

How to Meet Virtually With Your Elected Officials

Face-to-face meetings with policymakers are one of the most important tools advocates have. This is because elected officials can't ignore people that are right in front of them talking about a problem. It also helps them put a "face" to a certain bill or law. If they can think of you and your story when they are deciding whether or not to support a law, it could affect their decision about the law.

The pandemic has changed our world, and with it, how we meet with our elected officials! Many hill offices and congresspeople's local offices are now meeting virtually with constituents. You can request a virtual meeting by contacting your member of congress' office. [First, find your members of Congress and their contact information here.](#) You can find out how to make an appointment on the website of the elected official. Some elected officials have a page on their website to make appointments. But, for most elected officials, you will need to call or email them.

You can call them at: (202) 224-3121 (the TTY line is 202-224-3091). You will be sent to an automation. It will tell you to press 1 for your senators or 2 for your representative. Select an option. Then, it will ask you to enter your zipcode. Enter your zipcode using



the buttons on your phone. It will read back what you entered, and ask you to press 1 if it is correct and 2 if it is not. If it is not correct, it will ask you to enter your zipcode again. From there, the call will go directly to your elected official's office.

You can also email your elected officials. Most elected officials have an online form on their websites. This form is like emailing them! You can [find your senators here](#) and [your representatives here](#).

Plan to make your appointment at least 2 weeks before you want to meet.

How & when will the meeting take place?

Some offices prefer video conferences and some offices prefer phone conferences. Plan on being flexible to accommodate their preferences, but feel free to offer to set up a Zoom meeting or other type of video conference. If one format is an access need for you, you can request it as an accommodation.

You should start to ask for a meeting about two weeks before you want to meet. Many offices are very busy, so it is important to follow up. Try following up once a week until you get to meet.

Here's a script you can use when emailing to set up a meeting:

Hello _____,

I am a constituent from _____ (city, state) _____ and [I/ We] would like to meet with you to discuss Medicaid home- and community-based services funding in the next reconciliation package.

I hope you will be able to meet with [me/us] on [date]. I would be happy to help coordinate a virtual meeting platform, so please let me know if you have a preference for video or teleconference. If [date] doesn't work for you, could you let me know some other times that might be more convenient?

I look forward to hearing back from you.

Sincerely,

Your name

Your home address [This shows you are their constituent.]

Your phone number

Your email address

Some offices will reply very quickly, but others may take a while. If you have not heard back in two days, send a follow up email to your original email and/or call the office and ask for the person you are emailing. After you schedule your meetings, be sure to confirm the date, time, and digital location with the Congressional staffer.

Here are some tips for what to expect at a virtual meeting, and how you can prepare:

What should I expect at a meeting?

Meetings are usually about 15 to 45 minutes long. Try and find out how long a meeting will be beforehand so you can plan ahead for what you want to say.

You probably won't meet with your elected official directly. Instead, you will meet with a staff member who will report back to your elected official.

If you have any handouts, charts or pictures that will help you explain your opinion, be ready to send these documents. You can email them to the people you're talking to and have one for yourself to look at.

How should I prepare for the meeting?

- Plan ahead. Think about how the meeting might go and what will happen at what time during the meeting.
- Review relevant Action Alerts. Read about recent action our community has taken to support bills and legislative efforts. Learn everything you can about the law or problem you are talking about before the meeting. Also learn about what other people might say to argue against your opinion.
- Practice what you will say in the meeting. Write down notes about what you want to say.
- Read our toolkits about talking to your elected officials, [Sharing Your Story](#) + [They Work for Us](#).

Elevator speeches

It may be a good idea to prepare an elevator speech before you meet with your elected official. An elevator speech is a short speech that you have memorized in case you get a moment with an elected official. While you might not be physically in an elevator while things are virtual, you never know what time you may have! Elevator speeches help you remember your most important points. They're also good to fall back on if your meeting is very short.

Here is what you should include in an elevator speech:

- Your first and last name
- Where you live
- Your school, workplace, or some other part of the community you belong to

- Bring up the law or problem you are advocating for. Talk about how the issue affects you or the people around you.
- Tell them WHY you and others need the policy you support.
- Thank the legislator for listening to you

Try to keep your speech under 1 minute long, and be sure to practice beforehand. Think about typing up a document with the information on it. Then you can email the document to your elected official after you meet so they can read it and learn more later.

Example: Elevator speech

Here is an example of an elevator speech Sally might give to her Senator:

Hi, I'm Sally Jones, and I'm from Normaltown, California. I'm here today because I want to make sure the Senate quickly passes the next reconciliation package that includes at least \$150 billion for Medicaid home- and community-based services. Home and community-based services funded by Medicaid allow people with disabilities like me, my friends and my neighbors to continue living safely at home. These services keep people with disabilities out of institutions. The House has already included this funding in the reconciliation package. We just need the Senate to include it too. This funding is a life and death issue for disabled Californians. Please support HCBS funding in the next reconciliation package and keep us in our communities by passing it quickly. Thank you for your time.

What should I do during a meeting?

Introduce yourself to your elected official or their staff member: tell them who you are and where you live.

Try to start by complimenting something your elected official has done recently that you support. This helps make the person you're talking to more open to your ideas.

Be ready to answer questions and discuss your points in detail.

Other things to keep in mind:

The person you are talking to may disagree with what you have to say. This can be frustrating. Since your goal is to get them to change their mind, make sure that you don't raise your voice or make it seem like you are arguing with them. If you do this, they might not listen to what you are saying. Try and focus more on why you support what you do rather than telling them why they shouldn't support what they do. Always try to end the conversation on a positive note. After a meeting, always send a thank-you email. Include any documents you said you would send them. This lets your elected official know that you appreciate their time, and helps them remember what you talked about.

Example: Sally meets with Representative Smith's office

Let's say that Sally meets with Senator Smith over Zoom to talk about the HCBS funding in a reconciliation bill. Here is an example of a good meeting between Sally and Senator Smith:

Sally: Hello, Senator Smith. My name is Sally Jones, and I'm from Normaltown.

Senator Smith: Great to meet you, Sally.

Sally: It's great to meet you as well. I wanted to start off by telling you how much I appreciated your support for the Free Cereal for Everyone Act. I know it's helped my family so much to have a steady source of breakfast food.

Senator Smith: Of course. It is the most important meal of the day, after all.

Sally: I wanted to talk with you about the next reconciliation package and funding for Medicaid home- and community-based services, or HCBS. Are you aware of this funding in the bill?

Senator Smith: I have heard about it, but please remind me.

Sally: We need the largest federal investment in HCBS. Including this funding in the reconciliation bill would provide a critical investment in services for people with disabilities and aging adults, as well as the workforce that provides those supports. Many people with disabilities and aging adults rely on HCBS to do things like get dressed, take care of our families, work, and participate in our communities. But over 800,000 Americans, including many Californians, are on waiting lists and can't get the support they need. We need a big investment to make community services work for everyone who needs them.

Senator Smith: I understand your concerns, Sally. But this funding is a small part of a very large bill. I'm not sure I can support all the money we'd be spending.

Sally: Maybe so, but it costs more money to institutionalize someone than it does to support them in their community. Investing in HCBS through reconciliation will save money, plus it's providing jobs.

Senator Smith: Why does this bill have to include this funding? We could always do it later.

Sally: HCBS allows people with disabilities like me to continue living safely at home. These services keep people with disabilities out of institutions like nursing homes. The pandemic has exposed many of the dangers of institutionalization with the COVID-19 sickening and killing hundreds of thousands of people. This funding is a life and death issue for disabled Californians and can't wait.

Senator Smith: Hmm. That is a good point. I will think more about this issue.

Sally: Thank you for your time today. Please consider supporting the inclusion of funding for home- and community-based services in the reconciliation bill.