



# GUIDE TO LOBBYING YOUR LEGISLATOR

## Why are Lobby Visits Important?

Lobby visits are an essential component of effective SGAC work and are most effective when our chapters work in tandem to deliver clear and concise messaging to elected representatives. These visits allow SGAC to collectively voice our demands and advocate for change. Your visit will not only help to persuade your representative, but it will also be an educational experience for you. During your visit you will get an inside look at the political climate and insight on how to better promote your issue.

## How to set up a meeting with your legislator:

1. Decide which legislator(s) you'd like to meet with – you have two senators and a representative. Contact SGAC to learn more about any past discussions we have had with the legislator, and to learn about their history on issues relating to HIV/AIDS and global health.
2. Call your legislator's office to schedule a meeting. You can find their phone number on their website – make sure to call their local district office, unless you are planning on meeting with them in Washington DC. Try to call a week or more in advance. You may be asked to e-mail a scheduler. Make sure to follow up with the office by phone to make sure the meeting is scheduled. Keep following up as often as you need to!
3. If you are having trouble scheduling a meeting, contact SGAC to see if they have any contacts with staffers in the office of your legislator to speed up the process.

**NOTE:** It is a great idea for chapters to **meet consistently with the office of their representatives** in order to build a relationship with staff. Politicians are more likely to listen if they see and hear you meeting with them and advocating month after month, because they know the issue is important to you. Chapters can meet as often as every two weeks, and use each meeting to discuss a different campaign with the office. It may also be a good idea to invite students and community members from other organizations to

join your meetings - this gets other students involved in our campaign work, and demonstrates to the legislator that people with a variety of interests care about these issues. Natural allies for many of our campaigns are often found in medical students organizations, LGBTQ groups, cultural groups like Black students organizations or Latino students organization, and environmental and labor rights activist groups.

### **How to prepare for your meeting:**

1. It is important to be as relaxed as possible during your visit. Expect to be a little nervous.
2. Create an agenda for the meeting. Have everyone who is planning on attending get together at least 1 hour in advance of the meeting to plan out who is handling each agenda point. Decide who will “chair” the meeting based on familiarity with the issue and speaking skills. See the sample agenda below for guidance!
3. Bring a “leave behind” kit with you to hand the staffer after your meeting – this can include briefings, articles, and fact sheets. SGAC will provide most fact sheets and briefings to your chapter in advance of your meeting. You can also look to our friends at amfAR, Medicines Sans Frontier, Public Citizen, or AMSA for their resources.
4. If possible, try and form a delegation by bringing friends who are also from your district. If they are not from your district, you have no obligation to divulge this fact if you are not asked, but also do NOT lie if asked.
5. Do some basic research on the interests of your legislator so that you can cater your main arguments to issues, activities, or affected populations that he/she cares about. Do they have a son/daughter in the military? Are they very active in their religious life? Did they spend a year doing Peace Corps in Malawi? All of these personal details should be used to frame the issue for them in the most effective way possible.

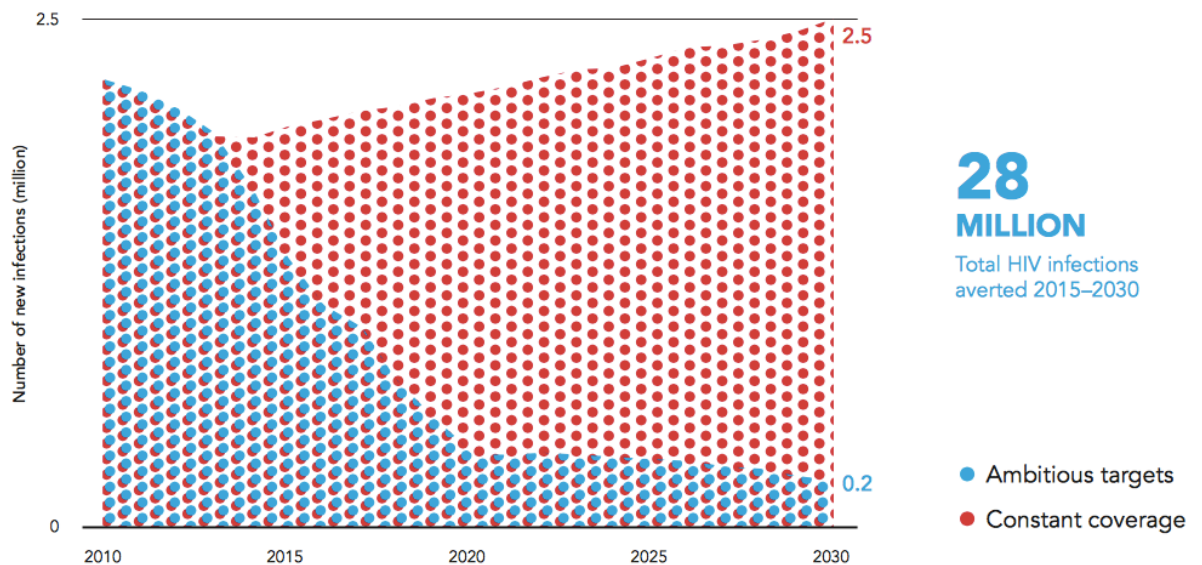
### **Sample Agenda for the Meeting**

1. **Introductions** – If you are affiliated with an organization, introduce the mission of that organization, and what your college chapter focuses on. Then, do individual introductions of each person in attendance. You may want to provide more details and background on who you are, and why you are interested in working on global health disparities and HIV/AIDS. Details about why you are advocating are important to humanize the issue. Acknowledge your member of Congress for any previous actions on the issue. Connect with your member of Congress and/or staff by asking specific questions, such as, “What are your main priorities in Congress this year?”
2. **Current State of the AIDS Pandemic**

We have the science

- i. Treatment is prevention – In July 2015 the START trial that was published shows us that when people receive treatment as soon as they are diagnosed they're viral load is reduced to undetectable and it virtually prevents them from transmitting the virus to others. Read more about this groundbreaking trial here: <https://www.niaid.nih.gov/news/OA/Pages/STARTqa.aspx> <http://www.nih.gov/news-events/news-releases/starting-antiretroviral-treatment-early-improves-outcomes-hiv-infected-individuals> This is good to include in the leave-behind kit for the office.
- ii. Mathematical models show we can end AIDS – using treatment & prevention tools we already have (condoms, preventing mother-to-child transmission), we can drive new infections down and save lives.

**Fig. 6a New HIV infections in low- and middle-income countries, 2010–2030, with achievement of ambitious Fast-Track Targets, compared to maintaining 2013 coverage**



[http://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/media\\_asset/JC2686\\_WAD2014report\\_en.pdf](http://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/media_asset/JC2686_WAD2014report_en.pdf)

- iii. Economic benefits – HIV treatment results in return to full employment (Bor, Health Affairs 2012), cost-savings in the long-term (UNAIDS Investment Framework, Schwartzlander et al., Lancet 2011), and it's a good investment. Since AIDS was first diagnosed, the U.S. has contributed billions of dollars to treatment and prevention of global HIV/AIDS. This has resulted success, meaning in many lives saved, and over 15 million people on treatment worldwide. It would be an illogical and TERRIBLE investment to back out of funding now.
- iv. Personal connection – if you have them, consider telling stories of friends/acquaintances with HIV or successful programs you've witnessed

3. **Presentation of Issues**– When discussing the issues with your members of Congress or their staff, focus on engaging them in the conversation as well as making requests.

- 1. Make a short, concise presentation of the issue – whether it is about funding for PEPFAR/Global Fund, the Robin Hood Tax, or the Trans-Pacific Partnership.
- 2. This is a good time to go through documents in your “leave behind” kit, and give it to them after you are finished speaking.

4. **Asks**

- 1. Make specific requests and ask for their answer right then. Ask them to take some sort of action – will they write a letter to the appropriations committee about protecting funding for Global AIDS programs? Will they co-sponsor legislation for the Robin Hood Tax? Will they call the President to express their disapproval with provisions in the TPP? Will the vote against fast-track authority? If they are unwilling to make a commitment, set a date to follow up.
- 2. Also carefully record any objections, questions, or concerns. If you can't address a specific question, tell them you will get back to them with an answer. One person should take notes during the conversation, being sure to write down any commitments made by the legislator or aide.
- 3. Set a plan for following up with the appropriate congressional staff.

5. **Follow-Up** – Sometimes the follow-up is more important than the visit itself. Fax or mail a “Thank You” letter and follow up with the appropriate aide(s). Without follow up, your effort in scheduling a meeting and speaking powerfully about our issues could be wasted. If your representative does what you asked, then be sure to thank them and let them know you appreciate their continued efforts.

6. **Report back** to SGAC about your meeting through the Google discussion group to prompt discussion on follow up action items for both your own chapter, and chapters in other locations.
7. **Repeat!**