

Make Your Site Visit Invitation Compelling by Getting to Know Your Legislators

Capturing a legislator's attention can be difficult. And yet it's something you'll need to do to rise above the dozens of invitations a member of Congress will receive for district-based visits. One great way to do so is to get to know something about your legislators and connect your invitation to their interests. Here are three important things to know:

1. **Make the Constituency Connection**

Your first hurdle will be to ensure legislators understand how your project connects directly to the people they represent. Take an "Advocacy Footprint" of what you'd like to show and focus in on those members who represent that specific area. This applies mainly to the House of Representatives unless your project crosses state lines. You can find Congressional District Maps at www.census.gov. Search on "Congressional 115"

2. **Find Out What the Legislator Cares About**

Most members have an issue or two (or three or four) they care deeply about. Find out what those issues are and then try to connect what you'll show them to that. For example, if he or she cares deeply about health care, focus on the health-related benefits of your program. You can learn about their interests by reviewing their websites at house.gov and senate.gov and looking up bills they've introduced at www.congress.gov. Knowing what committees they're on also helps. Legislators on the Small Business Committee, for example, will likely be most intrigued by the impacts of your work on small business development. They might even be most responsive to business leaders in the community.

3. **Where are they on the Political Spectrum?**

Members help all constituents, not just those who are members of their political party. After all, your representative has been elected to represent you and your interests, regardless of your party affiliation or political viewpoint. Nevertheless, it's still important to know what political party they belong to. A conservative member might be most interested in jobs and business development, while a more liberal member might be more interested in environmental impacts (that's a gross over-generalization, but you get the drift). You can find this out by reviewing the "issues" pages on their websites.

Armed with this information, you'll be able to craft an invitation tailored to the legislator's interests, which will increase your odds of getting on the schedule!