

How To Set Up a Congressional Meeting

1. Find your members of Congress.

Go to the [AOTA Legislative Action Center](#) to find your members of Congress (1 member of the House of Representatives and 2 Senators). First, type in your zip code (sometimes you need to know the extra four digits) to reveal the Congressional profiles. Each member's profile will show all of the information on his or her staff, contact information, office locations, as well as the member's background, committee assignments, and his or her positions on legislation affecting occupational therapy.

2. Find out the names of the staff you will visit.

Once you are in the member's profile, click on the "staff members" tab to find out about staff members and their issue areas. It is common to meet with the staff of your Congress members. Don't be discouraged if this is who you meet. They are often the experts on the issues and provide all of the direction to their boss about how to vote on their issue area.

If you are trying to meet with the member of Congress, first contact the executive assistant or scheduler. It is suggested that you place an initial phone call to the scheduler and ask for a meeting. Oftentimes you will have to fax in your request or send an e-mail so that they have your request on record.

If you are trying to meet with staff and are interested in meeting on health care related issues, such as the therapy caps, mental health, prevention, wellness, and so forth, then choose the health care staff aide. If you are interested in meeting on education related issues, such as early intervention, IDEA, NCLB, then choose the education aide. If you're not sure who you should meet with about your particular interest, call AOTA's Federal Affairs staff or ask your legislator's congressional staff who handles your area of interest. .

3. Contact the staff.

The best way to contact staff, unless directed otherwise by the office, is to call and follow up with an e-mail. Since staff works very busy schedules, it may take days and even weeks to get a meeting finalized.

A good first step in contacting the legislator's office is to ask to speak directly with the staff member that you've identified. . The telephone number for the Washington, D.C. office is included in the profile. You can also call the Capitol Switchboard at 202-224-3121 and ask for your member's office.

E-mail is also a very effective way to get a response from Hill staff. Days are long and busy on the Hill, making e-mail an easy way to communicate with staff. The House and

Senate use two different e-mail formats for their employees. Sometimes the use of e-mail varies among offices, and you may need to rely solely on telephone contact.

House e-mails:

[firstname.lastname@mail.house.gov](#)

[firstname_lastname@membersname.senate.gov](#)

example: Joe Smith

[joe.smith@mail.house.gov](#)

Senate e-mails:

example: Joe Smith with Senator Jones

[joe_smith@jones.senate.gov](#)

4. What do I say?

When you contact the office, make sure to highlight the relationship that you have with the member's district. (Use all your connections—work residence, home residence, places you once lived, school residence, etc.) Tell them the subject or purpose of your proposed visit and when you would like to meet.

Example:

“Hello, my name is Jane Smith and I'm an occupational therapist from X. I will be in Washington, D.C. on September 17 and would like to come by and talk to the Congressman/woman or his health care/education/research staffer about some issues important to occupational therapists and the people we serve.”

5. Follow up

As I mentioned before, staff on Capitol Hill are extremely busy. After you make a phone call (usually you will have to leave a voicemail) and send an e-mail, you might have to follow up with a call and/or e-mail in 2-3 days.

Other Tips:

- Try to set up your meetings no earlier than 11:00 a.m. and preferably by 12:00 noon. Allow yourself enough time to finish the 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. briefing and walk comfortably to your meetings.
- Try to set up your meetings an hour apart. This will allow enough time to meet at one location and then get to your next meeting. At any rate try to take what you can get if the staff or member of Congress has limited openings. Your meetings will typically last from 10 to 30 minutes.

Feel free to contact Dan Jones at djones@aota.org or 301-652-6611 with any questions.