



National Senior Corps Association
Tips for Hill Visits
updated 1/08



Make your appointment:

- Make your appointment as far in advance as possible. A month in advance is not too early.
- Call the Washington Office of your U.S. Senators and U.S. Representatives. Call as far in advance of Hill visit as possible. Contact information for your Members of Congress can be found at: www.senate.gov or www.house.gov
- Introduce yourself to the staffer who answers the phone including the name of your project and where you live and/or where your project is located (state, county, parish or district) so they know you are a constituent. You may not live in the congressional district where your Senior Corps project is located. This gives you the opportunity to meet with two representatives.
- Also introduce yourself as a Board member of the National Senior Corps Association representing FGP, RSVP and SCP programs in their district. You will be in Washington for the semi-annual Board meeting and would like the opportunity to talk with the Congressperson/Senator about your programs.
- In most cases, you will not meet with the Member of Congress. Below is the order of hierarchy for office staffers. Try to get a meeting with those who are highest on the list (provided by our Washington representative Priscilla Chatman, JD) or with the Legislative Assistant, the professional staff person who will know the most about national service:

Chief of Staff or the Administrative Assistant (AA). The AA is confusing to persons outside of politics because an administrative assistant is usually a clerical person, but with elected officials this is the title for the number one or two person. Some offices have both a chief of staff and an AA with one being housed in DC and the other in the local district office.

Regardless, they are first and second in authority. If you meet with someone in the elected official's local office you can ask to meet with the AA or the chief of staff. In DC a constituent usually will NOT meet with the AA or the Chief of staff. In rare cases if the member of Congress is from a sparsely populated state, a state geographically distant from DC or a very poor state where people rarely travel from the state to DC, then the constituents may get to meet with the AA or chief of staff. The next highest level person dealing with policy issues is:

Legislative Director. The LD is the staff member who supervises all the legislative assistants. The LD manages all the legislation and legislative issues from Iraq to education to national service. Below the LD is:

Legislative Assistant. An LA manages several issues and is a professional staff member with authority and power. The LA is the person directly responsible for an issue from Medicare, Iraq education to national volunteer service. This is the person you should and will probably meet with. Try not to meet with the staff person below this level. Below the LA is a:

Legislative Correspondence, LC. This is an entry level but professional position and will usually lead to this person becoming a LA once he or she has more experience. An LC usually reports to the LA. The LC does not meet with the Senator or the chief of staff or the AA. The LC probably does not meet with the LD either. Therefore, when meeting in Washington, you want to meet with an LA, the person with the most knowledge about an issue, or someone higher for political reasons. Although an LD, AA or Chief of staff certainly has more power than an LA, they have less knowledge on your specific issue. These higher ups listen to the LA for the facts and for a recommendation.

- There will always be a seasoned member of the Board to go with you to do the Hill visits, share rides, or take the Metro, etc. if you would like. It's a fascinating process and one that all of us experienced "for the first time" at some point. There's always something new to learn no matter how many times you've done it!
- Even if you have an appointment, legislators and their staff persons are often called away unexpectedly for many reasons. Be sure you leave your cell phone with the scheduler so they can contact you with last minute cancellations or change of meeting time.
- If you have an appointment with a Member of Congress (or their representative) on a key committee (Appropriations, Reauthorization), inform our Washington Representative of the day/time of the appointment. There may be special concerns to address or the Washington representative may want to accompany you to the meeting.

What to bring:

- Read up on the elected official(s) you are going to visit. Review their website, find out what committees they serve on, etc. Go to the visit prepared to share statistics: the number of programs and number of volunteers in your programs, number of programs and number of volunteers throughout their district. For Senators, know statistics on the number of volunteers and programs in the entire state.
- Something from home: small recognition items or other items from your program or others in the legislator's district, copies of newspaper articles, a few letters from local volunteer stations and/or volunteers thanking them for supporting the program, etc.
- Your business cards. NSCA is making Board business cards but it is also important, according to our Washington Representative, to identify yourself as a constituent (paper-clip or otherwise attach your card to your NSCA card).
- You will be provided with folders containing several handouts (NSCA Budget Request and misc. position papers) for your Hill visits. You can add your personal business cards and the NSCA card to the folders.

What to wear:

- Formal business attire (suit, tie, dress, business slacks, matching socks, the whole works).
- Comfortable shoes! Review website with map of Capitol Hill. Be prepared for a lot of walking. If you must wear heels, you might want to carry them in a backpack and wear sensible shoes walking from building to building.

Other tips:

- Map of Capitol Hill Complex – http://www.aoc.gov/cc/cc_map_entrances.cfm
- When making appointments, allow plenty of time to go from building to building. It can take more than ½ hour to walk from one end of Capitol Hill to the other end. If you're not sure of the distance, ask the staffer to estimate the time it will take you to walk from your prior and/or next appointment.
- Make sure you're on time for appointments. Plan to arrive 15 minutes early.
- Note Metro stops on the map. Union Station is closer to Senate buildings. Metro South is closer to House buildings.
- For early morning meetings, you might want to take a cab or allow for morning rush hour on Metro. From Dupont Circle, cab will probably cost approx. \$15 (there was a fare increase since Fall, 2007 meeting).

- In between visits there are several options for places to hang out: U.S. Botanic Garden (near Rayburn House Office Building), cafeterias (Rayburn and Dirksen cafeterias are the most extensive), National Museum of the American Indian (with amazing but somewhat pricey cafeteria).
- Seriously consider investing in a good guidebook and/or map.
- Pair up with other Board members for Hill visits.
- Make sure your cell phone is charged. List of everyone's cell numbers will be provided at meeting.
- Statement of the Obvious: Even if you didn't vote for the legislator, you are representing NSCA, your program(s) and volunteers.

Follow-up:

- Send a Thank You note when you get back home and follow-up on providing any additional information your legislator requested.