

## Meeting with Members of Congress

October 2007

### 1. Developing a Strategy

Research the positions of your Member of the U.S. Congress, both Senators and Representative, on HIV/AIDS and health issues. Check their opinions and voting records through past and current news articles and through their website. Voting records can be found at the Library of Congress website: <http://thomas.loc.gov>.

Know and understand the past and current relationship your organization has with the offices of your elected officials. This includes knowing about recent visits and communication with the Washington, DC and local district offices.

Select no more than five HIV/AIDS related issues affecting your community to discuss at one time; then decide on specific objectives for the meeting. The objectives should include an assessment of the possible responses your Member of Congress may have on these issues and action steps you would like for them to take. Be sure to clarify your positions on the issue (s) you plan to discuss.

If more than one person from your organization attends the meetings, decide ahead of time who will address each issue or point.

You can scan the AIDS Action website for up-to-date background information on your particular areas of advocacy at [www.aidsaction.org](http://www.aidsaction.org).

### 2. Scheduling your Meeting

Call your Member of Congress' office and ask to speak with the appointment scheduler in order to schedule a meeting. Let the scheduler know that you would like to speak to the person who handles HIV/AIDS and health issues on your Member's behalf and review what you would like to discuss. Many offices also require a written request that can be faxed or emailed.

Confirm your request with a brief letter or email that reiterates the date and time of your appointment, the HIV issues to be discussed, and the names and affiliations of each attendee.

Recognize that your Member will most likely not meet with you in person. Do not be disappointed! Instead, they may have their staff member who handles HIV/AIDS and/or health issues attend the meeting. This is the person who follows key legislation and writes the Member's speeches, letters, talking points, and other communications on HIV/AIDS. You can reach your Senators and Representative by calling the Capitol Switchboard at 202-224-3121 and asking for them by name. To find out who your Senators and House Representative Member are, go to: <http://capwiz.com/aac/dbq/officials/> and type in your zip code in the space provided.

### 3. Preparing for the Meeting

Convene a pre-meeting of your group to identify specific requests your group wants to make and to be sure that everyone understands these requests. At this time, you should also determine the desired outcome of the meeting.

Prepare documents that outline your specific HIV issue (s), your position, if any, on the issue (s), the purpose of your meeting, your contact information, and any factual and educational information on your selected issue (s). Make sure the documents are concise and formal in style, and that they clearly state what action you would like the elected official to take. Be prepared to leave these documents with the Member of Congress or their staff when the meeting concludes.

### 4. Conducting the Meeting

Introduce each person by saying name, what group they represent, and what their interests are. Present the issues clearly. Do not assume that the Member of Congress or staff person knows or understands what your organization does or what issue you wish to discuss. Give specific examples of how HIV impacts their district or state and how your organization/program is addressing and solving these problems.

Mention specific health and/or HIV/AIDS legislation by bill name and number. Specify what you would like the Representative to do in response to HIV/AIDS, related health issues, and

community needs. Try to obtain a solid commitment of action (i.e. co-sponsorship of legislation or letter sign-on). Be honest. Do not be afraid to admit that you do not know the answer to a question, but be prepared to research the question further and give an answer at a later date. Explain concretely how you can help the Member of Congress on HIV/AIDS issues in your district or state.

End on a positive note, even if you did not meet all of your objectives. Make sure to get the contact information of the person with whom you are meeting. Thank the Member or staff person for taking the time to meet with your group.

### 5. Follow Up

The group leader should be responsible for sending one thank you note that highlights the major points raised during the meeting and any agreed-upon next steps in solving specific problems identified. An email is best.

Invite the Member or staff person, in writing, to visit your organization for a tour of your organization or a special event being held there. It is very important that they are able to see for themselves the services you are offering to their constituents. In addition, request their attendance at a special recognition days such as World AIDS Day (December 1<sup>st</sup>), National HIV Testing Day (June 27<sup>th</sup>), or other events important on a national, local, or organizational level.