



PRIMER 3

IN-PERSON MEETINGS

SUMMARY:

Meeting in-person with your members of Congress is the most effective way you can advocate. Use this guide to learn how to schedule a meeting, prepare, make it effective, and follow up afterward.

PRIMER ISSUE

3

IN-PERSON MEETINGS



HIGH IMPACT ADVOCACY

While it can be intimidating, meeting in person with your elected leaders is, by far, the most effective form of advocacy you can do. You don't have to fly to Washington, D.C., to share your desire for every child to experience safety, health, and opportunity—all members of Congress have offices in your home state, and they spend portions of the year in those offices for the very purpose of meeting with constituents like you!

To really make an impact, you'll want to meet with your members of Congress and their staff more than once in a year. We recommend meeting with staff in early spring (when budget negotiations begin) and requesting a member-level meeting in August (when Congress takes a month-long district work period).

Use this guide for tips on how to successfully meet with your members of Congress in person about issues that impact kids around the world. We encourage you to invite others to join you and reach out to us for support and guidance. We're here to help!

SCHEDULING YOUR MEETING



Let's get that meeting on the calendar!

1

Decide which member of Congress to meet. We can provide you with guidance on who is the most impactful to start with at this moment.

2

Call the district office. Check their website for the office that is closest to your location and find the phone number. On the phone, ask for the name of the district scheduler and their contact information. Find out whether the scheduler prefers to receive meeting requests by email or if they have a form you will need to fill out on the website.

- 3** Either fill out the online request form **OR** send an email to the scheduler. If the scheduler prefers meeting requests through an online request form, follow their instructions to fill it out online. If you have any questions on what to put, reach out to us!

If the scheduler prefers meeting requests by email, copy our sample scheduling request below, and enter the specific information into the highlighted boxes.



SAMPLE SCHEDULING REQUEST

EMAIL SUBJECT:

Meeting with [Senator/Representative Name] to discuss [Issue or legislation]

EMAIL COPY:

I am a Volunteer Advocate with World Vision, a Christian development and humanitarian relief organization. I would like to request a meeting with [Senator/Representative Name] or the relevant staff member on [Issue or legislation; e.g. U.S. leadership on ending violence against children].

I would like to meet at your district office in [City] within the next [X] weeks. I'm generally available on [Dates you are available for meeting; give several options]. Attending the meeting will be myself, and the following constituents in your area [If applicable, share who else will be attending the meeting with you, their city of residence, and any organizational affiliations].

Thank you for considering my request. Please contact me at [Phone number] or via email at [Email] to confirm the meeting. I'm looking forward to our conversation.

Sincerely,

[Your name and address – to prove you are a constituent!]

- 4** **BE PERSISTENT!** This is the MOST IMPORTANT part! Offices will get several requests for meetings—especially Senate offices, who cover the entire state—so you will definitely need to follow up on your request.

Two or three days after you send in your request, give the office another call to make sure they've received your request. Continue to follow up with the scheduler every few days to make sure your meeting gets scheduled. Be polite, but persistent!

- 5** **Ask for help.** If you've followed up three times with the office with no response, contact us to ask how else you could get the office's attention. Sometimes, advocates will drop by the local office to put a face to the name.

DOES IT MATTER WHO I MEET WITH?



If the member of Congress is unavailable or it's your first time scheduling the meeting, the office may direct you to a staff member to meet with instead. Don't be discouraged—it's just as important to build a relationship with staff as it is with members! Staff often have more in-depth knowledge on the issues, and they directly influence policy by making voting and policy recommendations to the member.



PREPARING FOR YOUR MEETING

1 Find others to join you.

- » Consider strategically who might be helpful to include in your meeting (a prominent person in your community, someone with first-hand experience of the issue, etc.).
- » Involve your church or other social networks. Be sure they know why you are going and how they can specifically pray for both you and your members of Congress throughout the process. Ask your church leader if you can mention the opportunity in a church service or to some small group gatherings to see if others are interested.
- » Brainstorm ways you might be able to show your members of Congress that others in your church or community agree with your position or request. Consider bringing handwritten cards from congregation members, a signed petition, photos, or some other creative way to convey your message and the community's support.

2 Learn what might appeal to your member of Congress.

- » Remember the background research you did in Primer 1: Relational Advocacy to get to know your member of Congress? Revisit what you learned and look for connections your members of Congress would be interested in.
- » You don't have to be an expert to have your views heard—personal experience and sincerity about why you care about an issue makes a real impact! Brainstorm what stories you might be able to tell that will give the issue a personal touch.

3 Prep by getting to know the issues and resources.

- » Because time is limited during the meeting, be sure that you and the rest of your group have a clear understanding of the issues you will discuss.
- » Use the leave behinds that World Vision staff provide for you on the issues that you're covering. Make sure you print a copy to bring to leave behind with your members of Congress.

- » Schedule a prep call with your group (and World Vision staff) to plan your meeting agenda and what each person is going to say or contribute during the meeting.
- » Use the Congressional Meeting Outline to identify roles for everyone. Each meeting participant has a role to play, even if it is to record notes to follow up with the office or silently discern and pray!

4 **Pray!**

- » Invite God to go before you and prepare the way for your conversation with all involved. Ask for what you feel you need to honor him in the meeting: courage, compassion, discernment, or faith.

DURING YOUR MEETING

1 **Dress to impress.** (Business attire is appropriate.)

2 **Arrive early.**

- » We recommend gathering with your group 30 minutes prior to your scheduled meeting at a nearby location to review your plan, calm nerves, find parking, and get through any building security procedures.
- » Confirm how much time the member of Congress or their staff has before you start, so you can adjust your conversation accordingly.

3 **Use your resources.**

- » Use the Congressional Meeting Outline to stay on track and keep the conversation focused. You can also use the leave behinds you printed and brought along to point out specific facts or stories that you'd like to highlight.
- » Include personal stories, experiences, or photos when possible. These things communicate passion that often inspires action. If you sponsor a child, bring in a photo!
- » Remember to make a clear, specific ask with a deadline. Don't just ask for your member of Congress' broad "support"—ask them to take a specific action by a specific time and let them know you will follow up to see if they did it.

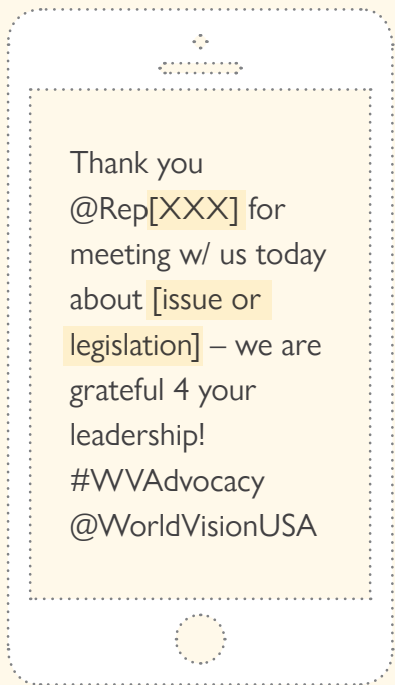


**IT'S OKAY TO SAY
YOU DON'T KNOW
THE ANSWER.**



In fact, it gives you a great excuse to reach back out to the office and remind them of your meeting! Ask World Vision staff for help following up if you need it.

SAMPLE TWEET



4 Leave something behind to remind them of your visit.

- » Remember to leave behind the printed issue resources you brought with you.
- » You may also want to leave a creative gift to help them remember your visit (gifts should be valued under \$10 for legal purposes). You can have fun with this—advocates have brought pictures of their sponsored children, signed cards from their congregation or community group, flowers, freshly baked bread, inspirational Bible verses or quotes, and many other wonderful gifts to bless the office.

5 Take a photo.

- » Request a picture of your group with your member of Congress or staff and share it on social media channels like Facebook or Twitter.
- » Every member of Congress has a Twitter account. Tweet them directly, share your photo, and publicly thank them for the meeting (they'll appreciate the free press!). Be sure to use the hashtag **#WVAdvocacy** and include **@WorldVisionUSA** so we can share it too!

FOLLOWING UP AFTER YOUR MEETING

1 Thank them and remind them of your ask.

- » Members of Congress (and staff!) rarely get thanked, so be sure to send them a letter or email on behalf of your group to let them know you appreciate them and their time. Remember, this is the beginning of a long-term relationship with their office—you want to build their support and encourage them over time to act on your issues.
- » Remind them of any commitments that were made in the meeting and the timeline associated, e.g. "I'll check in with you in two weeks, after you've had a chance to talk to your staff about cosponsoring the bill."

- » If they were unsupportive of your ask, respond respectfully and kindly. Commit to learn more about their perspective as you move forward. You may want to ask them for more information about why they are unsupportive, so you can do your research.

2 Tell us how it went.

- » Please fill out our [Meeting Report form](#) to help us track our impact, coordinate with our Government Relations team in D.C., and support you in following up with the office.

3 Share advocacy with others.

- » Tell others in your church, school, or community about your experience and encourage them to get involved. Your example may encourage them to try advocacy in the future or come along with you to your next meeting!