

Tips for Successful Virtual Meetings with Federal Policymakers

Considering the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, federal policymakers and their staff members have been conducting many of their constituent meetings virtually. As you prepare for your meetings, below are some helpful tips:

- ★ **Take a detail-oriented approach to scheduling virtual meetings:** There are many different platforms that can be used to hold virtual meetings, including Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Google Meet, and conference lines. When scheduling meetings with offices, be sure to ask which platform they prefer and ensure call-in or log-in information is shared with all attendees prior to the meeting. Testing the call-in number or link ahead of time will also help avoid mix-ups or technical difficulties on the day of the meeting.
- ★ **Have a plan for the structure of the meeting:** Coordinate with other meeting attendees before the meeting to determine who will start the meeting, lead introductions, close the meeting, etc. You will probably also want to establish the topics each attendee will speak about and in what order to help keep the meeting on track and ensure every attendee plays a role.
- ★ **Be on time, flexible, friendly, and brief:** Log-in or call-in early and be willing to wait. **Meeting with staff can be as productive as seeing the Member personally.** *Flexibility* is important because Members' schedules get re-prioritized at a moment's notice. Stick to the issues and the facts, and don't unduly extend the meeting. Congressional staff are friendly and open to meeting with visitors from the state or district they represent.
- ★ **Have college specific information on hand to share:** Institution specific information, including student demographics, enrollment trends, federal funding needs and examples of existing partnerships with outside stakeholders will help inform policy decisions made by Members of Congress. To further familiarize your representative or senator with your college, you can offer to facilitate a virtual or in-person tour of your campus (if feasible).
- ★ **Ask about your Member's priorities:** As with any good relationship, it is important to have give and take. Ask your Member what his or her priorities are—doing so presents an excellent opportunity to find out more about his or her interests and agenda. This discussion may also yield other opportunities to work together on additional issues.
- ★ **Ask for support:** Your representative, your senator, or their staff should be able to give you an indication of the member's level of support for community college priorities. It is appropriate for you to ask their position.

- ★ **ACCT:** Remind Members and their staff that ACCT is a national association that represents community college trustees and is headquartered in Washington, D.C. ACCT public policy staff is available and always willing to provide information on community college issues.
- ★ **Virtual Photo Op:** If you are using a video platform to meet with your representative, senator, or their staff, ask if you can take a picture of the screen during the meeting. If you are not using a video platform, you can either recycle a picture from previous years or find a photo from your college or community that captures the spirit of the meeting. You can use the photo to thank the Member and their staff on social media or to accompany a news release for your local newspaper. This will help communicate that you are working on behalf of your community and yield positive publicity for your college.
- ★ **Exchange Follow Up Information and Share Leave Behind Materials:** Towards the end of the meeting, ask the staffer for their email address and let them know to expect a follow up email. The email should include contact information for all meeting attendees as well as any leave behinds you would like to share (especially a one-sheet overview of your college). Remember to start the email with a thank you!