

# Tips for Successful Hill Visits

Remember that most hill visits are brief (15-20 minutes) and often with staffers, who are responsible for the issue.

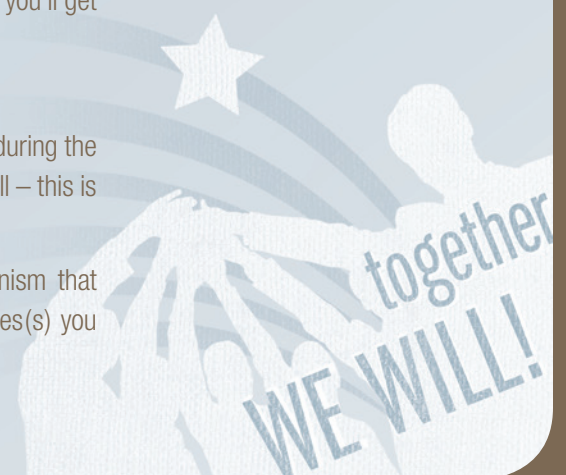
- >> **Be Prepared** Review and rehearse the key points you want to make. If possible, learn member's committee assignments (refer to your Congressional Directory).
- >> **Be on Time** But don't be surprised if they're not. Congressional schedules are hectic. You need to be flexible and patient. Leave buffer time for a successful or delayed meeting. It takes about 15 minutes to cross from the House side to the Senate side. If you are unexpectedly running late, call the office as a courtesy.
- >> **Be Conscientious of Numbers** Meeting space is very limited and causes anxiety for offices trying to facilitate multiple meetings. Standing in the hall for a meeting is not uncommon. Priority should be given to constituents, and let them speak first – only include non-constituents if they serve a particular role that is relevant to the specific member.
- >> **Be Political** Introduce yourself, noting where you live and/or go to school (i.e., confirming that you are a constituent) and establishing a connection to the issue you'd like to discuss. During your conversation, relate situations to the member's home state or district.
- >> **Be Concise** Hill visits are very brief (15-20 minutes). Plan on making no more than 3 key points, using personal and local examples to emphasize the need for the Senator/Representative's support. The Fact Sheets the National Council provides will help you explain:

*What's the issue (purpose of visit)?*

*What's the impact/importance (local/state/nation)?*

*What you'd like the Senator/Representative to do?*

- >> **Be Curious** Don't be afraid to ask how the Senator/Representative stands on the issue; and be tolerant of differing views, keeping dialogue open. Ask (don't demand) for reaction or feedback on your position. Show openness to the knowledge of counterarguments and respond to them gently without being argumentative. Do spend time with Members whose position is against yours. You can lessen the intensity of the opposition and perhaps change it.
- >> **Be Responsive** Try to answer any questions asked, but if you can't, let them know you'll get back to them with the information and be sure to follow-up.
- >> **Be Appreciative** Thank the Senator/Representative (Staffer) for his/her time.
- >> **Be Smart** Always send a follow-up "thank you" letter, reiterating the points made during the meeting. If you promised to provide more information – provide it. Don't drop the ball – this is your opportunity to prove that you are a resource.
- >> **Provide Feedback to the National Council** Please use the feedback mechanism that the National Council provides to let us know the Legislators' position on the issues(s) you discussed and if there is any follow up that we need to do with that office.



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## anaging Questions & Reactions

During your Hill visits, Members will have a variety of reactions to what you are saying. The following provides some guidelines as to how you should follow-up on their responses to ensure you get the most out of your Hill visit.

If your Senator/Representative says...

> > **This Sounds Great! I'll Sign on to Everything!**

Thank them and let them know that you'll be in touch to follow up. If possible, find out who their mental health/addictions, and/or health legislative assistant (LA) is for both their DC and local offices. Sometimes, members agree to take specific actions, but will forget if not prompted. Also, make sure to let the National Council know about any commitments you may have received.

> > **I'm interested. Are there letters being circulated about this bill? What can I do?**

Thank them and refer to the immediate actions/requests that are listed on the fact sheets. Let them know that you will keep them posted of any future actions, such as signing on to a circulating letter. If possible, find out the name of the local staff person as well as the DC staff person to follow-up. Lastly, make sure you let the National Council know about any commitments you may have received.

> > **Sounds Interesting. I'd like to learn more.**

Members of Congress, especially those recently elected, are often unwilling to make commitments the first couple times they are asked. This is in part because they simply cannot agree to everything that is asked of them and are eager to learn more about an issue before making a decision. If you get this reaction, thank them and let them know you're happy to serve as a resource. Find out the name of the appropriate staff people and follow-up with them. Let the National Council know of their interest.

> > **I've always opposed federal funding for mental health and addictions issues.**

Be polite, but persistent. Let them know that while you disagree with them, you hope that the member or staff might be willing to take some time to visit your agency in the district and learn more about the valuable services your agency provides to the community – services that are entirely appropriate and worthwhile investment of federal funds. If possible, find out the name of the local staff person as well as the DC staff person to follow-up.

> > **Provide Feedback to the National Council**

Please use the feedback mechanism that the National Council provides to let us know the Members' position on the issues(s) you discussed and if there is any follow up that we need to do with that office.

