



Insider's Guide to Federal Advocacy

BE A PARTNER

As a local elected leader, you are an important constituent. County commissioners are closest to the people, so your insight can help lawmakers better understand how federal policy decisions affect local communities. By working together and exchanging information, you can help each other achieve shared policy goals.

Get to know your member and their staff.

- Familiarize yourself with the member's background, committee assignments, voting record, and areas of interest.
- Find common ground to establish a connection and thank them for their work on a shared legislative goal.
- Unlike state legislators, Congressional members work full-time and year-round whether Congress is in or out of session.
- Members and their staff typically develop a deep level of expertise on a range of issues, especially senior members and committee staff.¹ They can often provide a unique bird's eye view on issues that span multiple federal agencies.

Exchange information and share data.

- County data can help show the impact of federal funding.
- Counties can provide examples of what is working well and what may need attention.
- Congressional offices have unparalleled access to information and a vast network of contacts in federal agencies, think tanks, non-profits, subject matter experts (ex. Congressional Research Service, Government Accountability Office, etc.), business leaders, other legislators, etc.

Help each other network.

- Congressional offices can be a great resource and are usually happy to make appropriate connections to advance a shared policy goal.
- Invite your member or their staff to attend locally held events of interest (ribbon cuttings or other events highlighting federally funded projects, roundtable discussions on topics of mutual interest, site visits, etc.).



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BE CREDIBLE

Anecdotes and personal stories can provide a compelling narrative, but legislators also need facts and reliable information to justify your ask. Gather relevant facts and data from county departments to share with your member, so they can use it to illustrate a need back home. Present the information in the clearest and most concise format to make it easy for your member to recall your talking points.

Bring your elevator pitch and your “A” game.

- Do your homework before you meet with your legislator so you're not simply reciting canned talking points.
- Bring a one-pager or palm card to leave behind, which clearly states your ask and justification, backed up by factual information.
- Be sincere and offer a personal story about why you care about the issue.

If you don't know the answer... don't guess. Find out and follow up promptly.

If you hold a different position than your member on a particular issue... you can kindly offer evidence that backs up your position. It is ok to disagree, just do it respectfully, and use it as an opportunity to inform.

Keep in mind that members and staff are generally prohibited from accepting gifts over \$50 and cannot use official congressional resources for campaign or political purposes.²



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BE STRATEGIC

Carefully review your member's committee assignments and their accomplishments to learn their areas of jurisdiction and legislative interests. Focus on members who serve on a committee with jurisdiction over your issue.³ They typically have more influence over related legislation. Pay close attention to timing and aim to deliver your message ahead of major developments on your issue.

Plan your meetings strategically... by matching each issue you plan to raise with the specific member(s), who has standing on a relevant committee.

Monitor the news, legislative calendar and relevant committee websites to...

stay informed about upcoming floor debates, hearings, or votes so you can...

get your information to the member at the right time - ahead of any major developments on your issue.

BE FLEXIBLE

Members have enormous demands on their time and their schedules can change abruptly, especially if Congress is in session. Meetings can change at the last minute, and your member can get pulled out of your meeting. You may also be asked to meet in a different location, such as the hallway outside a committee room. Be patient and flexible and don't let last minute changes disrupt your focus. If your meeting gets changed to staff-level, make the most of it and request a follow-up meeting if you get bumped.

Don't underestimate staff... no matter how young they may appear. They are entrusted to shepherd constituent requests and often negotiate legislation or speak on the member's behalf.

Staff may have more detailed knowledge than the member... on certain legislative issues, especially committee staff.

During recesses, members typically work from district/state offices back home... where they meet with constituents and local groups. If you wish to request an in-state meeting, contact the NC-based scheduler.



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BE CREATIVE

In addition to passing major legislation, there are many ways lawmakers can influence policy and public discourse. A well-timed inquiry to a federal agency on your behalf or submitting a thoughtful question for the record during a hearing, can help move the needle in your favor. Public policymaking is a long game and persistence is the key.

Work closely with your members and staff to find creative ways to bring attention to your issue if related legislation is out of reach.

Your member may be willing to:

- Give a floor speech to highlight your issue
- Provide a quote or public statement in support of your issue
- Request appropriations language to strengthen funding or prioritize your issue
- Direct an agency to further study your issue
- Attend a local event and publicly acknowledge the importance of your issue
- Ask or submit a question for the record at a committee hearing related to your issue
- Write a letter on your behalf or raise the issue in meetings with federal agency officials
- Talk to leadership or other legislators with jurisdiction over your issue if they don't serve on a relevant committee
- Help arrange a briefing with agency officials to discuss related federal programs

BE ACCOUNTABLE

Ask the member or staff for a specific point of contact to follow up on the issue you raised. In most cases, it is inappropriate to contact the member directly, unless they specifically told you to do so. Do not take it personally. Members simply do not have the capacity to respond to each constituent individually.

NCACC is here to help! Let NCACC know of upcoming visits so we can help you prepare and please debrief us after the meeting so we can help you follow up and track progress on county issues.



Insider's Guide to Federal Advocacy - Quick Reference

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- Focus on members who serve on a committee with jurisdiction over your issue
- Stay informed so you can get your information to the member at the right time

BE CREATIVE

Lawmakers can influence policy and public discourse in many ways. Find creative ways to bring attention to your issue if related legislation is out of reach.

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Legislators need facts and reliable information to justify your ask. Present the information in the clearest and most concise format.

- Bring a one-pager or palm card to leave
- Be sincere, share a story on why you care

BE FLEXIBLE

Meetings can change at the last minute. Be patient and flexible and don't let last minute changes disrupt your focus.

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- If you get bumped, request a follow-up meeting

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Ask for a point of contact to follow up with on the issue you raise (often it is inappropriate to contact the member directly). NCACC is here to help you prepare, follow up and track progress on county issues.



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Endnotes:

1 Federal legislators have full-time staff with separate offices in NC and DC. Staff roles, responsibilities, and titles can vary significantly from office to office. Staff may serve as political advisors (ex. Chief of Staff/District Director), policy advisors (Legislative Assistant/Legislative Director), administrative and technical support (office or IT manager), legal counsel (Legislative Counsel), and constituent services (Legislative Correspondent/Caseworker). Each member typically has one or more Scheduler(s) to manage their calendar. Schedulers serve as a gatekeeper and play an important role in helping the member prioritize their time. Members have several legislative staffers, who work in the DC office, and master specific issues within an assigned portfolio.

2 “The general prohibition against campaign or political use of official resources applies not only to any Member campaign for re-election, but rather to any campaign or political undertaking. Thus the prohibition applies to, for example, campaigns for the presidency, the U.S. Senate, or a state or local office, and it applies to such campaigns whether the Member is a candidate or is merely seeking to support or assist (or oppose) a candidate in such a campaign.” <https://ethics.house.gov/general-prohibition-against-using-official-resources-campaign-or-political-purposes>

3 Congressional Committee Participation

Senate:

- Sen. Richard Burr (R) - Committees: Finance; Select Intelligence (Chair); Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP); Special Committee on Aging
- Sen. Thom Tillis (R) - Committees: Armed Services; Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs; Veterans Affairs; Judiciary; Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe. Deputy Whip.

House of Representatives:

- Rep. G. K. Butterfield (D-1) - Committee: Energy & Commerce; House Administration
- Rep. George Holding (R-2) - Committees: Ways & Means; Budget; Ethics
- Rep. Greg Murphy (R-3) - Committees: Science, Space & Tech; Education & Labor
- Rep. David Price (D-4) - Committees: Appropriations (Chair, Transportation-HUD Subcommittee); Budget
- Rep. Virginia Foxx (R-5) - Committees: Education and Labor (Ranking); Oversight and Reform
- Rep. Mark Walker (R-6) - Committees: House Administration; Homeland Security; Education and Labor
- Rep. David Rouzer (R-7) - Committees: Agriculture; Transportation & Infrastructure
- Rep. Richard Hudson (R-8) - Committee: Energy & Commerce; Joint Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe
- Rep. Dan Bishop (NC-9) - Committees: Small Business & Entrepreneurship; Homeland Security & Govt Affairs
- Rep. Patrick McHenry (R-10) - Committee: Financial Services (Ranking Member)
- Rep. Mark Meadows (R-11) - Committees: Transportation & Infrastructure; Oversight and Reform; House Freedom Caucus (Chair)
- Rep. Alma Adams (D-12) - Committees: Agriculture; Education and Labor; Financial Services
- Rep. Ted Budd (R-13) - Committee: Financial Services