

Minnesota Peace Project

Tips for Meetings with Members of Congress

MPP's efforts to influence U.S. foreign policy starts at the local level in your district, before your Representatives get to DC, and continues when they are at the Capitol. All elected officials operate in a system that puts them under tremendous political pressure from powerful wealthy forces, so remember that this isn't a one-shot deal: you're building a relationship. Results won't come from just one phone call or one meeting. Build your Congressional District base. Organize. Persist and you will achieve results.

Things To Do Before the Meeting

1. Meet with everyone who is participating in the meeting. Pick a skilled moderator to keep the meeting on track. Decide on your talking points and questions.
2. Decide on materials to be left with Members of Congress (MOC) or their staff, including information on your local group, copies of relevant legislation, talking points, reports, etc.
3. You and your message will be taken more seriously by your MOC if your members dress appropriately for the meeting. Also encourage everyone to arrive on time.
4. Plan your delegation to show that support for peace cuts across ethnic and religious lines and that peace is supported by both money and votes.
5. Assign one or two people to take notes during the meeting.
6. Rehearse with your delegation before you go, and agree who will address each point. You will cover much more ground in the time you have.

Things To Do At the Meeting

1. Have the moderator briefly introduce him/herself, the MPP, and the broader peace movement. Then have the other participants in the meeting very briefly introduce themselves.
2. Make your "ask" up front. This is the most important part of the meeting and the reason why you came. You are asking the MOC to do something for you and they expect this. An "ask" is something specific, such as "We would like you to sign on to the Rachel Corrie Resolution." It is not general. "We would like you to support a just peace" is not an "ask". Explain why the MOC should support your "ask".
3. Don't put your MOC in a position where they have to say no. Members of Congress like to please their constituents and don't like to have to turn down requests. If they give an

evasive response to your "ask", don't press it to the point where the MOC is forced to say no. This puts them in an uncomfortable situation. After making your "asks" up front, focus on broader concerns and educational initiatives about the issues.

4. Don't make up answers to questions. If you don't know an answer to a question, state that you will research it and get it to the MOC.
5. Be disciplined—never contradict or argue with each other. If you do so, your group will lose credibility and will not be taken seriously.
6. Be respectful, courteous, and appreciative. No matter how much you might disagree with your Representative's voting records, never berate or disparage them face-to-face or through their staff. This is the surest way to deny yourself access in the future. Instead, point out specific pieces of legislation where you would have liked for them to have voted the other way and explain why.
7. Be calm—don't be intimidated. People wielding power can be scary sometimes. Odds are that you know much more about the issue than does the MOC or the staff person. Keep this in mind when making your points.
8. Address the Congress member correctly by calling them "Senator" or "Representative", unless otherwise directed by the MOC.
9. Focus on a few simple messages, backed by clear, concise facts and figures.

Things To Do After the Meeting

1. Send a thank you note to the people with whom you met. This shows the MOC that you will be continuing to monitor developments.
2. Provide any follow-up information requested and if you are asking the Members to do something pro-active, be sure to contact them after a reasonable amount of time if they have not done what you have requested.
3. Follow up with Congressional staffers on the issues. Offer expertise, and foster personal contacts. Don't go over the heads of staffers to reach your Representative; you may achieve short-term gains but lose on long-term access.