

2023 BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT VISITS

PARTICIPANT HANDBOOK

SPONSORS





INTRODUCTION

Thank you for participating in the 14th Annual Biological Sciences Congressional District Visits event. Your participation in the public policy process demonstrates to elected officials the value of—and strong support for—science in their district and state.

This event is an opportunity to share with your lawmakers how public investments in the biological sciences have enabled you and others to conduct research and train the next generation of scientists, and how these activities have benefited your local area, state, and nation.

This event is an opportunity to begin building a relationship with a lawmaker. Elected officials and their staff members often rely on outside experts—particularly when they are constituents—as a source of information when considering policy matters.

Again, thank you for engaging in the science policy process. This handbook provides details on your role as a participant in the event, as well as guidelines and tips for successful meetings.



OVERVIEW OF THE 2023 EVENT

MEETING WITH A LAWMAKER

You will have the opportunity to meet with one of your members of Congress or a state legislator to demonstrate the value of biological science. Meetings are typically short: 30 minutes or less for an office or virtual meeting and 1–2 hours for a tour of a research facility. If a meeting is not possible with the elected official, a meeting with their staff will be arranged.

You are welcome to invite colleagues to join the meeting, but you are encouraged to keep the group size small.

LOCATION

The meeting can take place online on a virtual meeting platform, at the elected official's local office, or at the participant's research facility; participants select the desired meeting location.

The meeting could take the form of a tour of a research facility, such as a field station, lab, or natural history collection. A tour is a great way to show policymakers how science is conducted and to introduce them to the people involved in research and science education.

We encourage participants to notify their employer's government relations or public affairs office if they plan to arrange a tour of a research facility.

DATE

The date of the meeting is flexible, although most meetings will occur in August or September. AIBS can assist with scheduling a meeting between mid-July and the end of October.

YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES

Participants in the Biological Sciences Congressional District Visits will be provided with training materials and assistance scheduling a meeting with a lawmaker. AIBS Public Policy Office staff will prepare and submit an email to the elected official's office requesting the meeting. The participant will be listed as the point of contact for scheduling.

Once a meeting has been scheduled, please report it to the AIBS Public Policy Office by emailing Jyotsna Pandey at jpandey@aibs.org. This information lets us know which offices have been contacted and helps us target future communications to these offices.

Participants are expected to attend the training webinar to be held on Monday, July 17, 2023 from 3:30-5:00 PM Eastern Time, or watch a recording of the webinar. The presentation will provide information about how to formulate your message and provide tips for a successful meeting.

You should plan on setting aside time before your meeting to research and prepare talking points on the benefits of government investments in science, especially to your local region.

You are responsible for checking your employer's rules regarding involvement in advocacy programs. During the meeting, you should clarify whether you are representing your own views or an institutional perspective. Some individuals may need to take time off from work to attend the meeting. It may also be necessary for the participant to inform the government relations office of their organization about their involvement in this event, especially if a lawmaker is going to visit the institution.



PREPARING FOR YOUR MEETING

You should prepare three talking points that summarize the message you want to communicate to your elected official. In general, you are encouraged to talk about the importance of federal- or state-funded biological research and/or education.

The specific message will be determined by the participant, on the basis of each individual's interests and experiences. For example, one individual may talk about their research that is advancing the frontiers of foundational knowledge in biology, which is supported by a grant from the National Science Foundation. Another individual may highlight their work educating and training students for careers that require scientific skills. Someone else might speak about how their research is helping to inform management of natural resources in their state.

Participants should not request funding specifically for their organization. Rather, individuals should embrace the adage, “a rising tide lifts all boats.” The goal is to increase awareness and funding for biological research in general.

More details about preparing talking points will be covered during the interactive online training session that will be held on July 17, 2023. In addition, sample talking points will be distributed to participants.

Other resources from AIBS, including fact sheets on the value of biological research, are available at <https://www.aibs.org/policy/resources.html>.

Participants should carefully consider what printed information they will give to the policymaker during their in-person meeting. Individuals are encouraged to provide one or two documents. AIBS will provide participants with a digital copy of a handout on the importance of federal investments in the biological sciences that can be referred to during the meeting and left with the elected official. In addition, participants should consider bringing a handout about their organization or institution, or a policy-relevant paper that would be readily understood by non-scientists. In case of virtual meetings, participants could consider creating an infographic to share via the online meeting platform or share a digital copy of the handout over email after the meeting. AIBS policy staff can help you to select appropriate documents.



MEETING LOGISTICS

A meeting will be arranged with your elected official or their staff. Although a meeting with staff may not seem as prestigious, staff are influential in making policy decisions. Lawmakers rely on their staff to be knowledgeable about issues in their district and to advise them on policy issues.

Be certain to confirm key details regarding the meeting. If a lawmaker or their staff will be touring the participant’s research facility, it is important to inquire how long the meeting can last and plan the tour appropriately.

Participants should plan on wearing business attire for a meeting at a district office or a virtual meeting. If the participant is inviting an elected official or their staff on a tour of a research facility, business casual attire may be appropriate. Be sure to advise the individuals you are meeting with if they should wear certain clothing (e.g. wear sneakers instead of dress shoes).

Don't forget to take a photo with your lawmaker. Be sure to ask for permission first, but most elected officials are happy to be in a photo with constituents.



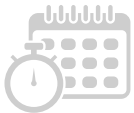
TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL MEETING

- Be on time, but be prepared to wait.
- Be prepared and succinct. Most meetings are short (15–30 minutes), so plan on getting to the point quickly.
- Avoid scientific jargon and acronyms.
- Limit the presentation. If you're meeting as a group, select a spokesperson and a common strategy to come across as a cohesive team.
- Stay on message.
- Use a short anecdote or offer facts that illustrate your point. For example, “our state receives \$xyz million from the National Science Foundation each year.”
- Anticipate questions about the policy implications of your research, as well as arguments of opponents of those policies.
- Do not monopolize the conversation, and do not patronize or complain.
- Follow-up after the meeting with a thank-you letter or email to the elected official or staff member, and offer to be a source of information in the future.



AVOID COMMON PITFALLS

- Avoid partisanship.
- If a question is outside your area of expertise, offer to put them in contact with an appropriate expert.
- Clarify your opinion versus those of your organization.
- Do not overload with information and handouts.
- Do not make unrealistic demands or tell them how to do their job.
- Do not suggest a program to cut in order to increase funding for the program you support.
- And remember: staff are important. They advise the elected official on all aspects of their job, including what legislation to support or oppose.



KEY DATES

- July 14: Registration deadline. Help us spread the word to your colleagues.
- July 17: Participant training webinar to be held online at 3:30 PM Eastern Time. The webinar will last approximately 90 minutes and will include time for questions.
- July 31 - September 4: U.S. Congress is in recess. Lawmakers are back in their home states and potentially available to meet with constituents.



QUESTIONS

If you have any questions or concerns as you prepare for your meetings, please do not hesitate to contact Jyotsna Pandey at jpandey@aibs.org.