The Importance of In-Person Meetings

- In-person visits from constituents are the most influential way to communicate with a Member of Congress who is undecided on an issue.

- Your meetings provide a chance to build relationships with your Members of Congress, establish credibility, enable access, and ultimately influence decisions.

- So, how do you ensure a successful meeting?
While there is no one "correct" way of calling upon a Member of Congress, you can increase the effectiveness of your visits by following a few helpful tips.
Appointments

- By now, you likely have requested your meetings and, if you haven’t done so already, you should inform offices of the issues you would like to discuss.

- Schedulers may not confirm your meetings until very close to ABA Day.

- Even after meeting confirmations, Members’ schedules may change, so be flexible.

**Tip:** If you have a large group, ask the scheduler in advance how many can attend the meeting.
2. **Do Your Homework: Part 1**

• **Know your Member:**
  
  - Member’s Leadership/Committee assignments.
  
  - Member’s legislative agenda: which issues are of primary concern to the Member?
  
  - Any other information relevant to your advocacy issues or which may bridge a personal connection.
Do Your Homework: Part 2

- **Know the issues:**
  - Identify key points and anticipate likely questions or reactions.
  - Know and be able to respond to your opposition’s arguments.
  - **Localize** the issue.
  - Have a consistent message.
3. **Be Prompt!**

- Give yourself enough time to get to each appointment promptly, but don’t be too early: Check in just before or at the scheduled time.

- Remember to factor in time for getting through security lines.
Select a Spokesperson

• Work with your state captain to select a spokesperson who has close personal ties to the Member or knows the issue(s) well.

• If several group members wish to speak, coordinate in advance.

• Usually the person with the closest relationship to the Member should open the conversation, but don’t waste time with too much social chit-chat!
5. Be Brief and Focused

• **Don't try to cover more than three issues per meeting.** Members and staff hear about many issues each day.

• **Deliver a focused message.** Keeping your discussion brief and focused will help you make your issues stand out from the rest!

• Decide in advance **which issue is the most important to cover** for each particular Member and cover it first.

• Meetings typically last no more than 15-20 minutes and may be cut short by a floor vote, so be sure to **make your point and move on**.
6. **Localize the Issue**

- Explain how the legislation/issue affects the Member’s district or state.
- Be specific—e.g., use local stories regarding legal aid.
- Deliver “Legal Aid Defender” cards from constituents to the Member.

**Remember:** Members are always thinking about their next election, so tying the issue to impact on the home state or district is imperative.
7. **Be Positive But Respond Honestly**

- Thank the Member for his/her past support on key issues.
- Look for common ground and keep politics out of it.
- Don’t retreat from your position, but respect the Member’s point of view even if it differs from yours.
- If a question arises for which you do not know the answer, say so and make a note to follow up with the answer.
8. Do Not Ignore Staff!

Today’s Legislative Assistant may be tomorrow’s Legislative Director!

• Build a relationship with staff members and do not be disappointed if you meet only with staff.

• Staff handles substantive issues and can be of great help in relaying inside information, defining the issue, and ultimately influencing a Member.
9. Make the Ask

- Tell the Member or staffer **exactly** what you would like the Member to do:
  - **LSC:**
    - If your Member is on the Appropriations Committee, ask the Member to support $482 million for FY19 funding for LSC.
    - If your Member is not on the Appropriations Committee, ask the Member to let appropriators know of his/her support and help by speaking out, including back home and in the media.
  - **PSLF:**
    - Ask your Member to support efforts to retain the PSLF program as envisioned until there has been an opportunity to assess its impact.

- Ask if more information is needed and offer the assistance of the ABA and your state bar. Let the office know you will follow up.

**Tip:** Don’t take generalized statements of interest or support to be reliable commitments on your issue.
10. Leave Behind Materials

- Be sure to leave behind ABA “One-Pagers” on each issue so that the Member or staff can refer to them after you've gone.

- Exchange contact information with staff so you can follow up.

**Tip:** Give any one-pagers and packets to the Member or staff at the close of your meeting so that their focus is on you.
Write a Thank You Letter

• Write a letter within two weeks of the meeting thanking the Member and staff for their time.

• Include a summary of your position and any understandings that might have been reached.

• Email this letter to the relevant staffer and stay in contact throughout the year.
Use Social Media to Reinforce Your Message

- Take advantage of social media to enhance the ABA’s presence and reinforce your message.
- Use the #ABADay, #LSCmatters, #LegalAidDefender and #Loan4Giveness hashtags in your tweets. Be sure to mention Members’ offices.
- Photos of visits will be made available to participants after ABA Day—post these pictures and tag the Members!


Report Results to GAO

• Complete Hill Visit Report Forms ASAP—drop off or complete using the ABA Day app.

• Talk to ABA GAO legislative counsels if follow-up is needed.
Conclusion

Develop and maintain working relationships with Members and staff year-round:

- Offer to serve as an information resource and offer the ABA’s assistance;
- Invite Members and staff to bar/pro bono/legal aid events/community activities;
- Participate in campaigns;
- Also meet back home with district/state staffers.
Next Steps

• Participate in our ABA Day advocacy issue training session on funding for the Legal Services Corporation and Public Service Loan Forgiveness on Thursday, March 29 at 3:00pm EDT/2:00pm CT/12:00pm PT.

• Questions?

  – **About the issues:**
    o Contact Aloysius Hogan (Aloysius.hogan@americanbar.org or 202-662-1767) for **LSC**
    o Contact Ken Goldsmith (kenneth.goldsmith@americanbar.org or 202-662-1789) for **PSLF**

  – **About ABA Day:** Contact Cecilia Pupillo (Cecilia.Pupillo@americanbar.org or 202-662-1775)

  – Check [www.ambar.org/ABADay](http://www.ambar.org/ABADay) for updates.