

2010 NASFAA Leadership Conference Guidelines for Making Visits to Members of Congress

This year's Leadership Conference includes time for you to meet with your representatives in Congress. This activity is scheduled for **Tuesday, March 2nd from 8:30 am until 11:30 am**. As leaders in your state and regional associations, we strongly encourage you to use this time to meet with your Representative and/or Senators (or their staff). This is an important first step in developing these important relationships. NASFAA will be offering a pre-conference webinar for Leadership Conference attendees on Feb. 2 to discuss current legislative issues and help you make the most of your Hill visit. The following tips will also help you maximize the impact of your Hill visit.

Tip #1: Deciding who to visit. We suggest that you set up meetings with both of your senators and with your representative if you can. It may not be possible for you to visit with more than one or two Members during the scheduled time, but you can also use any free time before or after the Leadership Conference for visits. If there are several congressional districts around your school, consider whether you want to visit the Congressperson representing your institution, your home, and/or a district in which many of your students live.

Tip #2: Setting up your visit. Make an appointment by calling the Capitol switchboard at (202) 224-3121 to be connected with your representatives and senators. Once you reach the Member's office, tell the scheduler that you'd like to meet with the Member about higher education issues. A 30-minute appointment would be ideal but even a brief meeting can be beneficial. If the Member is not available, ask to meet with the legislative assistant or staff member who handles education, appropriations, or budget issues.

Unless your visits are in the same office building, you'll probably want to allow 20-40 minutes between visits. Use the map we've provided to help you estimate your travel time or contact Justin Draeger, NASFAA vice president of public policy and advocacy, at draegerj@nasfaa.org or (202) 785-6940 for help.

Tip #3: Preparing for your visit. Here are some things to think about before your visits:

- Relax! It is completely understandable for you to be nervous about your Hill visit. Many of the students and parents who visit your office for the first time feel the same way! Remember these three things as you call your congressional office:
 - ◆ Members of Congress work for YOU;
 - ◆ Members of Congress want to provide service to their constituents;
 - ◆ Members of Congress want to work with you and to please you.

They are not the enemy! Instead, they want to be informed, and they like to help. After all, it could mean votes for them in the future!

- You don't need to know all of the technical details about processing a bill. Although it can help you to know how the system works, don't let it stop you or your students from contacting a congressional office.
- Decide what issues you want to discuss. NASFAA will help with some of the major

ones—including the Fiscal Year 2011 budget and appropriations processes—in the issue paper we'll send you shortly before the conference. And you'll want to be ready to discuss (and defend) the student aid programs that mean so much to our students and schools. Supporting materials (discussed below) will help!

- Here are some supporting materials to consider bringing with you:
 - 1) A school fact sheet showing how much federal student aid (by program) your school's students receive. You might also include any financial aid and related demographic information you have about your state. This will help you to discuss the benefits of each of the federal student aid programs you are interested in. You can use the sample template included with this mailing to create this document.
 - 2) An impact sheet to show how a particular issue affects your students, your school, and the academic programs there. A one page summary sheet is most effective. Remember to include your name, address, and phone number in case the person wants to follow up later.
 - 3) Some specific case examples to explain your concerns. Sometimes it's helpful to give legislators and staff real examples of students' financial aid packages. If you prepare this type of document, try to include some demographic information about the student (age, family size, course of study, year in school, family income, etc.) and an example of his/her most recent student aid package. Use your best judgment in choosing which student examples best support your positions.
- You may also find it useful to review articles from the Legislative Web Center on NASFAA's website.
- It may also be helpful to become familiar with the Member's background. Generally, you can find this by searching “voting records” on the Member's web site. If you understand the Member's previous positions on student aid issues, it can help you know what to expect and how to approach the discussion. Remember that very few Members always vote for all of our issues, but good friends vote with us most of the time. And remember that voting records may tell us who we need to persuade to vote with us in the future.

Tip #4: Security on Capitol Hill. You can expect high security at the congressional offices and the Capitol. Bring a picture I.D. Do not bring any item that may be construed to be a weapon.

We hope this information will help you set up and prepare for your congressional visits. Remember that the materials you'll receive at the leadership conference will include more general legislative advocacy information to help you in your leadership role throughout the year.

If you have any questions or concerns or need help setting up your visits, please feel free to contact Justin Draeger at (202) 785-640 (draegerj@nasfaa.org) in the NASFAA office.