

Quick Guide for a Virtual Meeting with Congressional Staff (It's Easier Than You Think!)

NOTE: This guide is shaped around asking for increased NIH funding, but the script is editable and can easily be adapted for NSF, CDC, FDA, AHRQ, ARPA-H, BARDA, or another research agency.

How to secure a meeting with staff of a member of the House or Senate:

1. Focus on your Representative in the House and your two Senators. It is difficult to secure meetings if you are not a constituent of the member's district or state.
2. Contact the Washington, DC office of the member. Phone numbers and links to member pages are in the [House](#) and [Senate](#) directories.
3. Ask to speak with the staff person who handles funding for the National Institutes of Health, note that you are a constituent and hope to arrange a brief virtual meeting about NIH funding.
4. If you are not put through to a staff member or given an email address for a staff member that enables you to arrange a meeting, [email Jacqueline Lagoy](#) from Research!America and we'll help come up with a plan B!

Plan for a 10–15-minute meeting:

With a few exceptions, meetings with members of Congress or staff are 15 minutes on the outside, 10 minutes ideally (from the staffer's perspective) — and could be even less, depending on what all is going on that day. This means you need to have a 1–2-minute elevator pitch prepared for your ask, because you'll need the rest of the time to begin forming an authentic connection with the staff member(s) with whom you are meeting.

Two key goals for meetings with congressional staff:

1. Form an authentic connection with the staffer.
 - a. So, they can trust the information you provide is factual and the asks you are making are reasonable.
 - b. So, they will consider you a resource when relevant issues arise.

2. Successfully make the case for the “ask” that led you to arrange the meeting.

The best meetings begin with a little self-reflection and a little homework:

1. **Self-reflection:** In the case of NIH funding, ask yourself why exactly you believe NIH funding should grow in Fiscal Year 2025. That should be central to your conversation. Here are some thought starters:
 - Is there a patient story you can share?
 - Is there a research example (your own or one you are familiar with) you can briefly relate in the context of its potential real-world impact? Consider connecting the dots between research and national security, economic growth, and competitiveness, and/or the day-to-day wellbeing of your friends and neighbors.
 - Check out this [op-ed](#) for inspiration, the United for Medical Research [resource](#) for updated economic data, and your own personal experience for why medical progress matters in our everyday lives.
2. **Homework:**
 - How much research funding flows into the state (and/or district) of this member of Congress, and what is the economic impact of those dollars? (Use our [spreadsheet of NIH and NSF funding](#) for the states and districts of every member of the 118th Congress.)
 - Which of these [public opinion survey](#) findings resonates most with you? Using survey results to underscore support for research funding is a tried-and-true way of making a Hill meeting memorable and impactful.
 - If you are an advocate for research focused on a particular disease, look for statistics about the number of people with that disease in your state or other local statistics; if it’s a rare disease, look for national or global statistics. The [CDC Health Topics page](#) is a particularly useful resource for this kind of data.
 - Think through how you might serve as a resource to the office going forward. Can you help answer constituent questions about a certain type of research? Can you connect the office with experts or with a civic organization in your city or

town? Note that personal office staffers (with limited exceptions) do not handle campaign matters, so this is not the right meeting to volunteer to work on or donate to the member's campaign. Contact their campaign office for those purposes.

Here's a script to get you started:

Remember, it's just a template: edit at will, based on the federal agency or research cause that is top of mind for you!

- **Opening:** Thanks for taking this meeting – I know there are many, many demands on your time and I appreciate it. I'm (name) a constituent from (city/town).
- **Get to Know Staffer:** If you don't mind, before I make my "pitch," it would be great to hear a little about you. Are you from (state/district)? How did your path lead you to working for (Senator/Representative)
- **Pitch:**
 - I am hoping (name of Senator/Representative) will speak with Appropriations Committee leadership about the importance of growing funding for the National Institutes in Fiscal Year 2025.
 - I understand that federal funding will be significantly constrained in FY25, but... *state why you believe it is critical to increase NIH funding.* Thinking about the impact on constituents, public opinion survey results are consistent over time in showing extraordinarily strong bipartisan support for federal research investment.
 - One finding from a January 2024 national survey commissioned by the nonprofit alliance Research!America is that regardless of political party, a majority of Americans would be willing to spend a dollar more a week in taxes if they knew that money was going to medical research. I'd be glad to follow up with additional findings. That's quite a statement of support!
 - Ask for the staffers thoughts about your request(s), and whether additional information would prove useful. Ask if you can check back in a couple of weeks on your request.

- Not all meetings are perfect. On the off occasion, a staffer might ask questions that you prefer not to answer, move the conversation away from the original subject, or pushback on your ask. It is important to remain courteous and not take the bait. Thank the staffer again for their time and circle back to why you personally believe your ask is important to your state or district. Congressional offices want to foster good relationships with their constituents and are usually happy to return the conversation to your ask.
- **Close** by offering to serve as a resource going forward.
- **Send a thank you email**, including any additional information you have been asked to provide. Ideally, include a relevant article or website link – it could provide information useful for answering constituent correspondence on a current issue, relate to a specific NIH-funded project in your district or state, or otherwise makes sense to include.
 - *You can identify the staffer's email address this way:*
 - House email addresses: `firstname.lastname@mail.house.gov`
 - Senate email addresses:
`firstname_lastname@senatorlastname.senate.gov`

Pat yourself on the back! You just made a difference. Even if your meeting results in no immediate action, you have made a new connection and raised awareness. Those seeds may not bear fruit right away, but if you sustain these connections, they will bear fruit!