

COMMUNICATING WITH WASHINGTON

AAPT Congressional Visits Day (CVD)

Instruction Manual

Staff on Capitol Hill, the White House, and Congress often lament that they do not hear enough from scientists and researchers who depend on federally funded research on the importance of science and their research to the Nation. The challenge is to make communicating with policymakers in Washington,DC a part of every scientist's professional and academic career.

AAPT has allocated funds to support Congressional visits during the 2018 Summer Meeting in Washington,DC. The goal is for as many members as possible visit their representatives during the week of the meeting to begin to establish relationships and dialogues that can continue throughout the year.

AAPT has decided on four priority messages:

- All teachers of physics at all levels should receive suitable investment and education in content and pedagogy.
- Physics education research is a critical component of developing effective pedagogical approaches.
- Tackling issues in physics education requires infrastructure at all scales: local, state and national.
- We recognize the importance of increasing the diversity of physics teachers and students at all levels through the development of curriculum, financial support for students and teachers, and increasing communication among physics teachers across all academic levels.

VOLUNTEER SIGN-UP

You can volunteer for these visits at:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/sm18cvdinterestform>. The form asks for your name, e-mail, address, state & zip code (which determine your representative) and times during the week of July 30th when you are available to make a visit.

For international members and those from Washington D.C: We apologize that we cannot facilitate a meaningful visit for you. United States policy makers are more readily available to meet with their direct constituents.

TERMS AND CONDITIONS

By volunteering for the program and accepting reimbursement from AAPT, you agree that:

- You have read and understand this Instruction Manual concerning communicating with policymakers.
- You represent AAPT in the most professional manner possible.
- You fully present the unifying message consistent with AAPT's four priority messages (presented above).
- You will NOT communicate remarks that are contrary to the mission and statements of AAPT.
- You will send appropriate follow-up communications with policymakers and fill out the Follow-Up Survey.

PRIOR TO YOUR WASHINGTON VISIT

Proper planning will result in a successful day of visits. Please read through the instructions on how to setup your visit day.

The volunteer is responsible for scheduling their own visits. If you need help, please use either of the following contacts:

- Scott Franklin (RIT), General Membership Congressional Visit Day, svfsps@rit.edu
- Bethany Johns (AIP), Saturday Workshop and General Advocacy Work, bjohns@aip.org

Connect With Volunteers From Your State Delegation

Working together with other volunteers can increase your access to Congressional offices inside your state or district. We encourage you to work with other volunteers that have signed-up for visits for AAPT-CVD. We will maintain a list of all volunteers so you can coordinate with others from your state or with compatible dates and time you are available.

Please reach out to these colleagues to coordinate your visit. We encourage group visits whenever possible. However, multiple individual visits throughout the week are also encouraged. Congresspeople want to meet with their constituents, and there is nothing wrong with several visits to the same office spread throughout the week.

Who to Visit

We encourage you to visit your 3-4 members of Congress, which includes:

- Two Senators
- At least one House Representative from the district you live, as well as another from the district where you work, if different from where you live.

Go to [Senate.gov](https://www.senate.gov) to find the contact information for the office of your two Senators. Go to [House.gov](https://www.house.gov) to find your representative by enter your zip code.

It is appropriate to accompany colleagues from your state as they visit their representative.

Create a Schedule

Create a template schedule for your day of visits before contacting offices.

House and Senate buildings are approximately 1.5 miles (10 min, taxi/Uber/Lyft, 25 min Metro, 30 min walk) from the AAPT Conference Hotel. Schedule each visit with your Congressperson's office for about 15-30 minutes. Keep in mind the time it takes to walk between offices. There is a tunnel that connects all House offices and another on the Senate side of the Hill. Using the tunnel helps minimize passing through security each time you enter a building. It takes approximately 10 minutes to walk between Senate and House offices and 25 min to walk across the Capitol between a House and Senate office.

Please schedule accordingly. You will need to pass through a metal detector every time you enter a new building (not if you pass between tunnels). Lines are generally quite short, with the possible exception of immediately after the building opens (8:30am-9:00am).

Use the Maps of Washington, DC and the Hill to know where office buildings are located. Allow time for lunch or breaks as needed.

TIP #1: To prevent wasting time and excessive traveling between offices follow these tips:

- Offices for House and Senate are on opposite sides of the Capitol. Schedule visits to have House visits during one block of time, say, the morning, and Senate visits in another block of time, e.g the afternoon.
- Both the House and Senate have three office buildings each, try to cluster together in time meetings in the same building.
- Do not schedule visits back-to-back. Give yourself enough time between visits to get to the next appointment on time.

Contact Offices

Start contacting offices about four weeks before your scheduled day to visit or as soon as possible. Many offices need time to respond. A phone call is the best way to initiate a visit. Introduce yourself, where you are from, and the reason for the visit (STEM Education policy and funding). This will help them identify the appropriate aide to hold the meeting. Suggest the day/time for a meeting according to your template schedule.

Many Congresspeople have an online form to schedule a meeting. All offices have a scheduler and you can usually find the email address online to contact them directly. **Call (or call again) the office directly, if after a week you have not received a response for your meeting request.**

TIP #2: Persist in contacting the office until you get a response. Be patient, yet firm. Don't hesitate to call or email several times. **Do not** wait until the final week to schedule your visit.

Maps, Metro, and Taxi

You may use the Metro, taxi or Uber/Lyft to your meetings on Capitol Hill. Do NOT take the Metro from one side of the Hill to the other. It is faster to walk or take a taxi/Uber/Lyft.

If you decide to use the Metro there are different stops that can be most convenient:

- Senate office buildings are next to the Union Station Metro stop on the Red Line.
- House office buildings are next to the Capitol South Metro stop on the Orange and Blue Line.

You can plan your Metro trip using the Trip Planner at: <http://www.wmata.com/>

Help From Your Institution

Contact your institution's Office for Governmental Affairs before visiting Washington, DC. Let them know that you will be visiting as a constituent on behalf of AAPT, **not** as a representative of your Institution. You may be asked to use your institution's lobbying firm to schedule visits or work with your Governmental Affairs specialist to put together your schedule and contact specific offices. Note that the specialist is hired to represent the interests of your institution; your visit is as a constituent in partnership with AAPT, so it is important that the institutional message not take precedence over that of AAPT.

TIP #3: Many volunteers have found their institution to be very helpful. They can do all the work of scheduling meetings. They also know what other offices may be good to visit.

Tips and Tricks

- **Dress professionally**, yet comfortably for the summer weather.
- Wear **comfortable walking shoes**. This is very important since you will do a lot of walking.
- Bring your **business cards** and give them to everyone you meet.
- **Print out your schedule** which includes the location, time, office number, and contact with whom you are meeting. Internet access is limited on the hill (cell phone reception is fairly reliable).
- **Be on time**. Call ahead if you will be late.
- **Have fun!**

HOW TO CONDUCT YOUR VISIT

Congressional offices want to hear from you. You are the expert. Don't be afraid to talk. However, do not be condescending. Be honest and admit when you do not know the answer. Send an informed answer in your follow-up communication. These visits are about developing a relationship. Remember that trust is hard to gain and easy to destroy.

Communication on Capitol Hill is quite different from within academia. Rather than logically building an argument for a request, you are expected to present the "ask" early in the discussion. The aide or representative can then explore which aspects of the ask are most resonant with their constituent concerns. You can encourage this by asking "what aspects of this are most likely to be of interest to the representative?"

For more details you can read [Working With Congress: A Scientist's Guide to Policy](#). This is a great addition to your professional library. The information is relevant and helpful for communicating with policy makers.

Be Prepared

Familiarize yourself with background information on the federal budget and science funding in your state. The federal budget is an important issue and will undoubtedly be a part of your visit. Try to stay up-to-date on the issue.

Science policy news sources:

- [FYI: Science Policy News from AIP](#), a science policy news bulletin related to physics and education, includes legislative and budget trackers.
- [AAAS R&D Budget and Policy Program](#), timely, comprehensive, and independent analyses of federal research & development funding trends.

Recommended political news sources are:

- [POLITICO](#), politics, policy, and political news.
- [The Hill](#), covering Congress, political campaigns, and Capitol Hill
- [Roll Call](#), the quintessential Congressional news source

Know your members of Congress. Read their bios and press releases, know their committees and interests, and tailor your pitch accordingly.

Do not give gifts or anything of value to the office, member, or staff. Congressional rules strictly prohibit this. You can leave behind a folder with information and pamphlets. However, we recommend you send detailed information in your follow-up communication.

The Message

The main unifying message is to promote the mission of AAPT, which is to enhance the

understanding and appreciation of physics through teaching.

In addition, AAPT has decided on four priority messages:

- All teachers of physics at all levels should receive suitable investment and education in content and pedagogy.
- Physics education research is a critical component of developing effective pedagogical approaches.
- Tackling issues in physics education requires infrastructure at all scales: local, state and national.
- We recognize the importance of increasing the diversity of physics teachers and students at all levels through the development of curriculum, financial support for students and teachers, and increasing communication among physics teachers across all academic levels.

Your Individual Message

Your member of Congress wants to connect with you, wants to hear from you, and wants your vote. Your institution's lobbying firm may have prepared statements on the university's or facility's position. Talk about your research or mission you are involved in, especially if you work on a specific mission in the astronomical decadal surveys.

Your members of Congress are most interested in what affects their state or Congressional District. Review how the member of Congress can positively impact your state or district by supporting the message.

State statistics on R&D funding, contracts, education and investments can be found at: [State STEM Report Cards 2018](#)
[Science & Engineering Indicators, State One Pagers](#)

Before You Leave the Office

Say thank you and that you appreciate their time.

Ask for a card. This will help with following up and filling out the feedback survey.

Ask for a picture with the Congressperson. Post it on social media or send it to us.

TIP #4: Listen. Listening is just as important as talking about your message. Let the conversation be organic. Be prepared when the staffer asks questions that may seem unrelated to your message. Enjoy the conversation.

TIP #5: Limit use of scientific jargon. You are not there to lecture or prove how smart you are. For example, phrases or words such as "alpha particles," "electromagnetic spectrum," or "magnetohydrodynamics" should not be used unless asked.

FOLLOWING YOUR VISIT

Your work does not end after your visit. You want to be in communication with the offices you visited throughout your career. To initiate a communication you send a follow-up letter. After your visit please complete our feedback survey. This is a way for the AAPT to measure the effectiveness of the program.

Follow-up Communication

Please send a follow up communication for each or your visits.

You may send a follow-up either by email, fax, or regular mail. The typical format for follow-up communication is:

- Say, "Thank you."
- Reiterate your message
- Offer to be a resource
- Mention that you will watch the Congressperson's actions on the issue.

You may also want to send a handwritten thank you card to those you met. It is standard practice and a professional courtesy to let the person you met with that you value their time by taking your time to hand-write a thank you.

Feedback Survey

The feedback survey helps AAPT gather metrics and gauge the effectiveness of this effort. For the survey you will need the list of offices and corresponding individual you met with, use cards obtained from visits.

Once you are done with the visit we will email you and ask you to complete a feedback form that will support AAPT's efforts in promoting the four priority messages. By filling out the form you are eligible to receive a gift card from AAPT.

Reimbursement

AAPT is happy to provide a gift card to those who engage in the CVD and complete the feedback form, while supplies last. You will be send a link to the feedback form after the summer meeting.

Map of U.S. Capitol Complex

