



GUIDE TO LOBBY VISITS

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 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, D.C. Try to call a month in advance if you want to meet with your Congressperson. 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 plan to **meet consistently with the office of their representatives** in order to build a relationship with staff. It may also be a good idea to invite students from other organizations to join your meetings - this gets other students involved in our campaign work, and demonstrates to the legislator that young people with a variety of interests care about these issues. Natural allies for many of our campaigns are often found in medical student organizations, LGBTQ groups, cultural groups like Black or Latino student organizations, and environmental and labor rights activist groups.

How to prepare for your meeting:

1. 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.
2. 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 Health GAP, amfAR, Medicines Sans Frontier, Public Citizen, or AMSA for their resources.
3. If possible, try and form a delegation by bringing community members 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.
4. Do some basic research on your legislator’s interests so you can cater your main arguments to issues, activities, or affected populations that he/she cares about.

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. 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**
 - a. Opportunity to end AIDS
 - i. Treatment is prevention – NIH-funded research from June 2011 shows that receiving treatment prevents a person from passing HIV on to their partners (reduces the transmission rate by 96%)
 - ii. Mathematical models show we can end AIDS – using treatment and prevention tools we already have (condoms, preventing mother-to-child transmission), we can drive new infections down and save lives.
 - iii. Economic benefits – HIV treatment results in return to full employment (Bor, Health Affairs 2012), cost-savings in the long-term (UNAIDS Investment Framework, Schwartlander et al., Lancet 2011)
 - 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.
 - a. Make a short, concise presentation of the issue – whether it is about funding for PEPFAR and the Global Fund, the Robin Hood Tax, or trade and access to medicine issues.
 - b. 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**
 - a. 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? If they are unwilling to make a commitment, set a date to follow-up.
 - b. 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.
 - c. Set a plan for following up with the appropriate congressional staff.
5. **Follow-Up** - Email 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.