Most Effective Methods of Legislative Contact

1. Face to Face Individual Visit

2. Poll of the District

3. Face to Face Group Visit

4. Telephone Call

5. Personal Letter

6. Resolution Passed by an Organization

7. Petition

8. News Report of Group/Individual Position

9. Form Letter

Source: Study conducted by Dr. Charles U. Larson, Professor of Communication Studies. Northern Illinois University, **1983**

E-Mail Finds the Rare Ear in Congress

By REBECCA FAIRLEY RANEY

IN theory, e-mail should be a useful tool for democracy, an easy and prompt way for citizens to reach their representatives. And with the fear and disruption resulting from the discovery of anthrax in Congressional mail, e-mail might seem an ideal alternative.

But although many members of Congress asked constituents to switch to e-mail after mail delivery to their offices was halted in October, the trend on Capitol Hill seems to be a backlash against the medium.

Ill equipped to cope with the deluge of correspondence that the Internet has brought, many Congressional offices no longer disclose e-mail addresses to the public. And both staff members and lobbyists say that e-mail is far less successful than faxes, phone calls or letters in reaching and influencing legislators.

Based on a recent test for this article, e-mail is unlikely to elicit an acknowledgment that it has been read. On Nov. 26, messages were sent to the 65 Senate offices listing addresses on the Senate Web site. The messages identified the sender as a reporter sending e-mail to members of Congress to see if, when and how they answered. Aside from 27 automated responses, only 7 Senate offices sent a reply within two weeks.

Many of the automated responses discussed the difficulties that e-mail has created for Congressional offices. Staff members are deterred from reading e-mail because they receive up to 5,000 messages per week, many of them from advertisers and nonconstituents.

In one response, Larry Neal, deputy chief of staff for Senator Phil Gramm, Republican of Texas, wrote, "The communication that Sen. Gramm values most certainly does not arrive by wire. It is the one where someone sat down at a kitchen table, got a sheet of lined paper and a No. 2 pencil, and poured their heart into a letter."

Mr. Gramm's office, like many others, often responds to e-mail messages on paper.

Also responding to the test were the offices of the Republican senators Richard G. Lugar of Indiana, Kay Bailey Hutchison of Texas, Robert C. Smith of New Hampshire and Michael B. Enzi of Wyoming, all of whom, like Mr. Gramm's office, replied within four days. The offices of Kent Conrad of North Dakota and Carl Levin of Michigan, both Democrats, replied after nine days.

However, many Senate staffs were displaced at the time because of the anthrax episode. And offices typically take three weeks or more to respond to postal mail, said Rick Shapiro, executive director of the nonprofit Congressional Management Foundation.

Still, antipathy toward e-mail is evident on both sides of the Capitol. Representative Brad Carson, Democrat of Oklahoma, said that when he took office in January, staff members from other offices warned him not to answer e-mail with e-mail. "There's an institutional bias against adopting new technology," Mr. Carson said in a telephone interview.

His office responds to e-mail within three or four days, he said. But that practice remains an exception in an institution in which office procedures are built around logging and answering postal mail.

Congress received about 80 million e-mail messages last year, according to the Congress Online Project, a two-year research effort financed by the Pew Charitable Trusts and conducted jointly by the Congressional Management Foundation and George Washington University at (www.congressonlineproject.org). The researchers estimate that the number may have doubled this year. The House received only about 17 million pieces of paper mail last year, according to House administrators. The Senate numbers for paper mail were not immediately available.

"The communication that Sen. Gramm values most certainly does not arrive by wire. It is the one where someone sat down at a kitchen table, got a sheet of lined paper and a No. 2 pencil, and poured their heart into a letter."

5,000 messages a week may be far too much for the typical Senate office to handle.

In March, a study by the Congress Online Project found that e-mail, instead of promoting democracy, may be having the opposite effect. The ease with which e-mail can be sent and the push by advocacy groups for supporters to send e-mail to Congress have raised the public's expectation of being heard, the study said. Instead, the report concluded, the "conflicting practices and expectations of all the parties are fostering cynicism and eroding trust."

In fact, because of the daunting task of keeping up with e-mail, nearly one-third of the 100 Senate offices no longer accept e-mail through public addresses, whereas 83 had public e-mail addresses in 1996. Twelve of the 65 Senate offices listing e-mail addresses sent responses that they no longer respond to e-mail sent to those addresses. Only about a quarter of the House offices list e-mail addresses on their Web sites, compared with about a third in 1996.

Most Congressional offices, including several that still list e-mail addresses, advise constituents to fill out forms at the legislators' Web sites.

For example, an automated response from the e-mail address of Senator Jon Kyl, Republican of Arizona, provided a link to his Web site with directions to communicate through Web-based forms and to consult a section called Issue Positions.

The message reflects the problem that electronic communication has created for many Congressional offices: "In an effort to respond as quickly and thoroughly as possible," Mr. Kyl's message said, "I am no longer receiving e-mail at this address."

Consultants who specialize in Internet campaigning discourage the practice of lobbying solely through e-mail. Though several small companies sell products that route e-mail to Congress through Web sites, managers of those companies said that sales amounted to less than $10 million per year.

Some consultants, however, said that certain e-mail campaigns had worked. Pam Fielding, founder of E-advocates in Washington, said that an e-mail campaign helped rescue the Violence Against Women Act last year. A week before the Senate vote, she said, leaders of the Stop Family Violence campaign sent a request for accounts of domestic violence to the campaign's e-mail list of 36,000 supporters. Within 24 hours, she said, the request had yielded 6,000 stories for Congress via e-mail.

"You had priests talking about their parishioners and moms talking about daughters who are no longer alive," she said.

The bill passed, and shelters and hot lines for battered women received $3.3 billion over five years. Ms. Fielding was cautious about attributing the passage of the bill to any one factor but said that "we knew we were influential" in sending the e-mail.

Nonetheless, Jonah Seiger, co-founder of Mindshare Internet Campaigns, which designs online communication strategies for trade associations, nonprofit groups and corporations, said he had not advised any of his clients to lobby via e-mail.

Mr. Seiger has helped groups attract and organize supporters online and has then created efficient methods for them to use Web sites that convert e-mail messages into letters, faxes and telegrams to Congress.

The objective of any campaign, he said, is to create a tangible sense of pressure within a Congressional office through ringing telephones, bulging mail bags and humming fax machines. E-mail silently accumulating in an In box does not create that pressure.

"E-mail is effective in organizing a constituency," Mr. Seiger said. "It's uniquely ineffective in projecting the voice of that constituency. There's no way to create an impact in a visual way."

Making Yourself Heard

People who send e-mail to members of Congress can improve the chances that their opinions will be noted, says Pam Fielding, founder of a consulting firm called E-advocates. She suggests observing these guidelines:

1. Include your full name and postal address.
2. Communicate only with your own representatives.
3. Put the message in your own words and tell your story.
4. Address one topic per message.

TIPS FOR TRIPS TO THE CAPITOL

- Locate yourself in the Legislator's District
- Know where your legislation is and its bill number
- Know when your legislator will vote on your legislation
- Don't badmouth the other side
- Ask who the key staffer is on your issues
- Keep it simple; avoid jargon
- Don't get defensive; keep your cool---it's their game and their rules
- Follow up with a letter to the staffer and the legislator
- Tell the legislator specifically what you want; leave no ambiguity
- Don't get sidetracked; remember your mission
- Remember to practice saying, "I don't know but I will get back with you"
- Most importantly, tell your story

JOE GAGEN

LEGISLATIVE GRASSROOTS TRAINING

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Do's	Don'ts
Thank legislators for meeting with you and for their consideration, even if your comments are not well received.	Don't give inaccurate information or purposely lie.
Be professional, courteous, positive, direct, clear, concise, factual, credible, and specific.	Don't threaten or be rude to a legislator and/or his/her aide.
Do your homework.	Don't make moral judgments based on a vote or an issue.
Always follow up with information you have promised.	Don't waste a legislator's or aide's time.
Follow up a visit or telephone call to a legislator with an offer to be of assistance in the future.	Don't say, "I hope this gets by your secretary."
Use correct forms of address.	Don't send form letters or obvious mass produced letters or emails.
Type (as opposed to longhand) any fact sheets, letters, and testimony. Be sure they include how you can be reached.	Don't fail to find out where the bill you are interested in is in the legislative process.
Pass along anything nice you may have heard about the legislator, but don't over do it. Get down to business quickly.	Don't publicly or privately complain about a legislator or a member of his/her staff. Never start or carry rumors.
Try to establish a relationship of mutual trust with your legislator.	Don't ignore staff.
Treat members of the legislature as friends, and intelligent citizens.	Don't hold grudges.
Attend legislative hearings, committee meetings, budget mark-up sessions, and floor votes on your issues, if appropriate.	Don't give up.
Be very specific about what action you need from your legislator on an issue (e.g. vote "yes" next Tuesday on HB 1).	Don't fail to give the legislator your one page fact sheet when writing or visiting.
Establish a reputation for reliability and credibility.	Don't be argumentative or abrasive.
Be reasonable, and realize that everyone thinks his/her issue is the most important one being considered.	Don't interrupt him/her when he/she is obviously busy.
Treat members of the legislature as you would like to be treated. Use common sense.	Don't cover more than one subject in a contact unless asked.
	Don't write a letter longer than one page unless absolutely necessary.
	Don't blame legislators for all the things that go wrong in government.
	Don't be offended if he/she forgets your name or who you are, even if it is just five minutes after your visit.

The Roles of Congressional Staff

Each member of Congress has a staff to assist him/her during a term in office. To be most effective in communicating with Congress, it is helpful to know the titles and principal functions of key staff.

Commonly used titles and job functions:

Administrative Assistant (AA) or Chief of Staff (CoS): The AA reports directly to the member of Congress. He/she usually has overall responsibility for evaluating the political outcomes of various legislative proposals and constituent requests. The AA is usually the person in charge of overall office operations, including the assignment of work and the supervision of key staff.

Legislative Director (LD), Senior Legislative Assistant or Legislative Coordinator: The LD is usually the staff person who monitors the legislative schedule and makes recommendations regarding the pros and cons of particular issues. In some congressional offices there are several LAs and responsibilities are assigned to staff with particular expertise in specific areas. For example, depending on the responsibilities and interests of the member, an office may include a different LA for health issues, environmental matters, taxes, etc.

Press Secretary or Communications Director: The Press Secy.'s responsibility is to build and maintain open and effective lines of communication between the member, his/ her constituency, and the general public. The Press Secy. is expected to know the benefits, demands, and special requirements of both print and electronic media, and how to most effectively promote the member s views or position on specific issues.

Appointment Secretary, Personal Secretary, or Scheduler:
The Appt. Secy. is usually responsible for allocating a member's time among the many demands that arise from congressional responsibilities, staff requirements, and constituent requests. The Appt. Secy. may also be responsible for making necessary travel arrangements, arranging speaking dates, visits to the district, etc.

Caseworker The Caseworker is the staff member usually assigned to help with constituent requests by preparing replies for the member's signature. The Caseworker's responsibilities may also include helping resolve problems constituents have with federal agencies, e.g., Social Security and Medicare issues, veteran's benefits, passports, etc. There are often several Caseworkers in a congressional office.

Other Staff Titles: Other titles used in a congressional office may include: Executive Assistant, Legislative Correspondent, Executive Secretary, Office Manager, and Receptionist.

District Office Director: The district office director is the most political and least issue oriented of all the staff members. This person is the eyes and ears for the member back in the district. Often times, the district office director is a former campaign manager or worker.

Cardinal Rules
for Working With Congress

The following is an excerpt from *Working With Congress: A Practical Guide for Scientists and Engineers* published by the American Association for the Advancement of Science. Although the suggestions deal with the federal congress most, if not all, apply as well to state legislatures. Copies can be ordered from AAAS by calling 800-222-7809 and asking for item #96-025.

Cardinal Rules for Working With Congress

Whatever mode you use for working with or contacting those in Congress, your overriding concern should be: How can I improve my chances for communicating my ideas successfully and getting them accepted? In operational terms, this means you should keep to the following guidelines.

CONVEY THAT YOU UNDERSTAND SOMETHING ABOUT CONGRESS.

A recurring complaint among members of Congress and their staffs is that so many who come to see them seem to know so little about Congress. Members and staff don't expect you to be an expert on Congress, but they do appreciate (and have more respect for) those who display an awareness and understanding of what is going on – particularly with regard to the conditions members and staff face. Among other things, these conditions include severe time constraints, competing demands for legislative and budget priorities, and the imperatives of reelection. Citing what may be an extreme case, a staff member explained why one visitor received a negative reception: "This guy didn't realize that representatives have to face an election every two years!"

DEMONSTRATE YOUR GRASP OF THE FUNDAMENTALS OF THE CONGRESSIONAL DECISION-MAKING SYSTEM.

Members and staff say that one of the most difficult things to get scientists and engineers to understand is the tough reality faced by members in balancing competing interests, building working alliances, and achieving acceptable compromises. Among their comments are that "scientific elites don't acknowledge other legitimate interests;" "there is a lack of understanding that they are in a competition like everyone else;" and "scientists are perceived as just another constituency." Finally, as one staffer pointed out, there is "a frequent misperception that a member will vote against one of his or her constituencies if only you will give them the correct facts." Unlike science, politics can't be reduced to empirical facts and figures. Indeed, it is rare that an initiative is not substantially modified through compromises and trade-offs before a final policy decision is made or a law is enacted. This means that you may lose even if you have a good case and a good relationship with the member. It also means that you should not take it personally and should keep trying. Persistence can pay off.

DON'T SEEK SUPPORT OF SCIENCE AS AN ENTITLEMENT.

This may seem obvious, but it is a problem that occurs with sufficient frequency to require highlighting. Members and staff react negatively when they are presented with arguments in support of science that they see as being cast in "entitlement terms." In their words, scientists and engineers should not "convey an attitude of being inherently deserving in contrast to other seekers of the public largesse," and support for science should be "presented in terms of helping to meet national needs, or to achieve societal goals, not as an entitlement owed to scientists."

DON'T CONVEY NEGATIVE ATTITUDES ABOUT POLITICS AND POLITICIANS.

Even if you have some inner, private views that are less than flattering about politics and politicians, keep them to yourself while working with Congress. It is the kiss of death to be perceived as having a "holier than thou" attitude, or as one staff member put it, to "convey that the purity of the scientific profession puts you 'above all of this.'"

PERFORM GOOD INTELLIGENCE GATHERING IN ADVANCE.

Intelligence gathering involves learning at least the basics about the member, committee, or staff member you are contacting. As one staff member exclaimed, "Can you believe this person didn't even know which party my boss belongs to?" A good one-stop source is Congressional Quarterly's *Politics in America*; other sources include hearing records, speeches, floor statements, and conversations with Washington friends who are knowledgeable about Congress. In addition, one staff member suggested that, "Too many people make a serious mistake by not leveraging or using the Washington offices of trade associations and companies."

Begin by learning where a member comes from (state/district), their committee assignments and professional background, where they stand politically on various issues, and how they fit into the congressional power structure. Try

The following is an excerpt from *Working With Congress: A Practical Guide for Scientists and Engineers* published by the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

to learn if the member already has a view on your issue. As one senior staff person said, "Know what is on the member's mind in terms of recent concerns. Check recent hearings and floor debates." For staff, there is less published information, but it is still possible to get reasonably accurate profiles by making a few telephone calls to Washington friends, agency staff, association staff, and the office of your senator or representative, and by consulting the *Congressional Staff Directory.*

Staying in touch with developments is an important part of gathering intelligence. A good daily newspaper or weekly newsmagazine can keep you up to date on what Congress may be engrossed in at the moment. If a member is spending most of his or her time worrying about the budget or about foreign affairs, your recognition of that fact is important. Your sensitivity to such developments will smooth your road and perhaps your conversation. To stay on top of specific issues in Congress, you may want to read the *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report* or the *National Journal* or check on developments through an on-line electronic subscription service such as Politics USA.

Always use a systematic checklist.

One good way to ensure careful, complete advance preparation is to write out a good checklist. Whether for participating in an elaborate meeting, presenting a statement in a hearing, or making a simple telephone call, prepare carefully. Think carefully about what you will want to leave at the meeting. This should include, according to a senior staff person, things right down to your business card with the date and a brief mention of your meeting topic. It was pointed out that "hundreds of cards get collected, at meetings, at receptions, and so on, and it is easy to forget six months from now how and why one has a particular calling card." Put together a simple, clear summary paper of one or two pages – including a brief background – that can be left after the meeting. Know what you want to say, and know when you've said it. Practice in advance with a dry run of your presentation. Demonstrate by what you say and how you present it that you are well organized and worth listening to. Such an approach will help you to plan better and to track your progress during a meeting or a telephone conversation. You are much less likely to get lost or to forget an important point.

DO YOUR HOMEWORK ON THE ISSUE OR PROBLEM.

It's obvious that you should know the technical side of your issue. Not as obvious, perhaps, is the importance of translating your message into terms relevant to Congress. Know which bills (if any) are pertinent. Know which committees are involved and what they are doing (e.g., holding hearings, planning hearings, and holding the issue in "deep freeze"). Know which other members are involved and what their views are.

Tie your issue to member interests if possible. Look for connections between your issue and the member's interests. Such connections might be his or her legislative interests; they might be related to constituent concerns. One senior staff person said that, although it might not always be possible, you should try to "say why your proposal is important to the member's state or district, how current efforts are helpful that way, and why your proposal would be good for the member's constituents." You are on your way if you can clearly show the member how he or she can gain by going along with you. Finally, as one staff person said: "Try to have something to offer – good advice or useful contacts for additional information, for example." Use concrete examples as often as possible. Congressional people tend to be oriented to examples and anecdotes rather than abstractions or broad generalities. Play to this as much as possible without distorting your case. Staff members are always looking for "nuggets" to put into member speeches, floor remarks, and committee hearing remarks. Help them out if you can. As one staff member observed, "Concrete examples seldom hurt and most often they help."

TIMING IS VITAL.

All too often, the message may be great, but it is useless if the timing is all wrong. Keen judgment is required here. Weighing in too late with you opinion can mean the legislative train has left the station. As one committee staff director put it, "It was a good set of suggestions, but we'd already reported the bill out of committee two days ago. They thought we could fix it on the floor. Well, maybe – sometimes. But they should have come three months ago when it was still in subcommittee." On the other hand, coming too early can be just as bad. A good effort can be wasted "if it is too early and other matters are dominating the legislative agenda. We only handle so many things at a time," according to a senior staff person. Also, keep the congressional calendar in mind. While activity in the congressional environment seldom comes to a complete halt, it does vary over the course of the year. A member observed, "There is a much better chance of having an in depth discussion with me during a recess period, whether in person or on the telephone." This advice applies to meetings with staff members as well.

UNDERSTAND CONGRESSIONAL LIMITATIONS.

A recurring theme is that too many people bring problems to Congress and "look to us to devise a solution instead of

presenting a plan for us to consider, modify and perhaps adopt," said one staff member. It is important to have a good understanding of just what Congress can do and what it cannot do. A committee staff director said, "We don't have big planning staffs that can sit down and spend days analyzing what somebody drops in our lap – such as a ten-page memo with forty-five appendices." Enormous time pressures from multiple competing interests don't leave much time for original analysis and extensive research. Bear this in mind in your contacts with Congress.

MAKE IT EASY FOR THOSE IN CONGRESS TO HELP YOU.

State your problem or issue clearly and suggest what action is needed. In describing a meeting with one group of scientists, a senator said, "They were with me for twenty minutes, and when they left I still had no idea why they had come to see me." Avoid this mistake – get the problem or the issue and your request on the table right away. Work carefully at honing your request or advice or information so there is no doubt about your issue, your position, or what you are asking for. Do this by working out a proposed answer to your request or be presenting a plan of action to accomplish what you desire. Occasionally this might be seen as presumptuous, but more often it will be seen as well organized on your part. Members and staff appreciate proposals for action that are clear and articulate, and show that they have been thought through before presentation. Congress, if it moves on your proposal, may use your language or specific suggestions. Have the material ready to use!

KEEP THE "BOTTOM LINE" IN MIND.

In whatever way you are working with Congress, never forget for a moment what your objective is. Make it clear to them as well. If you have a hidden objective or agenda, this is not the book for you. Go back and read Machiavelli's "The Prince" instead.

USE TIME – YOURS AND THEIRS – EFFECTIVELY.

Members and staff are keenly aware of the value of time and resent having it wasted. Plan your efforts in detail and try to make your presentation as concise as possible. Being disorganized or long winded (on the telephone, in writing, or in person) is a sure way to limit your success and future congressional contacts.

A senior staff person cautioned, "You need to remember that staff is generally overworked, is nearly always pressed for time, and generally handles many issues besides the one you are interested in. While interested, they may not have the level of zeal for your project that you have." Do not overload them with details or stacks of paper. It is often useful to have visual ways to make points quickly and effectively. One staff member said, "I look for good ways to brief my boss quickly." A bedrock theme from all staff is that severe pressure on time colors everything they do, including meetings.

REMEMBER THAT MEMBERS AND STAFF ARE MOSTLY GENERALISTS.

While most are "quick studies," you cannot assume that they will immediately understand or appreciate the value of what you are proposing. Do not expect members or staff to have deep familiarity with specific pieces of legislation, or to know their provisions or even their bill numbers. You will lose them if you toss out statements like "Section 222 of Title III of H.R. 4494 will kill us." Be concise, but make clear what you are talking about. Keep messages simple, don't be too detailed, and don't overwhelm your listeners with technical jargon.

DON'T PATRONIZE EITHER MEMBERS OR STAFF.

Even if it is clear that the person with whom you are dealing is uninformed or misguided, keep your cool and maintain a steady course. Don't resort to an "I'll show this idiot" attitude. On the other hand, it is not necessary to accept rudeness or insulting behavior meekly. While not frequent, instances of such conduct do occur. A call or letter to a member or chairman is one way to respond. Finally, there is always the "Hill grapevine," which can be available through friends, association offices in Washington, and reporters who cover Congress.

DON'T UNDERESTIMATE THE ROLE OF STAFF IN CONGRESS.

While it is important to remember that members are elected and staff are not, staff members generally play influential roles in the congressional setting. Do not make the mistake of looking down on a staff member or underestimating his or her ability to help or hinder you, even if the person happens to be very junior.

CONSIDER AND OFFER APPROPRIATE FOLLOW-UP.

Seldom will a single meeting with a member be all that is necessary to achieve your objective. Possibilities range from

a simple follow-up telephone conversation or two with a staff member to an extended period of working with a staff. Conceivably, other members might become involved. Take this into account and be certain that follow-up commitments can be met before you offer them. Before you leave any meeting with a member, try to have clearly identified the name and phone number of the staff person who will be your principal follow-up point of contact. Finally, it is useful and appropriate to ask such a staff member if he or she thinks you should contact other staff members about the issue.

Remember your friends and thank them often. These are more than simple courtesies; they are also the hallmarks of polished professionals. Keep track of your advocates and look for ways to express your appreciation. Use handwritten notes to stay in contact. Private thanks are sometimes appropriate, but also look for public ways to thank them for their contributions.

Remember that the great majority of members and staff are intelligent, hardworking, and dedicated to public service.

If you approach members of Congress with a positive outlook based on the recognition that on the whole they are competent and dedicated, the experience is much more likely to be favorable and fruitful. They need and want your help: make it easier for them to use it effectively.

Meetings

Scheduled, Formal Meetings with Members and Staff

One of the most frequent ways in which people from outside work with members and staff is through scheduled, formal meetings. Such meetings, which may involve either individuals or groups, are generally held to discuss specific requests, ideas, pieces of legislation, proposals, and the like. The previous section gives you a good start in getting the most out of a meeting with a member or staffer. You should also bear in mind a number of more specific pointers on style and strategy.

BEING ON TIME IS CRITICAL.

You are on the member's (or staffer's) turf, and most likely you asked for the meeting. Be aware that the chances are good that you will have to wait when you get there – even for a meeting with a staff member. Much goes on in the congressional environment that is beyond the control of individual members and staff. Although some members and staff are notorious for not holding to their schedules, most make a serious effort not to be late with their appointments. Build the prospect of delay into your schedule; don't take it personally or get upset. Use the time to relax or chat with a staff member who offers conversation. On the other hand, don't interrupt a clearly busy staff person or an overworked receptionist trying to cope with ringing telephones.

BE ADAPTABLE AND FLEXIBLE.

The congressional environment can be somewhat chaotic at times. In practice, this means that even if your meeting has been scheduled for weeks, it may start late and it is subject to interruption for any of a number of reasons – floor votes, committee votes, or telephone calls from other members on urgent matters. Accept such interruptions gracefully. Don't be flustered by starting and stopping. Think in advance about how to pick up the threads of the conversation and weave them into your next point. Watch and listen carefully to see if you've made the transition successfully. A very quick review of your earlier points may occasionally be necessary, but don't even think of repeating everything.

EVEN AT THE RISK OF SOME OVERSIMPLIFICATION, BE CONCISE.

Don't overwhelm them with details; instead, highlight the key facts. If they want more detail, they will ask you for it. In the words of one senator, "Time is of the essence. Make your best case quickly and up front – and let the rest happen." Another senator suggests that you not forget a purpose of mutual value to you both: "Think in terms of providing a

basic education about your issue and its broad context to larger congressional concerns. Do this as clearly as possible." Putting the issue in broad context does not mean a lengthy background review. It means tying your issue into one or more of the handful of large concerns facing congress at any given time – for example, the budget deficit, health care, the state of the economy – and doing it clearly and concisely.

ORGANIZE YOUR PRESENTATION SO AS TO ALLOW FOR QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION.

One representative said, "I expect to ask questions and I like straightforward answers." A senior staff person advises, "Give a short, clear answer first – and a long answer if the circumstances lead to developing the latter. Only add details and qualifications with encouragement." Another staff member advises: "Be open to all questions even if you think they are stupid or ill-informed – or reflect the views of your opposition." One staff member has some unusual advice: "Consider the members as rather bright, intelligent students who are not terribly well informed on your issue." If you don't know the answer to a question, say so. A staff member says, "Don't pontificate" and don't ever "fake it" with a guess or a confusing non-answer. Your credibility can sometimes be enhanced by saying, "I don't know" if you don't. If pressed, you might speculate and label your response appropriately. Enough people violate this rule to cause members and staff to underscore how strongly they feel about trusting what a person says. Members and staff work in an environment where one's word is one's bond. Do all of them follow this principle? Of course not. But don't misrepresent either your own or your competitor's positions; it will eventually come out. A related point suggested by a number of staff members is "Don't oversell your case." Work hard at building your credibility; it is a tremendous asset – even if your issue is weak or unpopular. To further enhance your credibility, acknowledge as accurately as you can those who disagree with you or are opposed to what you are suggesting; tell the member or staff person as best you can why this is so. Don't make them research this information or be surprised by your opponents.

BE ESPECIALLY CAREFUL IN PLANNING GROUP PRESENTATIONS.

It may be ego gratifying for every member of a group to have some part in a presentation (or there may even be a valid technical reason for this), but group presentations should be used sparingly, with caution and careful planning. One person must be in charge and manage the individual presentations smoothly but firmly. A staff director advised: "Plan carefully who is going to say what. Don't have a confusing scene in the member's or staff member's office about what is going on. Don't get into side-discussions within the group. And think about this mathematical fact: three people cannot each give a ten-minute presentation in a twenty-minute appointment. This seems obvious, but it is tried often enough to boggle your mind."

It is even more important for a group to have an advance dry run than it is for a single presenter. Use a detailed checklist that the group commits to beforehand. One long-winded presenter can ruin your entire show by forcing a carefully crafted closing of five minutes to be done in one minute – with the resulting loss of focus and force in achieving your objective.

Staff members can be powerful and influential, often serving as gatekeepers who can help you communicate with members. Don't underestimate their value by thinking you have been passed off to an underling if a member did not agree to your request for a meeting. In the words of a committee staff director, "Staff members have a lot of discretion on who sees members, on who testifies at hearings, on what is read by members, and on what goes into legislation in the form of specific words and sections." In setting up meetings with members, it is often useful to enlist the aid of a staff member before approaching the member.

This is a basic fact of life in Congress. As part of your intelligence gathering, assess the roles of those staff members who appear to be important to you and use the information effectively. Include in this assessment member-staff relationships. Some staff members have wide latitude in speaking for members; others aren't authorized to tell you the time of day. Some staff members can directly influence multimillion- or multibillion-dollar programs; some simply gather information for others to use. A senior staff person advised: "Make sure you are talking with a person who can really do you some good." However, a companion to this advice is not to be upset or put out if you end up with a less than influential person; there is always another day and people do get promoted! Finally, as another senior staff person suggests: "Don't confuse staff interests in a meeting on your project or issue with automatically leading to a favorable outcome for you."

While a personal staff member can be the conduit for you to see a member, and he or she can serve as a liaison to appropriate committee staff members, a personal staffer will less often be the focus of major legislative or budgetary activity, especially in the house. Committee staff are likely to be more legislation oriented or technically informed than are personal staff. Personal staff are likely to be more member oriented and district or state oriented. All of this means you must do different kinds of homework and plan your meetings accordingly.