Lobbying 101

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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.
1. 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!
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.

**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.
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 LSC’s budget request for $593 million for FY20 funding.
  - 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.
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 or email 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, 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!

• Follow us on Twitter @ABAGrassroots
Visit the Grassroots Action Center for more info and tools for ABA Day

- Access additional checklists, best practices, and other tutorials to help you prepare.
- Get to know the 116th Congress with demographic breakdowns and Member bios.
- Participate in digital campaigns & share your story.
- Join the ABA Grassroots Action Team to learn when issues affecting the legal profession need your voice.

>> ambar.org/grassroots
• Complete Hill Visit Report Forms ASAP—complete online and/or drop off at our Headquarters on the Hill.

• 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 28 at 3:00pm EDT/2:00pm CT/12:00pm PT.

• Questions?

  – **About the issues:**
    o Contact Aloysius Hogan ([Aloysius.hogan@americanbar.org](mailto:Aloysius.hogan@americanbar.org) or 202-662-1767) for [LSC and PSLF](#)

  – **About ABA Day:** Contact Jennifer Sherman ([Jennifer.Sherman@americanbar.org](mailto:Jennifer.Sherman@americanbar.org) or 202-662-1777)

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