Tips for Communicating with Congress

Know Your Audience

- Members of Congress represent their constituents. “All politics is local.”
- Learn as much as you can about the member(s) you are meeting. Democrat or Republican? Committee assignments? Special interest in research at National Institutes of Health or other science funding? Review the biographical information on each member sent to you and visit their websites.
- Members and their staffs are educated, news-informed generalists. Staff members may have a science policy background but it may be in health issues or public health. In the House of Representatives, each staff member is responsible for multiple issues.
- Members of Congress are most aware of issues under the jurisdiction of the committees on which they serve. For example a member on the Judiciary Committee may not be familiar with the NIH but may be familiar with issues like genetic discrimination. A science committee member will be quite familiar with research programs at scientific agencies.
- Members and their staffs have demanding schedules so be prepared for a meeting to be cut short by a vote or another meeting.
- Congressional staff are IMPORTANT. They are often experts on the issues and provide critical direction to their bosses about how to vote on specific issues. Do not feel that your office is not taking your concern seriously if you are scheduled to meet with staff – approximately 90% of our meetings are, and our message is still heard.

What to Bring/Wear

- Dress professionally, but wear shoes that you can wear to walk around.
- Bring a camera, in case your member of Congress stops by to say hello, and don’t be afraid to ask for a picture.
- You will need to pass through metal detectors repeatedly during the course of the day. DO NOT bring anything that could be mistaken for a weapon (pocket knives etc). If you will be carrying a briefcase or similar, consider emptying your pockets into your bag so that you will not need to do so at the security line.
At The Meeting

- Bring business cards and talking points. Don’t worry if you don’t have business cards, just bring them if you have them.

- Keep it short: Plan on a 10 minute meeting but be prepared for a longer, in depth discussion. As you sense that the person you are meeting with would like to wrap things up, reiterate the main point, thank them for their time and end the meeting.

- Arrive early: 5 minutes at least and be prepared to wait. Staff and members are busy.

- MUTE OR TURN OFF YOUR CELL PHONES.

- Be prepared to give a brief description (30-60 seconds) of what you are researching/studying. Focus on the applications and goals of the research, and remember that this is a NON-TECHNICAL audience.

- If you are asked a question and do not know the answer, offer to look into it and follow up at a later date.

- **Be Positive!** Research means progress and innovation.

Caution!!!

- Avoid partisanship.

- Don’t monopolize, patronize or complain.

- Don’t suggest a program that can be cut to increase NIH funding.

- Be aware of your surroundings – you never know if you are around a staffer so be careful of what you say.

Follow Up

- Within 1 week of the meeting, send a thank-you letter to each person with whom you met.

- Take notes of any information or materials you promised to provide and do so within 2 weeks of the meeting.

- Let one of the members of the ASBMB Public Affairs office know if an office has requested additional info so we can help you to follow up.