

Becoming an Effective FEW Advocate One-on-One Meetings with Members of Congress

Federally Employed Women (FEW) has developed a very active grassroots advocacy program through the participation of thousands of FEW members like you! Grassroots Advocates provide an extremely effective means of encouraging legislators to vote or react in certain ways to legislation being considered on Capitol Hill. In fact, direct communication is the best way to be certain that legislators are responsive to the needs of their constituents.

Tens of thousands of bills are introduced in the Congress each year, but only a relatively low number ever become law. As a result, elected officials rely heavily on grassroots advocates to help them decide which bills to support or oppose, and which ones deserve the extra work of that legislator to making it become law.

While a variety of factors may influence Members of Congress when they are deciding what position to take on an issue, two principal concerns guide their decisions:

1. They want to make good public policy and
2. They want to make the decision that helps them get re-elected.

Your contact with legislators as a Grassroots Advocate responds to both of these goals. First, federal workers provide essential services to millions of Americans. Ensuring a professional and top-notch federal workforce means U.S. citizens will continue to receive the best possible assistance in all aspects of their lives from food safety and financial benefits to homeland security and proper healthcare. This assurance to the American people absolutely necessitates provisions and laws to ensure that the federal government provides a positive work place environment and its workers are given decent wages, benefits and job security.

Second, as a constituent, your Member of Congress must answer to your views. Only at great peril to his re-election prospects would a legislator ignore the views of a voting constituent.

One of the best ways to contact Members of Congress is to visit them in person - either in their Washington, D.C., offices, or in their district offices during congressional recesses. Personal contact is the most effective form of communication with lawmakers who want to hear from their constituents and are especially interested in how certain issues will affect voters in their districts and states.

Setting Up the Appointment

First you must formally request, in writing, a meeting with the legislator. (See sample page 6.). Because of security concerns with incoming mail, these letters should be emailed to the legislator's office using the designated form on the legislator's website.

Your Meeting Request

When drafting your letter, be very clear about its purpose and the issues or legislation you are interested in discussing. Also, be specific about dates and times, allowing for a window of a couple of hours when you can meet the lawmaker. Identify all individuals who might be attending. If the legislator is unable to meet with you, meet with the staff person handling your particular issues.

If you have not heard back from a legislator's office after two weeks, follow up with the scheduler in that office. Offices receive hundreds of requests each week, so some do get lost.

Confirm the Meeting

Once a meeting is secured, it is preferred that you confirm the meeting a couple of days beforehand, and provide some background information on the issue(s) you will be discussing. This ensures that the meeting will be more productive because the legislator and/or staffer will be able to prepare themselves before meeting with you. FEW can provide these materials for you.

Preparing for the Meeting

Following are some pointers to refer to when visiting a legislator's office.

Be Organized

Rehearse beforehand and have a mental agenda. This keeps the meeting from going astray. Rehearse your "pitch" which should cover

1. Your position
2. Opposing arguments and
3. Why your position is better both for you, a federal worker, and for the legislator's home district or state.

It is critical that you convey a good working knowledge of the issue and a thoughtful justification for your position. Do not present lots of statistics nor overstate your case. Personal anecdotes are most effective in bringing an issue down to the personal level.

Research

Learn as much as you can about the official before the meeting. FEW's Washington Representative can provide Advocates with all the information they may need. Educate yourself on the legislator's background, political philosophy, committee positions and past support of FEW issues.

During the Meeting

Time Is Valuable

Do not expect more than fifteen minutes of legislator or staff time. Arrive on time and leave when your allotted time is up. Because of constantly changing schedules, always be flexible and willing to wait if necessary.

Do Not Be Awed

Legislators are people just like you, often from a community not far from yours and most of the time they are "generalists" on issues and may shy away from specifics. They may not understand an issue and its implications as well as you do. Discuss the issues with them, but do not lecture or be defensive. Usually the staff members, while also generalists, know more of the specifics, so make sure you talk with them as well.

Introduce Yourself

Introduce yourself; tell where you work, where you live, and the issue(s) you want to discuss. Limit the number of issues to two maximum.

Make Your Points

After meeting the legislator, make a brief (5-10 minute) presentation of your position(s). Emphasize how the issue(s) affect you, your community and your state. Give anecdotal evidence of how the issue will benefit and/or harm you as a federal worker, a family member or a colleague. Use FEW's federal government employment statistics for that Congressional district and/or state as backup to show how many of the legislator's constituents are federal workers and/or federal retirees. Use other relevant facts and research to support your views.

Ask for a Commitment

Ask how the legislator stands on an issue or on specific aspects of a bill or issue. Don't be afraid to politely press for specifics and what actions the legislator intends to take. Try to gain a commitment, and write down what the legislator and/or staff member says. If a commitment is made, repeat it at the end of the meeting (i.e., "I am glad you have agreed to co-sponsor HR 1234.")

Listen Carefully

In addition to asking questions, listen carefully to the viewpoint of your Member of Congress, even if you disagree. Be prepared to answer questions and conduct any follow up if needed. If you do not know the answer to a certain question,

don't be afraid to say so, but promise to follow up with a response. Write down specific questions that you cannot answer or need more information on so that FEW headquarters can also follow up with the legislator.

Leave a One-Page Fact Sheet

If it is more than one page, it will not be read. The fact sheet should offer a concise summary of the issue and your proposed solution. As always, relate the impact of the legislation to the legislator's own district. Also, leave a copy of the employment statistics for the Congressional district and/or state of the legislator that FEW compiled. Contact FEW's National Vice President for Congressional Relations via CongressionalRelationsVP@FEW.ORG and /or FEW's Washington Representative via (tsaunders@washingtonpremiergroup.net) for copies.

Invite the Legislator

Before leaving, extend an invitation to the legislator to be a keynote speaker at one of your Chapter events.

After the Meeting

After the Meeting, Send a Thank-You Note

It is important to thank both the legislator and staff member. A letter following a visit can reinforce areas of agreement, provide additional information, and refute opposing views, thereby helping persuade the legislator to adopt a favorable position. Letters can be easily sent from FEW's Advocacy website: few.org/cqengage/. Please provide a copy of the letter to FEW's Washington Representative Tonya Saunders.

Fill Out a FEW Scorecard

It is very important that the FEW headquarters office be kept apprised of any meetings held with legislators, and what responses FEW advocates received. Scorecards are available from FEW's Washington Representative (tsaunders@washingtonpremiergroup.net) and should be sent back to her. Include on the scorecards any follow up that she should conduct with that legislator's staff.

Maintain Contact

Maintain contact with the official as the issue progresses. Continue to provide feedback of your interest in the issue.

Congressional Staff

One word about Congressional staff members—they are extremely influential with the legislator, and many times can sway the lawmaker one way or the other. They are an indispensable resource to the FEW Advocate. They can help you find information on an issue, give you hints about their boss's position, provide invaluable advice on the strengths and weaknesses of your arguments, and alert

you to your opposition on a particular issue. Circumventing a Member's staff is always counterproductive—so remember to thank and keep in touch with them.

Summary

FEW's strength comes from its grassroots membership. The information contained in this document is provided as a tool to assist FEW members in becoming active and effective advocates for FEW. By becoming so, you can effect change and make real progress in working towards FEW's goal of eliminating sexual discrimination and in working for the advancement of women in government!

SAMPLE MEETING REQUEST LETTER
[Fill in these bold sections]
Choose correct language between the /

[DATE]

The Honorable **[Jane Doe]**
U.S. House of Representatives/United States Senate
Washington, D.C., 20515/20510 (or District Office address)

Dear *Representative/Senator* **[Doe]**:

As a federal worker, a constituent of yours and a member of Federally Employed Women (FEW), I am requesting the opportunity to meet with you to discuss **[ISSUES YOU WANT TO DISCUSS]**. I live in **[CITY]** and work at **[PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT]**.

I will be in *Washington, D.C./near the district office* on **[DATE]** between **[TIMES]**. Anytime within those hours that you can meet would be most appreciated. Along with me, the following constituents will also be attending:

[Ms. Jane Doe, who lives in Pomona and works at the Department of Defense]

[ELABORATE ON THE ISSUE AND HOW IT IMPACTS YOU AS A FEDERAL WORKER. FEW'S WASHINGTON REPRESENTATIVE CAN PROVIDE SOME LANGUAGE]. This issue does not only impact us. There are approximately **[??]** federal workers in your district (see attached sheet). **[FEW'S WASHINGTON REPRESENTATIVE CAN PROVIDE THIS INFORMATION]** and all are *negatively/positively* impacted by this bill.

Thank you in advance for your consideration. If you have any questions at all, do not hesitate to contact me directly at **XXX-XXX-XXXX**.

Sincerely,

Getting to and Around Capitol Hill

When visiting offices in Washington, D.C., it is easiest to take the metro. For meetings with Senators, exit at the Union Station stop on the red line; for the House of Representatives, exit at Capitol South on the blue/orange line.

There are three Senate Office Buildings—Hart (2nd and C Sts., NE), Dirksen (1st and C Sts., NE) and Russell (1st and C Sts., NE). The Hart and Dirksen buildings are attached; Russell is on the other side of 1st Street. The first digit of the office room numbers will indicate what floor the legislator's office is on (i.e., 505 Hart is on the fifth floor).

The House of Representatives also has three buildings—Cannon (1st St. and Independence Ave., SE), Longworth (Independence and New Jersey Aves., SE) and Rayburn (Independence Ave. and S. Capitol St., SW). Room numbers will indicate what building and room number the office is in.

Three digit room numbers are in the Cannon building, and the first number indicates what floor (i.e., 410 is on the fourth floor of the Cannon building).

Four digit room numbers beginning with a "1" are located in the Longworth building, and the second digit indicates the floor (i.e., 1109 is in the Longworth building on the first floor).

Four digit room numbers beginning with a "2" are located in the Rayburn building, and the second digit indicates the floor (i.e., 2411 is in the Rayburn building on the fourth floor).

See map on page 8

Downtown Washington DC Map

Click on Red and Gray Areas to Learn More



[Zoom Out](#)