

Develop a relationship with your representative's and senator's education aides

Senators and representatives rely on their aides to collect and filter the large amounts of information and requests that bombard a congressional office. Be deliberate in your efforts to build strong relationships with aides with specific responsibility over their particular issue of interest. In this tool, we offer five easy steps for developing and maintaining strong relationships with those congressional aides. Get the attention of a good aide, and you've got the ear of the senator or representative.



1. LEARN ABOUT YOUR SENATOR OR REPRESENTATIVE;

Your senator and representative are real people. It is easy to be intimidated and awed by their position of responsibility. However, learning about them can reduce your apprehension and provides insight into their experiences related to the issue of professional development. For example, they may have been teachers, married to teachers, or worked in a business or industry that highly values the training and development of employees. Leverage this information to assist you in connecting on a personal level.

Visit congress.org to learn about members of your congressional delegation.

2. IDENTIFY YOUR CONGRESSIONAL MEMBER'S EDUCATION AIDE;

Most congressional offices have a legislative assistant (LA) dedicated to the issue of education. Their expertise and knowledge of education varies by office. Congressional members who serve on committees with jurisdiction over education often have the most knowledgeable staff.

In addition to LAs, congressional members who are highly interested in education policy may designate their legislative director (LD) to field calls on education. The LDs are senior members of the senator's or representative's policy team. You may also encounter chief of staff, usually the most senior member of the congressional office staff. This person is often concerned with the policy and politics of an issue.

Learn how to contact and communicate with these different aides. Accessing the contact information for these key aides is as easy as calling your senator's and representative's D.C. office. Offices are accustomed to this request and are happy to provide the information.

☐ Collect the following information:

Education legislative aide: _____

Phone: _____

E-mail: _____

Education legislative director: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Chief of staff: _____

Phone: _____

E-mail: _____

3. REACH OUT TO YOUR CONGRESSIONAL MEMBER'S AIDE AND FOLLOW UP;

To help guide you through your first conversation with the education aide, we recommend following the steps below:

1. Introduce yourself in person or over the phone.
2. Ask if the aide has a few minutes to speak to you.
3. Tell the aide that you are a constituent and concerned about (your issue).
4. Thank the aide for the work they are doing and thank them specifically about something your member of Congress has done.
5. Deliver your elevator speech.
6. Ask if you can send them follow-up information.
7. Send a thank-you e-mail; be sure to follow up with the aide within three days.

4. TRACK AND REPORT ON YOUR CONTACT WITH KEY CONGRESSIONAL AIDES; AND

Track and report your contact and relationship with key congressional aides for future reference.

Date of contact: _____

Congressional aide: _____

Form of communications (phone, e-mail): _____

Topic of conversation: _____

Outcome: _____

Date of follow-up conversation: _____

5. SHOW YOUR APPRECIATION.

Congressional aides work long hours and dedicate themselves to their bosses. They are under immense pressure to a high volume of constituent requests. It is important to acknowledge their work through simple handwritten thank-you notes and e-mails. Acknowledging the aide's work and attention will go a long way in solidifying your relationship with them and influencing congressional action.

☐ Send a follow-up letter and a follow-up e-mail to the person you spoke with.

Adapted from the *Education advocacy toolkit* by B&D Consulting, 2008. Available online at www.learningforward.org/standfor/advocacytoolkit.pdf.