

Water Equity & Climate Resilience Caucus

Advocacy Tool Kit

Connecting with Elected Officials

There are many ways to engage and educate elected officials on environmental justice and specifically water policy. Interacting with your elected officials is a great way to build relationships and learn where a member stands on a specific policy issue. Think of engaging with your Members of Congress as an opportunity to tell your story and showcase the work that you are doing – describe your work as an advocate or local leader, the community you work in, and share what your organization’s policy priorities mean to your community.

You can spend time with elected officials that support specific policy objectives and those who are neutral or undecided. Staunch opponents are rarely converted. Nevertheless, it is important to understand all opposition arguments and be prepared to counter them.

Meetings with elected officials can happen in a variety of settings, including their DC office, District office, or by inviting them to join you at a local event. You can also share your policy priorities through traditional and social media efforts or by attending a Town Hall meeting hosted by the official. The information in this guide seeks to provide ideas and tips for advocating in a variety of settings.

Meeting With Your Elected Officials

Getting Started:

- Find your official. If you are not familiar with your Member of Congress or Senators are, you can find them by visiting [Senate.gov](https://www.senate.gov) and [House.gov](https://www.house.gov). Note: on [House.gov](https://www.house.gov) there is a “find your Representative” feature where you can search by zip code. A similar search is likely available for state/local officials.
- Find a specific person to meet with. If you don’t already have a point of contact for an elected official you can call the House of Representatives

switchboard at (202) 224- 3121, and the operator will connect you directly with your representative's Washington, DC office. Once you are connected to the office, introduce yourself, say that you are a constituent, and ask for the name and email address of the Representative's DC or in-district staffer that handles nutrition, agriculture, or another topic. You can also ask for their contact information.

- Email the staffer to request a meeting. Send an email to the appropriate DC or in- district staffer requesting a meeting and suggesting a possible date and time. Often, email formats are standardized among Congressional Hill staffers- House: first.last@mail.house.gov; Senate: first_last@member.senate.gov.
- Follow-up by phone. If you have not heard back from the staffer 48 hours after sending your email, call the office to follow-up on your request.

Preparing for your Meeting

Federal legislators and their staff want to hear firsthand about work that you are doing in their state or district. We encourage you to prepare in advance for any meeting. In doing so, think about your organization's federal legislative priorities, as well as your own interests and accomplishments.

- Research your Congressional Delegation's interests and responsibilities in Congress. Read up on their professional backgrounds, their committee assignments, any focused membership groups to which they belong (examples include the Congressional Progressive Caucus, Senate Environmental Justice Caucus, Congressional Black Caucus, Hispanic Caucus, etc.), their legislative accomplishments, etc. Most of this information is available on individual legislators' home pages which can be reached via www.house.gov and www.senate.gov. Through research, you may even be able to find out if this member is generally supportive, neutral or opposed to the issues you wish to talk about.
- Begin to familiarize yourself with the legislative issues. NVG and WECR co-chairs staff can provide materials to help you familiarize yourself with the legislative issues prior to setting up a Congressional visit. When necessary, we can also provide talking points or fact sheets on the issues to help you to get up-to-speed on policy priority issues. Choose two or

three main points, key facts or statistics to help you to make your argument and consider which messages will be most compelling.

- Materials. Feel free to bring fact sheets, new articles or other materials to leave behind. These can often provide information that you are unable to cover during the meeting – or serve as a reference point after.

The Meeting

- Ideally, an initial meeting is in person, but phone calls, and zooms, are also the norm.
- Be on time, but don't be surprised if your meetings start late. Elected officials and their staff keep very tight schedules but meetings often run over.
- Start the meeting by thanking the elected official and/or their staff for taking time to meet with you.
- Introduce yourself, describe where you're from and why you have taken the time to be there.
- Provide a brief description of the WECR Caucus, your organization, as well as a brief history and overview of your advocacy related work.
- Clearly state your legislative asks. If you don't have a specific ask, say you want to establish a relationship with the office so you can serve as a resource on water policy related issues moving forward.
- Explain your position with the facts, but always use personal or local stories when possible. Legislators are most interested in how legislation will affect their districts and constituents. Never speak ill of another legislator, staff member or advocacy group.
- Close the meeting with a clear picture of next steps.

Things to Note

- You may end up meeting with a staff person in the office or the Member. Staff can be instrumental in accessing legislators at a later time, so do not disregard them.
- Most meetings will probably last no more than minutes (District meetings may be longer).
- Be excited and passionate about your work. Elected officials and their staffers have numerous meetings every day. Help them remember the meeting by showing your passion and excitement around your project.

- If there is an opportunity to ask questions, do so. Look for connecting points in the conversation. Have an exchange.
- It's OK to not have all the answers. Your elected official or his / her staffer may ask you a question you do not know how to answer. This type of situation is a perfect opportunity for you to follow-up with their office after the meeting.
- Ask the legislator or staffer how he or she will respond to the requests that you make. If an answer cannot be provided immediately, ask when you can follow-up to get a response.
- Offer yourself as a resource moving forward.

Following Up

- After a meeting with an elected official, send a short "thank you" note to the member or staffers thanking them for their time. Use this note as an opportunity to reiterate your major points, attach any materials, and remind the legislators of anything they may have agreed to do. This letter should be sent within a week of the meeting.
- Answer any outstanding questions or share further information.
- Share the results of your conversation with NVG staff, including any insights you have gained about legislators' concerns and interests.
- Cultivate ongoing communication. Share press articles or local news updates, follow each other on social media, think about invites to future events.

Additional Opportunities to Meet With Your Electeds

District events are another great way for elected officials to learn more about the important work that you do. Consider the following:

- Invite a Member of Congress to come to a site visit your organization or location of your work
- Organize a roundtable
- Join at a local event with other water/ environmental justice advocates, and invite them to participate
- Find out where your member of Congress will be during the Recess.
 - Aim to schedule the site visit or event when the elected official is at home. Members of Congress are usually in their districts Friday through Monday, during holiday breaks, and during the August

recess. Access the [Congressional Calendar](#) to review potential dates and times.

- The best way to schedule a site visit is to email a letter of request to the elected official's district scheduler at least six weeks in advance (*see above scheduling request*).
- Think about where the event should take place. Is it at your restaurant, a farm or other venue?
- Develop an agenda – including a possible activity or other way to highlight the work that you are doing, or policy priority that you wish to get across.
- Think of any other partner / stakeholders that should be invited to the event.
- Prepare for an event and follow up in the same way that you would for a meetings

Town Hall Meetings

Members of Congress often host town hall meetings throughout the year. These provide an opportunity to put water / environmental justice priorities on your Members of Congress' radars by sharing your support or concerns. Unlike most other advocacy opportunities, these events also provide a great platform for getting Members to publicly commit to doing something.

To prepare for a Town Hall:

- Find out when the town hall will be. Call your Members' district offices, visit their websites and check local media to determine if they will host a Town Hall. If you are unable to find information from the Member's office, you can also check townhallproject.com.
- Spread the word. Let your colleagues and networks know the locations and times of these events. Ask them to join you to show that a large number of constituent's care about the issue.
- At the event, raise your policy priority. Briefly provide some context and background.
- Ask your Member for support.

If you have questions or need assistance with any of these efforts please do not hesitate to contact Tricia (pgriffin@nvgllc.com).