with basic biographical information about the member and their stance on any relevant issues and legislation prior to meeting with the office.
- **Have your script prepared in advance.** When you meet with congressional staff, remember that their time is very limited. Thus, your message must be clear and concise. Determine ahead of time the purpose of your meeting and who in your group will take the lead. Know if you have a hard “ask,” or if your goal will be strictly to educate the staffer.
- **Location does not determine a meeting’s importance.** Show up to your meeting on time, but don’t be offended if your meeting takes place in a hallway or lobby. Congressional offices are small and they often have limited conference room space.
- **Never underestimate the “worker bees.”** You might be talking to someone who seems far down the chain, but don’t feel as though you’re being passed to someone unimportant. The “worker bees” often keep an issue on the radar of decision-makers and ultimately implement strategy. Alternatively, they can kill a proposal they don’t like simply by keeping it off the decision-maker’s desk. Always treat congressional staffers with full respect.
- **Stay on topic.** The most effective meetings last no more than 20 minutes. Start the meeting by introducing yourself and your organization. Be sure to mention your connection to the state or district that the member represents. Next, make your “ask” and elaborate on your legislative priorities. If you don’t know the answer to something, be honest. Loop back with the staffer after the meeting with an answer.
- **Closing is the key.** Designate one person to reiterate the “ask” at the end of your meeting and make sure to give the staffer your leave-behind materials. Thank the staffer for their time and support. Exchange contact information and follow-up after the meeting with a thank you note. Treat this exchange as an opportunity to become a reliable resource they can turn to for advice on your issue.
- **Remember that decisions rarely rest with just one person.** It pays to build relationships with several people close to the process. If you have staffers on your side, they can advocate for you. A positive relationship with a congressional staffer may help you get into the room with the final decision-maker down the road, or simply keep your issue alive during deliberations.