



National AHEC Organization: Connecting Students to Careers, Professionals to Communities, and Communities to Better Health.

How to Prepare for Congressional Visits At Home

Before you Meet with your delegate:

1. Coordinate state/local plans and materials with other AHEC program and center offices within your state.

2. Schedule your appointments to meet with your Representatives and Senators well in advance!

- You should begin immediately to call local congressional offices of those who represent your project and ask for the name and fax number or email address of the scheduling or appointment secretary.
- Prepare a request in writing to the scheduler to request an appointment. Example:

“I am a constituent of Representative (Name) or Senator (Name) and wish to make an appointment for XXXXXXXX, to brief the Congressperson (or Senator) on the AHEC program and the work we are doing in his/her district. I can be reached at (phone number) to confirm the meeting time and place. Thank you for your consideration.”

- Follow up. If you don't hear back in a timely manner, call the Appointment Secretary until you get the appointment! If they say the Congressman or Senator is not available to meet on that day, ask to meet with the health legislative assistant. Or call the health legislative assistant directly and ask to meet with them.
- States with more than one AHEC project are encouraged to work together to schedule your Congressional appointments, especially with your Senators, since Senators represent the entire state. You may need to make separate appointments for your Congresspersons, since they represent specific districts within a state. We suggest you appoint someone at one project in your state to take the lead on making your joint appointments.

3. Prepare your materials about your AHEC project as “leave-behind” materials for each congressional office where you plan to meet (see “Preparing Your Leave-Behinds” in this packet).

During your Congressional Visits:

1. Brief your congressional representative on your successes and challenges in your local AHEC region. Stress that the program needs more support and funding from Congress. **If you are meeting with district staff rather than DC based staff, be sure to tell the staffer that you would like your information forwarded to the DC health legislative assistant.** [District based staff typically deal with local constituent issues. DC based staff deal with legislation and budget.]
2. Be sure to leave behind materials about your program along with other materials you will receive when you arrive in Washington.
3. Be sure to ask for the business cards of the staff persons with whom you meet.

Preparing Your “Leave-Behinds”

Members of Congress, or their staff persons, meet with many people during the course of each day. It is therefore important that you prepare packets to “leave behind” so they can review and have them on file for future reference.

The NAO Board, the Public Policy Committee, and the Program and Center Directors Constituency Groups have all prepared documents for you to leave behind for visits to elected officials. These include:

- NAO brochure
- AHEC Message – 2010
- AHECs Make A Difference – Graphic
- NAO Workforce Policy Priorities

Be sure to include these documents and be prepared to discuss them with your Congressional representatives.

- If you have a brochure describing the work of your Program or Center(s), be sure to present it. This is of local concern for the Congressional representative—it is their constituency.
- Be especially aware if a Board member, Dean, or a person associated with your Program knows the Representative or Senator. Include a quote and have the representative contact that person.
- Testimonials, newspaper articles, and pictures say it better than anything: AHECs are important and make a difference. It may also be helpful to have an NAO Bulletin article or some publication that has been produced about your Program or Center.
- Map of your project area (this will clearly show your elected official where you fit into his/her district).
- Statistics – just a few – that will provide solid information about why AHECs are important to their states and regions.
- Clear photocopies of print media about your project, e.g., news articles where your project is favorably mentioned or a report on an event.

Suggestions:

- Don't use a folder that doesn't easily fit in a hanging file.
- Do prepare a labeled file folder

Protocol for Congressional Visits

Give Yourself Plenty of Time Between Appointments.

- Schedule your visits with enough time apart, because a delay in one office can set you back for the remainder of your schedule.
- Make sure you have the locations and telephone numbers for all of your visits, so that you can also call ahead if you expect to be late.
- Likewise, if you finish early, you can always call ahead to the next office to see if they would welcome an earlier visit than previously scheduled.
- Wear Professional Attire!

Be sure to fill out the following form and send it to Dale Dirks, our NAO Washington Representative. He will need this information to accomplish our work!

ddirks@hmcw.org

NATIONAL AHEC ORGANIZATION CONGRESSIONAL VISIT FEEDBACK FORM

MEMBER OF CONGRESS _____

STAFF MEMBER: _____

ATTENDEE'S NAME AND CONTACT INFORMATION:

OVERALL, HOW DID THE STAFF MEMBER RECEIVE YOUR GROUP'S PRESENTATION?

WHAT ISSUES DID YOU DISCUSS?

DID THE STAFF MEMBER HAVE A PARTICULAR INTEREST IN ANY OF THE ISSUES DISCUSSED?

IS THERE ANY FOLLOW-UP REQUIRED?

Fax completed form to: Dale Dirks' Office • Fax: (202) 546-7105 • ddirks@hmcw.org

The Roles of Congressional Staff

Each member of Congress has staff to assist him/her during a term in office. To be most effective in communicating with Congress, it is helpful to know the titles and principal functions of key staff.

Commonly used titles and job functions:

Administrative Assistant (AA) or Chief of Staff (CoS): The AA reports directly to the member of Congress. He/she usually has overall responsibility for evaluating the political outcomes of various legislative proposals and constituent requests. The AA is usually the person in charge of overall office operations, including the assignment of work and the supervision of key staff.

Legislative Director (LD), Senior Legislative Assistant (Sr LA), or Legislative Counsel (LC):

The LD is usually the staff person who monitors the legislative schedule and makes recommendations regarding the pros and cons of particular issues. In some congressional offices there are several LAs and responsibilities are assigned to staff with particular experience in specific areas. For example, depending on the responsibilities and interests of the member, an office may include a different LA for health issues, environmental matters, taxes, etc.

Press Secretary (Press) or Communications Director (Comm Dir): The Press Secretary's responsibility is to build and maintain open and effective lines of communication between the member, his/her constituency, and the general public. The Press Secretary is expected to know the benefits, demands, and special requirements of both print and electronic media, and how to most effectively promote the member's views or positions on specific issues.

Appointment Secretary (Appt), Personal Secretary, or Scheduler (Sch): The Appointment Secretary is usually responsible for allocating a member's time among the many demands that arise from congressional responsibilities, staff requirements, and constituent requests. The Appointment Secretary may also be responsible for making necessary travel arrangements, arranging speaking dates, visits to the district, etc.

Caseworker: The Caseworker is the staff member usually assigned to help with constituent requests by preparing replies for the member's signature. The Caseworker's responsibilities may also include helping to resolve problems constituents present in relation to federal agencies, e.g., Social Security and Medicare issues, veteran's benefits, passports, etc. There are often several Caseworkers in a congressional office.

Other titles used in a congressional office may include: Executive Assistant, Legislative Correspondent, Executive Secretary, Office Manager, and Receptionist.

(From: Congress At Your Fingertips, 108th Congress, 1st Session, 2003, p. 24, Capitol Advantage, Merrifield, Virginia)

As you meet with Congressional staff persons, please ask for their business cards and attach them to your Congressional Report forms, or photocopy them and fax them to Dale Dirks at (202)-546-7105

A Brief Explanation of Congressional Authorization vs. Appropriation

Securing federal funding from Congress requires a two-step process:

- The program must be “authorized,” and after that,
- The funds must then be “appropriated”

The Authorization Process

Authorization Committees:

The House and Senate have many different committees that manage legislation not related to the annual budget process. These committees oversee changes to all other areas of federal lawmaking. If Congress is in the process of authorizing a program like Area Health Education Center, in addition to establishing the broad outlines and intent of the program, it must include “authorization for funding” language in the legislation to instruct the appropriators as to the general amount of funding they see as necessary to carry out the intention of the program. The AHEC and other Title VII programs were last reauthorized in 1998, for the period through fiscal year 2002. Many programs continue to be funded after the authorization has expired, and this has been the case for the Title VII programs for the last several years. Reauthorization discussions are in progress, but any action this term is uncertain. Our companion programs, National Health Service Corps and Community Health Centers have already been reauthorized.

Authorization Subcommittees:

For authorization, AHECs fall under the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee (HELP) in the Senate and the Energy and Commerce Committee in the House). This is where bills start their process towards becoming law, and move up through the full committee, and the full House or Senate.

The Appropriations Process

Every year, Congress must pass and send 13 separate appropriations bills to the President in order for the federal government to remain funded. These bills formally stipulate how much money is to be appropriated to various federal programs for the coming fiscal year.

Appropriations Committees:

Both the House and Senate have full appropriations committees that review and approve all of the 13 appropriations bills, which are then sent onto to the full House or Senate for approval. By the time both chambers have passed these bills, any differences between them must be ironed out through conference committees before being sent to the President. Only upon the President’s signature can the programs receive federal funding for that budget year.

Appropriation Subcommittees:

For each of the 13 appropriations bills, there is a subcommittee assigned to review a group of programs and their funding. For AHECs, this subcommittee is the Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies.

2009 U.S. Budget/Appropriations Timeline

What happens between your visits and October 1st, when Fiscal Year 2011 begins? This is the general flow of the appropriations process in an ideal year:

February - President Obama submitted his proposed budget to Congress in February

May/June/July - Appropriations committees hold hearings and markups on spending; Tax panels hold hearings and markups

August - Congress takes its summer recess

September - Conference committees meet, final votes are held and presidential signature brings budget process to a close

October 1st - FY 2009 begins --- If Congress is late, a series of continuing resolutions will be passed until final action is taken on all of the appropriations bills.

How a Bill Becomes Law

Introduction: Anyone may draft a bill; however, only members of Congress can introduce legislation, and by doing so become the sponsor(s). There are four basic types of legislation:

- Bills
- Joint resolutions
- Concurrent resolutions
- Simple resolutions.

The official legislative process begins when a bill or resolution is numbered – H.R. signifies a House bill and S. a Senate bill – referred to a committee and printed by the Government Printing Office.

Step 1. Referral to Committee: Bills are usually referred to standing committees in the House or Senate according to carefully delineated rules of procedure.

Step 2. Committee Action: When a bill reaches a committee it is placed on the committee's calendar. A bill can be referred to a subcommittee or considered by the committee as a whole. It is at this point that a bill is examined carefully and its chances for passage are determined. If the committee does not act on a bill, it is the equivalent of killing it.

Step 3. Subcommittee Review: Often, bills are referred to a subcommittee for study and hearings. Hearings provide the opportunity to put on the record the views of the executive branch, other public officials, supporters and opponents. Testimony can be in person or submitted in writing.

Step 4. Mark Up: When the hearings are completed, the subcommittee may meet to "mark up" the bill, that is, to make changes and amendments prior to recommending the bill to the full committee. If a subcommittee votes not to report legislation to the full committee, the bill dies.

Step 5. Committee Action to Report a Bill: After receiving a subcommittee's report on a bill, the full committee can conduct further study and hearings, or it can vote on the subcommittee's recommendations and any proposed amendments. The full committee then votes on its recommendation to the House or Senate. This procedure is called "ordering a bill reported."

Step 6. Publication of a Written Report: After a committee votes to have a bill reported, the chairman instructs staff to prepare a report on the bill. This report describes the intent and scope of the legislation, impact on existing laws and programs, position of the executive branch, and views of dissenting members.

Step 7. Scheduling Floor Action: After a bill is reported back to the chamber where it originated, it is placed in chronological order on the calendar. In the House there are several different legislative calendars, and the Speaker and Majority Leader largely determine if, when, and in what order bills come up. In the Senate there is only one legislative calendar.

Step 8. Debate: When a bill reaches the floor of the House or Senate, there are rules or procedures governing the debate. These rules determine the conditions and amount of time allocated for debate.

Step 9. Voting: After the debate and the approval of any amendments, the bill is passed or defeated by the members voting.

Step 10. Referral to Other Chamber: When a bill is passed by the House or the Senate, it is referred to the other chamber where it usually follows the same route through committee and floor action. This chamber may approve the bill as received, reject it, ignore it, or change it.

Step 11. Conference Committee Action: If only minor changes are made to a bill by the other chamber, it is common for the legislation to go back to the first chamber for concurrence. However, when the actions of the other chamber significantly alter the bill, a conference committee is formed to reconcile the differences. If the conferees are unable to reach agreement, the legislation dies. If agreement is reached, a conference report is prepared describing the committee members' recommendations for changes. Both the House and the Senate must approve the conference report.

Step 12. Final Actions: After a bill has been approved by the House and Senate, in identical form, it is sent to the President. If the President approves of the legislation, he signs it and it becomes law. Or, the President can take no action for 10 days, while Congress is in session, and it automatically becomes law.

If the President opposes the bill he can veto it; or, if he takes no action after the Congress has adjourned for its second session, it is a "pocket veto" and the legislation dies.

Step 13. Overriding a Veto: If the President vetoes a bill, Congress may attempt to "override the veto." This requires two-thirds roll call of the members who are present in sufficient numbers for a quorum.

(From: Congress At Your Fingertips, 108th Congress, 1st Session, 2003, pp. 25-26, Capitol Advantage, Merrifield, Virginia)

Advocacy Requires a Year-Round Effort!

After your Congressional Visits:

1. Complete a separate Congressional Visit Report Form for each and every visit you make.
 - Complete the form as soon as you can, while the information is still fresh.
 - Attach any business cards you collected during your visits.
2. Turn in your completed Congressional Visit Report Forms at the debriefing session or fax to the HMCW office.
3. Send a letter to thank your Member of Congress or staff member you met with for taking the time to meet with you. Reiterate the points you made during your meeting and be sure to provide any information you said you would obtain when back home.
4. Include your lawmakers throughout the year in your press conferences, community meetings and special events. Since visibility is important to lawmakers, make them look good by inviting their participation. In turn, they will be publicly identified as supporters of AHECS.
5. Add your lawmakers or their staff members to your mailing and email lists.
6. Visit district offices and develop relationships with local staffers