

Communication Strategy for Congressional Visits

The following tips may help you communicate more effectively and ethically with your congressperson and will result in a favorable reception and outcome for your visit.

✓ Establish Rapport

- Explain who you are and why you are there. Shake hands, make eye contact, and smile!
- Demonstrate an interest in and knowledge of the representative's background and record.
- Thank the representative or staff member for her/his time.

✓ Make Your Points Clear

- Preview the discussion: "I'd like to talk with you about the importance of funding for NEH and describe some critical examples of the good work that has been funded. I also would like to hear your ideas on the potential role and opportunities of the humanities in U.S. society."
- As you move through your comments, engage the Member/staff person in a dialogue. What potential do they see for future funding for humanities and NEH? Don't do all the talking. Stimulate an interactive discussion. Ask questions and then really listen to the answers.
 - What is your sense of the value of humanities in U.S. society?
 - What is the hope for an increase in funding, from your perspective?
 - What can we do to help?
- Be brief. Although you may be tempted to repeat ideas when you feel the representative isn't "getting it," resist that urge. As you close, review your key points and thank the individual for his/her time. Offer to follow up with more information on any details from the conversation.

✓ "Sell" Your Position

- You are in the office as a lobbyist. Your role is to "sell" NEH and that means also selling yourself.
- Be enthusiastic. People respond well to an eager, energetic speaker.
- Be concrete. Use examples to illustrate the need for funding. People remember vivid details.
- Be specific, direct, and focused. Ask for something tangible. Members and Congressional staff expect this. If you don't make a request, they'll wonder why you came to see them. Examples of what to ask for include:
 - "Do you support an increase of \$15 million for NEH for FY2006?"
 - "Would Congressman/Congresswoman X sign this Dear Colleague Letter in support of an increase for NEH?"
- Try to get a clear answer ("closing") or response to your request. If necessary, reiterate it politely. For example: "So, Congresswoman/Congressman X will support Y."
- Don't hesitate to talk about money and federal funding. You believe the humanities are important – so say so assertively. As a citizen, you have the right and obligation to make your viewpoints clear. If Congress doesn't hear from you, who will they hear from and how else will they learn about the widespread support for NEH across the country?

- Use evidence to support the need for money and funding. Provide thoughtful, informed answers to questions.
- Finally, enliven the conversation nonverbally.
 - Be animated and dynamic.
 - Maintain eye contact and posture.
 - Avoid using fillers (i.e. um, ah, like, you know).

✓ **Follow Up After the Meeting**

- Send/fax a letter to the staff person and member, thanking them for their time. Ask for business cards so you can follow up easily. A brief thank you note can cement a positive impression.
- In the follow-up note, reiterate what it is you are asking for. Repeat the “ask.”
- Call to follow up if applicable. For example: “Has Congresswoman/Congressman X decided to sign on to the letter?”
- If the Congressperson takes positive action on your issue, write them a thank you note. Copy the member’s staff on all correspondence.

The National Communication Association provided assistance in the development of this list of strategies.