

COMMUNITY COLLEGE

NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE SUMMIT

Scheduling Meetings on the Hill

‘What should the invitation to my Member of Congress say?’

- Make sure your request is specific, relevant, timely, and that it appeals to the interests of your members of Congress. If you know your Senator or Representative has a specific interest (for example, STEM), then consider tying the invitation to their priorities.

‘What details should I include?’

- Congressional offices want to know basic information. We’ve already talked about the ‘why.’ Your invitation should also address the ‘who,’ ‘what,’ ‘when,’ and ‘where.’ The office will want to know what issue areas you want to speak about in order to assign the correct staffer.

‘Where should I send the invitation?’

- In most instances, a request for a meeting on Capitol Hill will go through the D.C. scheduler. Simply call any office and request contact information for the individual who handles scheduling requests in Washington, D.C.
- Congressional offices receive many scheduling requests, so they prefer to receive them in writing. Save yourself a stamp. Email is your best bet when requesting a meeting unless otherwise stated by the congressional office.
- If you have previously met with other staffers in the D.C. or district office, consider including them on the request.
- Make sure you follow up. If you placed a request but haven’t heard back, call or email the scheduler.

‘How much advance notice do they need?’

- Probably not as much time as you may think. Congressional schedules are constantly in flux, but generally begin to shape up two or three weeks in advance. Try to request your meeting at least a month in advance. Early-January is a good time to request meetings for NLS.
- Offer a few different options for meeting times if possible.

‘How long will the meeting last?’

- The standard meeting window is generally a 30-minute block. However, on a particularly busy day you may only be allotted 15 minutes.
- Allow time for overages. Even if you believe you have a 30-minute meeting, it’s better to plan to be there for an hour. Meetings can start late, or go long.

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NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE SUMMIT

Sample Meeting Request

To: [DC Scheduler]
CC: [Education Legislative Assistant]
RE: Scheduling Request–Community College Meeting

Dear Mr./Ms. District Office Scheduler,

I am writing to request a meeting with the [Senator/Representative] on either February 10 or 11. Leaders from our college will be in Washington, D.C. to discuss ongoing activities on our campuses and our legislative priorities for 2022. Our group would like to apprise the Senator/Congressperson of our work on behalf of the community. The Senator/Congressperson may be particularly interested in our efforts around dual enrollment given her committee work.

Representatives from the college would also like to discuss our legislative and funding priorities for the upcoming fiscal year, including the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act.

The following individuals are slated to attend the meeting:

Betty Smith, President
Bob Thomas, Board Chair
Jane Jones, Trustee
Diane Roberts, Student

Our group is available during the following times:

February 10 – between 2 and 5pm.
February 11 – between noon and 4pm.

I can be reached at (555) 333-2999 or pbsn@commcoll.edu. Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

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Tips for a Successful Meeting (Virtual or In Person)

Considering the ongoing pandemic, meetings with federal policymakers and their staff members that are scheduled in conjunction with ACCT's 2021 National Legislative Summit may be held in person or virtually, depending on each office's policy. As you prepare for your meetings, below are some helpful tips to keep in mind:

- ★ **Take a detail-oriented approach to scheduling virtual meetings:** There are many different platforms that can be used to hold virtual meetings, including Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Google Meet, and conference lines. When scheduling meetings with offices, be sure to ask which platform they prefer and ensure call-in or log-in information is shared with all attendees prior to the meeting. Testing the call-in number or link ahead of time will also help avoid mix-ups or technical difficulties on the day of the meeting.
- ★ **Have a plan for the structure of the meeting:** Coordinate with others before the meeting to determine who will start the meeting, lead introductions, close out the meeting, etc. You may also want to establish the topics each attendee will speak about and in what order to help keep the meeting on track and ensure every attendee to plays a role.
- ★ **Be on time, flexible, friendly, and brief:** Log-in or call-in early and be willing to wait. **Meeting with staff can be as productive as seeing the Member personally.** *Flexibility* is important because Members' schedules get re-prioritized at a moment's notice. Stick to the issues and the facts, and don't belabor the meeting. Congressional staff are friendly and open to meeting with visitors from the state or district they represent.
- ★ **Have college specific information on hand to share:** Institution specific information, including student demographics, enrollment trends, and examples of existing partnerships with outside stakeholders will help inform policy decisions made by Members of Congress and their staff. To further familiarize your representative or senator with your college, you can offer to facilitate a virtual tour of your campus (if feasible).
- ★ **Ask about your Member's priorities:** As with any good relationship, it is important to have give and take. Ask your Member what his or her priorities are—doing so presents an excellent opportunity to find out more about his or her interests and agenda. This discussion may also yield other opportunities to work together on additional issues.

- ★ **Ask for support:** Your representative, your senator, or their staff should be able to give you an indication of the member's level of support for community college priorities. It is appropriate for you to ask their position.

- ★ **ACCT and AACC:** Remind Members and their staff that ACCT and AACC are two national associations that represent community college trustees and CEOs, respectively, and are headquartered in Washington, D.C. They are available and always willing to provide information on community college issues.

- ★ **Virtual Photo Op:** If you are using a video platform to meet with your representative, senator, or their staff, ask if you can take a picture of the screen during the meeting. If you are not using a video platform, you can either recycle a picture from previous years or find a photo from your college or community that captures the spirit of the meeting. You can use the photo to thank the Member and their staff on social media or to accompany a news release for your local newspaper. This will help communicate that you are working on behalf of your community and yield positive publicity for your college.

- ★ **Exchange Follow Up Information and Share Leave Behind Materials:** Towards the end of the meeting, ask the staffer for their email address and let them know to expect a follow up email shortly after the meeting concludes. The email should include contact information for all meeting attendees as well as any leave behinds you would like to share (especially a one-sheet overview of your college). Remember to start the email with a thank you!

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Appointment Information

Your Representative/Senator:

Congressional District: _____

State:

Meeting Date and Time: _____

D.C. Office Address/Meeting Platform:

D.C. Phone Number: (202) ____ - _____

D.C. Scheduler Name and E-mail:

Legislative Staffer for Education:

Legislative Staffer for Job Training:

Legislative Staffer for Appropriations:

Notes

COMMUNITY COLLEGE NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE SUMMIT

NLS PRE-DEPARTURE CHECK LIST

- Appointment information – date, time, platform, and names, e-mail addresses, and numbers of staff with whom you have spoken.
- Know your community – be able to explain briefly and clearly the needs of the community, how your community is changing, and how the college is responding to these changes.
- One-page profile/summary of your community college.
- Legislator background information.
- Completed federal funds worksheet that shows the impact federal dollars have at your college and for your students.
- Record of issues on which you have previously contacted the legislator.

COMMUNITY COLLEGE

NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE SUMMIT

Keep the Momentum Going After the Meeting is Over

Send Thank-You Notes or Emails

- ★ A thank-you note is not only polite, but also provides an opportunity to follow up on key topics discussed during the meeting. Send a note to both the member of Congress and to participating staff. It can be a useful reminder for your congressional offices to follow up on further conversations, research, or commitments made during your meeting.

Promoting the Visit

- ★ Utilize social media or a press release to publicize information and photos from the visit. When quoting members of Congress, work with their press offices to first gain approval.

Maintaining Contact

- ★ Often the communication ends when the meeting is over. Keep the relationships going by engaging with staff regarding campus activities. This could include forwarding a campus newsletter or newspaper article to a relevant staff member.
- ★ Consider offering space on campus for events. Members of Congress often hold public forums or events, but cannot pay for an expensive venue. A town hall meeting at your campus would be a great opportunity for your college, your members of Congress, and your mutually beneficial relationship.
- ★ Make sure they know you are an informational resource. You now have a staff contact in that office. Make good use of it!