

Biological Sciences Congressional District Visits

Frequently Asked Questions

1) What can I expect to get out of the event?

Participants will have the opportunity to meet with one federal or state elected official to discuss their research and the importance of science. If the lawmaker is not available, a meeting with his/her staff will try to be arranged. The meeting can either take place at the elected official's local office or at the participant's research facility. Participants will receive training on how to effectively communicate with policymakers.

2) Who is eligible to participate?

Any scientist, researcher, educator, postdoctoral scholar, graduate student, curator of a natural history collection, or other science professional who lives in the United States is welcome to participate. The event organizers reserve the right to limit participation if the number of registrations exceeds the program's capacity.

3) Is the event only for individuals, or can an organization participate?

Both individuals and groups of people from the same institution are welcome to participate. In past years, university departments, research centers, scientific collections, and field stations have participated.

4) Is participation free?

There is no cost to participate due to the support of the event sponsors: American Institute of Biological Sciences, Botanical Society of America, Harvard Museum of Comparative Zoology, Helminthological Society of Washington, Natural Science Collections Alliance, Paleontological Society, Society for the Preservation of Natural History Collections, and Society for the Study of Evolution.

Participants are responsible for arranging their own travel to the meeting with their lawmaker. In most cases, the closest district office is less than an hour drive away.

5) Do I get to select which elected official I meet with?

Yes. If multiple participants select the same lawmaker to meet with, however, AIBS will combine those participants into one group.

6) Where will the meeting take place?

Participants can either invite the elected official and/or their staff to visit the participant's research facility or participants can opt to meet at the nearest district office. Look up the location(s) of your elected official's district office(s) at policy.aibs.org/know.

7) When will the meeting take place?

Your meeting can be scheduled at your convenience between mid-July and the end of October. If you are trying to meet with a member of Congress, the month of August is recommended, as Congress is on recess then.

8) What topics can participants advocate for during the meeting?

This event is intended to demonstrate to elected officials the value of public investments in biological science. Examples include research funded by a federal agency, research equipment purchased through a federal or state grant, and education and workforce training. Participants are welcome to speak about the benefits derived from their own work, such as furthering the frontiers of foundational knowledge or better management of natural resources.

9) What are my responsibilities as a participant?

Participants are responsible for providing information about their research and availability for a meeting to AIBS. Participants are expected to attend either the online training webinar or watch a recording of the webinar. Participants should also plan on spending some time in advance of their meeting to prepare talking points about the benefits of public investments in science, especially to their local region.

10) What should I wear to the meeting?

Participants should plan on wearing business attire for a meeting at a district office. For gentlemen, this includes a suit, dress shirt, and tie. For ladies, a suit, dress, or blouse with skirt/slacks is appropriate. Attire for a tour of a research facility can be less formal.

11) How can I prepare for the meeting with an elected official?

A webinar will be held on July 26, 2018 at 3:30 pm (Eastern) to train participants on how to effectively communicate with policymakers. Additional resources from the American Institute of Biological Sciences can be accessed at <https://www.aibs.org/public-policy/congressional-district-visits-resources.html>.

12) Can I bring handouts to my meeting?

Participants are welcome to bring along one or two documents to distribute. AIBS will provide participants with a digital copy of a handout that can be referred to during the meeting and left with the elected official. Additionally, participants could consider bringing a handout about their university/institution or a policy-relevant paper that is understandable by non-scientists. AIBS policy staff can help you to select appropriate documents.

13) Can I invite other scientists to participate?

Yes. You are welcome to invite colleagues from your institution to join you in the meeting. Please let AIBS know if you plan to have additional people join you.

14) Should I notify my employer about my plans to meet with an elected official?

Yes. It is best to coordinate your participation with your institution's government relations office.

15) I want to request funding for a project at my institution. Is that allowed?

No. This event is not the appropriate venue to request congressionally directed spending. Participants should come with the mindset that 'a rising tide lifts all boats' in regards to support for biological research.

16) Is it too late for my organization to sponsor the event?

No. Please contact Jyotsna Pandey, AIBS public policy manager, at 202-628-1500 x225 or jpandey@aibs.org.