



Tips for First-Time Hill Visits

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I'm headed to Capitol Hill for visits with lawmakers and their staff on aging services topics. Should I be nervous?

It's natural to be nervous, but don't worry. You're going to meet great people, see some cool things, and have an overall good experience.

What's security like getting into Hill office buildings? Is it similar to airport security?

It's very similar to the airport. You'll empty your pockets and go through the scanner, but you're able to bring along water, coffee, or your lunch.

Do you have any dress code tips, including tips for shoes?

Dress in business attire and keep your shoes as comfortable as possible while remaining professional. There are long halls and stairways. Depending on what time of year you are visiting, keep in mind you will likely spend time outside waiting to get in the building for your meeting time, so dress appropriately.

I'm in the hall at the door of my congressperson's office. What happens next?

One member of your group will go straight into the office to introduce themselves to receptionist and say who you're meeting with. They will give you further instructions on where to go or wait for your meeting time.

How do I address my Congressperson or their staff?

Address your policymakers as "Congressman/woman X" or "Senator Y" if you're able to meet with them directly. In most cases you will meet with the staff of your Congressperson, and you can call them by their first name.

Once we sit down, how does the meeting usually flow? I've heard that meetings sometimes happen standing in the hallway?

Yes, space is at a premium so sometimes meetings will take place with everyone standing up in the hallway or in a cafeteria. As for the flow, the person who requested the meeting will generally kick it off by giving their thanks, introducing the members of their group, and then moving into the reason for the visit—introduce the issue or problem, and share solutions or stories.

At the end of the discussion, make a request for some action from the office. LeadingAge will help prepare you with your ask, which can be as simple as asking for support in signing onto a piece of legislation.

Who facilitates the flow of the meeting?

Before you go into the meeting, you want to be clear with your group on who will lead. If it's your first visit and you're not leading, you may only introduce yourself—that's perfectly fine. Soak up the experience and enjoy your meeting time and discussion.

I'm not an expert on any piece of legislation, but I know how my programs work and how they impact older adults. How do I share without seeming like out of the loop on legislation?

Be honest. Sharing what your organization does and how it impacts older adults is something offices need to hear if they're going to be compelled to take action for solutions. Sharing your stories and identifying issues is very helpful. Your story matters and they will help share it.

What if I'm asked something I don't know?

Simply say "I don't know" and follow up with the answer—this is a great opportunity to reconnect with staff after the meeting and continue the conversation. LeadingAge will help you find the answers.

How important is it to ask for something in particular?

It is very important. Asks can run the gamut: signing a letter, coming to visit your community, co-sponsoring a bill, introducing a bill, or asking a question at a hearing. Each of these asks are opportunities for your member of Congress to demonstrate their willingness to understand your organization and to work to help you get solutions.

How long do meetings usually last?

Generally, you will get about 15 minutes. Sometimes meetings get cut short and you may only get five minutes—don't take it personally. Staff get pulled into lots of things beyond their control. It can be another great opportunity to follow up and build that relationship after the meeting.

Should I follow up with a thank you?

Absolutely. Along with leaving behind materials from LeadingAge and your business card, follow up with an email thank you to staff members. This is the time to include information about your organization (newsletter, links, etc.) and anything you said you'd follow up on as well.

Is it okay to ask for a photo with the member of congress or staff?

Yes, don't be afraid to ask. Share the photo with LeadingAge and use it on social media and/or in your newsletter, and send it along with your thank you email.

What if it looks like I'll be a couple of minutes late for the meeting?

Don't panic. If you're running late, send a quick email to the staff or call the office so they are aware you are delayed.

MYTH: Offices hear so much from aging services they just tune us out.

They always want to hear more from you—they need the information, and you can provide it from the boots on the ground perspective. And everyone in your community votes. They are interested in being reelected.

MYTH: Our solution is expensive so it cannot be viable.

The government is filled with many expensive and very complex programs, and at one point they were just an idea brought up in a meeting just like you're going to be in. You have nothing to lose.