

HOW TO ORGANIZE AN AID IN-DISTRICT MEETING

REQUESTING A MEETING

After you've notified AID that you're interested in arranging an in-district meeting with your member of Congress, here are some suggestions on how to request and schedule a meeting.

1. ***The basics*** - Decide whether you would like to schedule a meeting while you're at school or at home during break. You can either meet with the member of Congress who represents your school district or your hometown. Also, decide if you want to meet with the respective representative, either senator or all three members of Congress that comprise your state delegation.
2. ***Set a date*** - Meetings are scheduled year-round, yet you may have a better chance of meeting with your member of Congress directly while they're back in their home district on recess. Both the House and Senate are scheduled to have a two-week recess from March 15-March 30. This would be an ideal time to try and schedule an in-district meeting.
3. ***Choose a delegation*** - Decide who will join you during the meeting. Seek out friends who have similar interests, fellow AID members, or family members. As the organizer, you will be considered the Delegation Leader and will take responsibility for all logistics and preparation related to the meeting.
4. ***Send a meeting request letter*** - Send a meeting request letter to your member of Congress' office explaining why you want to schedule a meeting and what you would like to discuss (a sample letter can be downloaded on AID's website). Make sure to note that you are a constituent and how many people will be attending (list the names, if possible). You can find your legislator's contact information on their website which can be located at www.house.gov or www.senate.gov. Address the letter to your legislator's district office and send it via fax. Sending a hard copy letter may result in delays.
5. ***Follow-up on your request*** - Feel free to follow-up on your request 2-3 days after the original send date. Call the district office directly and ask to speak with the scheduler.

PREPARING FOR THE MEETING

Once a meeting date and time have been confirmed, AID will help you prepare for the meeting itself. We have developed specific talking points to guide you through the meeting and to make sure you take advantage of this important opportunity to convey critical policy messages to your member of Congress.

1. ***Contact your delegation*** - Let your delegation know that a meeting has been arranged and confirm who will be able to attend. The scheduler may have arranged a meeting between your group and the member or you may be meeting with a staff person if the member is not available.

2. **Research** - Print out the talking points developed by AID. Conduct some basic research on your member of Congress to find out where they stand on global poverty issues and, in particular, HIV and AIDS. Visit their website to read about their background, which committees they sit on, if they've made any recent statements on these issues, etc.
3. **Arrange prep meeting** – Set a date and time to meet with your delegation to prepare for the meeting. This can take place over the phone or in person. During the meeting, you and your group will discuss the talking points, assign roles and answer any questions.
4. **Prepare materials** - Prepare a “Leave Behind” packet to bring to the meeting. Include background information provided on AID’s website.

IN-DISTRICT MEETING

As the Delegation Leader, it is your responsibility to coordinate the discussion and ensure that the meeting is conducted in a professional and respectful manner. Here are some guidelines to help ensure that your meeting runs smoothly and that you're able to convey these important messages.

1. **Your voice is critical** – As a constituent, your member of Congress is concerned about your opinion. Make sure that you mention you reside in his/her district or state and explain why you are passionate about the fight against global poverty. Explain that you are a member of Americans for Informed Democracy and why you are involved.
2. **Appearance** – Many people ask how they are expected to dress for an in-district meeting. A standard rule is “business casual.”
3. **Timeliness** – It is best to meet your group at least 10-15 minutes before the scheduled meeting time. Some groups like to meet at a coffee shop near the district office or in the building lobby. This is a good way to touch base with each other before the meeting begins and to make any last minute adjustments in case someone is unable to attend on short notice.
4. **Manage Your Time** – If you are meeting with your member of Congress directly it is difficult to tell how much time they will have to spend with you. At times, the member may only spend a few minutes with the group and a staff person will take over or the member may devote more time than expected. On average, expect a meeting to last a half hour. Either way, follow the talking points developed and the amount of time allotted to each issue. Make sure to stay on message and be respectful of the time.
5. **Manage Expectations** - Sometimes it is difficult to anticipate the level of familiarity your member of Congress and/or their staff person has in regards to global poverty issues and HIV, in particular. Don't feel that you need to be an expert; your best assets are your passion and concern for these issues. If you are asked a question that you're unable to answer, feel free to say that you'll be happy to get back to them and AID will help you follow-up.

6. **Wrap-Up** – Before concluding the meeting, be sure to thank the member and/or their staff person for taking the time to meet with you. Provide them with the “Leave Behind” packet and let them know that you look forward to staying in touch.

FOLLOW-UP

Congratulations! You and your delegation should be proud of completing your in-district meeting. You were able to take a stand on behalf of the world’s poor and truly make a difference by demonstrating to your member of Congress that they have a passionate constituency who care about these important issues. Thank you for taking the time to organize such a committed group of individuals and for carrying out such an important meeting.

If this was your first meeting, you’ll probably find that there are some things you’d like to improve upon for your next meeting. Don’t worry, this is normal! The second time is always much easier, once your group becomes more comfortable in delivering their messages. Here are next steps once your meeting is complete:

1. **Immediate Follow-Up** – The member of Congress or staff person will typically provide each member of the group with their business card. Hold on to this for future reference and be sure to send a thank you note as well as any follow-up information requested during the meeting.
2. **Feedback** – Make sure to fill out the feedback form available on AID’s website.
7. **Long Term Follow-Up** – Stay in touch with your member of Congress and/or their staff person. This is a great opportunity to foster this relationship and to present yourselves as a resource. AID will keep you posted on any updates related to PEPFAR. As the reauthorization process continues, there may be an opportunity to take action again in the near future.

Sample Letter

[Date]

The Honorable XXX

Attn: XXX

Address1

Address2

City, State Zip

Dear Senator/Representative XXX:

As your constituents and members of Americans for Informed Democracy (AID), a national student organization, we would like to request a meeting with you in your [insert city here] office to discuss the U.S. role in the fight against global poverty.

The U.S. currently supports poverty-fighting work that takes many forms, including training teachers, building wells for safe drinking water, providing basic family health care, and helping stop the spread of HIV/AIDS. As young leaders passionate about these issues, we would welcome the opportunity to meet with you and talk about how we can make an even bigger difference in the fight against global poverty.

In particular, we would like to discuss reauthorization of the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), which is currently being debated in Congress. This is an historic opportunity to halt the spread of the AIDS pandemic and ensure that all men, women, and children are able to live a life of dignity and respect.

Now more than ever the American people and your constituents see the need to build on past successes and provide a future filled with hope for poor communities around the world. We and other AID supporters would like an opportunity to share our views and to support you in your leadership on these issues.

Thank you for your consideration and we look forward to meeting with you. We will follow up with your staff to find a time that works best with your schedule or you can contact us directly at [insert phone number here].

Sincerely,

[name]

[title]

[city, state]

[name]

[title]

[city, state]