

Do Your Homework

Schedule Congressional and Legislative Meetings

The amount of time that you have with your members of Congress or legislators will be limited so you want to be prepared to make the most of it! The following tips will help you have a successful meeting.

- **Do your research on each member of Congress or legislator before you meet.** Know their history, what issues they prioritize, how long they have been members of Congress, what committees they serve on.
- **Bring a group!** The purpose of the meeting is to help your members of Congress or legislators understand the importance of your issues and the need for their support. If possible, organize a group of community partners – your Board members, law enforcement, nurses or medical providers, faith leaders, etc. – who can describe the role of funding or the impact of the issue within your community. Keep the group small, no more than four or five people, and plan ahead so that everyone understands the focus of the meeting and is prepared to contribute to the discussion.
Note: You may want to consider bringing a survivor or family member of a victim along; however, be sure that this individual is comfortable and ready to share their story.
- **Bring materials to support your request.** Do not go empty-handed! Take these things with you: program brochures, a written letter stating your requests, data related to the issue and relevant to your district, program newsletters, position papers or fact sheets, stories and statistics from your community, and your business card. Bring enough materials for staff, too! If you don't know how many to bring, call to inquire.
- **Ask for what you want and don't let them sit on the fence.** Be clear about what you're asking of them – e.g., a one-time increase of \$1 billion in the VOCA cap and be sure to actually ask for it. "Will you request a one-time increase in the VOCA cap of \$1 billion for local victim services?" If they respond vaguely or generally, try to draw them out and get them to give a concrete answer. Don't be argumentative or hostile, but do be persistent.
- **Follow up.** After every meeting, send a "thank you" letter that summarizes your understanding of what they agreed to do and thanks them for their work to help victims. Be sure to include any information or materials that you promised during the meeting. Remind them that you are available as a resource. Send a separate "thank you" letter to their staff and make a point to keep in touch with them.
- **Don't be a stranger!** Call your members of Congress or legislators and invite them to your program's events. Add them to your mailing list. Subscribe to their mailing lists. If your program has a significant success or your community has experienced a crime-related fatality, call or write to tell them about it. Stay in touch and pay attention to your ongoing relationships with your members of Congress or legislators so that you are not calling them only in a crisis.

Lobbying Tip

Invite your Legislators to Visit Your Program

Having your members of Congress or legislators come to visit your program site is likely the most effective lobbying strategy – and essential to building good relationships with them. They need to come to your program to see what and how and where you operate. Visiting your site is also crucial for instilling in them the value of your program and how funding translates to actual services for victims in their district. Legislators consistently report that site visits are an extremely positive and influential experience.