

Dr. Smith Goes to Washington
(A Guide to Grass-Roots Scientific Advocacy)

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Chapter 1

Three Days on Capitol Hill

In three months, you are going to Capitol Hill. This year, like every year, is an important one for science advocacy on the Hill. Appropriations bills will be in play, science has needs and has plans for both the up scenarios and the downs. New projects, based on fundamental questions about the nature of the cosmos, are waiting to receive final funding before construction can begin, before post-docs and graduate students can be hired and trained, before young faculty members can get grants.

The U.S. funding system works on a yearly basis, as required by the Constitution. That's why it's important that in this year, as in past years, you spend time making phone calls, writing letters, and - perhaps most importantly - spending a few days on Capitol Hill meeting face-to-face with Congresspeople and their staff. You are the face of science, whether you are a citizen or whether you came from abroad, attracted by the U.S. education system and rich scientific programs. You pay taxes, or you vote, or you have family connections to the district, or all of the above. Any way you look at it, you are a constituent. More importantly, you are a constituent engaged in fundamental research at the frontier of human knowledge, and you represent both the cause and the effect of federal support for this work.

You are part of a larger effort, a grass-roots effort to organize scientists for three days. You will go from the lab to the Hill, in your suit and with your message of support for the physical sciences. You will train for these meetings. These are not lectures, or deep conversations with your colleagues. These are meetings with people whose backgrounds are as diverse as their reasons for being in politics. They are young and old, they have one degree or many, they serve many functions in the Congress, and they have a full plate of issues to handle. Your job is to catch their interest in who you are, what you achieve with your research, and why the scientific enterprise affects them and is affected by them.

As part of a larger team, you have responsibilities. You are first and foremost responsible for assembling your list of constituent connections, through where you live, where you work, where you have immediate or extended family, where you have lived and worked, and even where you were educated. Based on those connections, you will be assigned a list of primary connections, offices with whom you are you make appointments for those three days on the Hill. You are responsible for understanding the Senators and House Members who represent those constituencies - how have they voted, what do they think or say about science, what legislation have they pushed for funding science? All of this must be at your command; it is your highest duty to go into those meetings with at least a basic understanding of the priorities and values of the office.

You will not go alone. Another person from the team will be assigned as a secondary on your visits. These visits can last 10 minutes or one hour - you can never tell. The staffer or Congressperson may be an

ally, they may be eager to hear about your field, they may not be interested at all, or may be swamped with responsibilities for an upcoming vote. You and your secondary are to engage in the meeting as people, as the face of science. You will introduce yourself, you will tell them why you are there to speak with them that day, and you will even say a little about your research. Your secondary will help keep the conversation flowing, interject comments or anecdotes that help the flow. Remember that this *is* a conversation; your job is also to listen to what they have to say, to what questions they ask. You never want to be sidetracked from your message, but you do want to cultivate a relationship with these offices. These meetings are to be the seeds of a much larger relationship.

Over three days, you may have a dozen or more meetings, some where you are primary, some where you are secondary. You will cross Capitol Hill many times, through rain or sun (you can never tell in DC). You will discuss what you learn each night with your team, and rest up for the next day. You will be exhausted at the end, but you will be wiser, and you will be closer to your government, and you will be the face of science in a sea of faces for many other interests.

This is a very short taste of what's ahead, both for the organizers and for the members of a team that goes on such a grass-roots advocacy effort to Capitol Hill. This document outlines the nuts and bolts of organizing and executing such a visit to the Hill. It is broken into sections for leaders and members, and each section attempts to provide an outline of responsibilities and tips for the process.

1.1 Symbolic Notation

There are some symbols used in the margins of the text to help guide the eye to useful tips, important lessons, and other notable information. These symbols are:

-  : This indicates a useful tip, something you probably want to employ to make your life easier
-  : This indicates a note about something that is to be avoided, a lesson learned from past experience, or other cautionary tale. Take heed of this information and avoid repeating mistakes from the past.

Chapter 2

Advocacy Leadership

This chapter is devoted to the procedures needed to effectively lead a team of individuals, representing a potentially diverse set of research interests, on a grass-roots advocacy campaign to Washington D.C. This chapter summarizes the skills needed to effectively lead such an effort, tips on delegating authority within your team, training a new generation of leaders, and lessons learned from previous efforts.

2.1 Choosing the Team

2.2 Organizing the Team

2.3 Inter-team Communication

Chapter 3

Advocacy Membership

This chapter is devoted to explaining to a member of an advocacy team what responsibilities they are expected to bear. It will give an outline of the timeline of the process of preparing for and executing the effort. It will also give tips based on experience in this advocacy process.

The following outline gives a very brief timeline of what the process will be like for a member of the team. The experience is roughly the same for a new person, or for an experienced advocate.

- Three months before the trip
 - The team typically forms around this time, and if the advocacy trip is a multi-team effort (where each team may represent a different project, lab, university, etc.) this is shortly followed by a ‘kick-off’ meeting. This meeting will introduce you to members of the other teams, provide information on the politics and appropriations landscape for the coming year, and give you the opportunity to break down barriers that might exist due to differing research priorities between the groups.
 - Your team leader will organize regular meetings of the team. You will be asked to offer a list of available times and days during the week for such a recurring meeting.
 - You will be asked to do homework to identify your constituent connections. This will include providing information about your geographic affiliations and the Members of Congress who represent these areas. At this point, you will also be expected to start learning about these Congresspeople in preparation for practicing meeting these people (“role-playing”) and for crafting a custom wrapper around the team’s message, so that you can connect that message to each office’s priorities (education, healthcare, energy, science, etc.).
 - If you don’t regularly do this already, subscribe to a political news source or a thorough newspaper or periodical. This will help you to build your chops on current events in U.S. politics.
 - You should post useful information about advocacy, current events, or funding to the team website or mailing list. Sharing information between team members is critical to building relationships between one another and for keeping each other informed. While each team has a leader or leaders, a grass-roots effort like science advocacy requires a bottom-up approach to succeed and form an effective advocacy unit.
- Two months before the trip

- If it hasn't already begun, you will start role-playing during team meetings. This is also encouraged outside the meetings, as there is almost never enough time to do enough role-playing in the meetings. Role-playing involves breaking into groups of three people, one who plays the role of a Congressperson or their staff, one who plays the primary, and one who plays the secondary. The role-playing is most usefully organized around connections that the primary has researched in the previous month. The primary should share information about that office with the Congressperson/staffer, and share information with the secondary. Role-plays should last about 10 minutes.
 - The team leaders will use the constituency information collected in the first month to assemble a first draft of primary assignments. These are the offices for which you will take full responsibility for arranging appointments. You should review that list and make sure of several things. First, have you gotten all the primaries you think you should have gotten? If not, inquire as to why you didn't get them. It could be that a member of the team, or another team, may have a much stronger connection. Or, it could be a mistake. Don't assume that the right decision has been made. Your team leader can advocate for you to get that primary.
 - You should make travel arrangements. Hotel and airfare may both be your responsibility. Make sure your team leader has clearly explained what you are responsible for arranging, and make sure that the cost parameters of the expenses are clearly defined. These trips tend to be on limited budgets, so make sure you choose wisely when arranging air travel. Also, if you are responsible for hotel arrangements, make sure you weight cost vs. location. There are depressed areas of DC where hotels are cheap but the neighborhoods are not safe relative to other neighborhoods. If you're not familiar with DC, talk to somebody who is.
- One month before the trip
 - Your team leader will ask you to begin making appointments with your primaries. If the primaries are organized from highest priority to lowest priority, try calling the top five and make appointments with them. If you try to arrange too many all at once, you may over-pack your schedule or run into situations where you have meetings scheduled too close. Make sure to keep a calendar handy for the days of the trip that clearly marks free and busy periods of the schedule.
 - If you succeed at your first five in short order (within a week), then start working down the list. If you don't hear back from some of your first five, or play phone tag for more than a week or two, start calling other primaries to insure you don't leave yourself with too few appointments.
 - Your goal should be to get appointments with all your primaries, but try not to schedule them closer than one hour apart.
 - You should be engaged in regular role-playing, honing how you introduce yourself and how you connect your message to a given office. Most importantly, you should be practicing to have a more high-level discussion with offices that clearly support your work. Practice asking them for specific things: floor statements (where they use general debate to speak in favor of science), letters to appropriators in support of existing or additional money for science, sponsorship of legislation, etc.

The following sections of this chapter delve into the details of many of the items mentioned above. Please only consider this list the barest outline of what a team member can expect.

3.1 Establishing Constituent Connections

A constituent is most strictly a person who lives in the Congressional district and at least pays taxes. Voting eligibility is helpful, but certainly not a prerequisite for being a constituent. For science advocacy, it is often difficult to find a strict constituent connection for districts with influence in the Congress. Therefore, it is recommended that when considering your constituent connection, you broaden the definition. In this section, the variety of possible constituent connections are reviewed and helpful suggestions are made for strengthening weak constituent connections.

A broader definition of constituency which has served science advocacy efforts well is the following:

- A person who resides in a state and a Congressional district (which defines your most direct relationship with a House Member). This is a strong constituent connection.
- A person who is employed by an institution in a state or Congressional district, or who works at such an institution. For example, you may be affiliated with a college or university in one state but conduct most of your work at a national laboratory or other institution in a nearby district or different state. Clearly, you provide a benefit to that district and state by working there, purchasing goods and services, etc. Your work is affected by the Congresspeople representing the district and state of your workplace. You should treat a work connection as a strong constituent connection.
- A person who formerly resided or worked in a district. If your time there was recent enough (within five years), this is a moderate to strong connection; you paid taxes, and you owe your progress and quality of life to the Congressional representation in that area.
- Having immediate family in a district is a strong constituent connection. This is especially true if you grew up in a place other than where you now live, since your education benefited from Congressional representation. Clearly, how a Congressperson manages a district with your immediate family in it affects your life; one good argument is if you have children in your family in a district (nephews, nieces, etc.); in that case, the educational opportunities afforded to those children can serve as a powerful reason to take interest in meeting with Congresspeople from that area.
- Having extended family is a moderately strong connection. If you feel the connection is too weak, and you have a good relationship with the family, you could ask them to call the Congresspeople or write a letter and advocate for a meeting on your behalf. They can request that the Congressional offices meet with you, since your work is important to them as a constituent and they want your voice to be heard on their behalf.
- Where you were educated is a moderate to weak connection. At the very least, you can use a meeting with such offices to thank them for their work to shape the federal policies that provided a good environment for your education.
- A personal or prior connection with an office is, perhaps, the **STRONGEST** connection you can have. If you have family or friend connections to a Member of Congress or their staff, do not be afraid to try to arrange an appointment through that person or through your prior connection. Once you have met with an office, and especially if you have maintained contact, you should consider yourself a valued constituent of that office even if you lack other connections.

The above is summarized in Table 3.1.



Connection Type	Strength	Advice on strengthening this connection
Personal or Prior Meeting	High	If the personal connection is through a mutual friend or family member, work with them to cultivate a meeting
Current Home or Work	High	None
Former Home or Work	Moderate to Weak	If the connection is less than 5 years old, use the meeting as a “thank-you” for what they did in their district that benefited you and made your current work possible.
Immediate Family	High to Moderate	If the connection is to a place you haven’t lived in, and you’re having trouble getting a meeting, try asking your family member to advocate for you.
Extended Family	Moderate to Weak	You may need to initiate advocacy on you behalf for a meeting immediately, asking your family member to write or call.

Table 3.1: Various categories of constituent connections, the quality of those connections, and some advice on how to strengthen to connection to better guarantee a meeting.

3.2 Gathering information about your connections

Once you have established a list of those Senators and House Members who represent your geographic affiliations, it is time to learn about them. Here are the kinds of things you want to know:

- **Biography:** where did they grow up and where were they educated? What degrees do they hold, if any? Where have they worked prior to their political career? How long have they been in Congress, representing their current district or state?
- **Priorities:** what are the things that are most important to this Member?
- **Recent Voting:** how have they voted on recent legislation that affects current or future science funding?
- **Statements:** what have they said, if anything, about science, education, technology, or any other related area?

Collecting biographical information should be quite simple. The first place to go is their website in Congress. They will discuss their history, and that history will certainly stress things that are most important to them. There are also external websites that will discuss biographical information. You will want to know if they do or do not have a science background. You should also find out if they have an education background, or a background in a company that worked on energy or technology. All of these details will help you to shape your message to fit into the priorities of the Member.

Finding the priorities of the office should also be straight-forward. Their website will almost certainly contain a list of issues which the Member takes seriously. Read through their statements on each issue carefully, and look for statements that will help you to connect your work to the important highlights of their priorities.

The recent voting record will be available in several forms. The Member's website will likely list recent votes which were important to the Member, either for or against a measure. They may even comment on why they acted as they did. Since they may only highlight information that aligns directly with their issues, it is wise to consult an external source that lists their entire voting record. Search that record for legislation containing words like "education", "science", "technology", "energy", and "research". You are bound to find bills related to these area on which a Member has cast a vote. If you know the names of specific bills, search directly for their voting record on those bills.

Finding statements that the Member has made can be a bit more difficult. There are many possible sources of this information. Start with their website. They are very likely to have links to recent floor statements that the Member has made on specific issues or bills. Find those statements that clarify their thinking on issues related to science. Broaden your search to include news sources. Use a search engine to try to find quotes from the Member connected to certain keywords. If you are having a hard time finding information, discuss this with the team and the leadership and see if there is more that can be learned.

Keep a folder of information for each office, containing notes and print-outs relating to their issues and statements.



3.3 Making appointments

Making appointments can be one of the most tricky activities ahead of actually meeting with Members of Congress. You need to start this process no less than 3 weeks before the trip. Starting too early (more than 5 weeks) is usually not a good idea, since many offices want to deal with their calendars a month ahead of time, and not more. You need to be polite but persistent, and do not give up until you hear a "no". Do not persist in trying to get an appointment once you get a firm "no" - this will not lay the groundwork for a fruitful meeting, should you happen to get one later in spite of an earlier "no".

You should be well versed in the offices you are calling before you call. Keep your folder of information on that office in front of you. It is also helpful to write-up a short paragraph of text that you can refer to during the short phone conversation. This paragraph should contain a sentence or two introducing yourself and the reason for your call. In addition, a few sentences about the topic or topics that could be covered during a meeting can help so that you're not trying to remember details while nervously talking to a Congressional staffer.



An example paragraph could be the following:

"I am calling to request an appointment with the Senator/Congresswoman/Congressman So-and-So, or with the person who handles science issues for the office. The purpose of the meeting is to discuss the federal investment in scientific research in the physical sciences. My name is Such-and-Such, and I am a young/senior researcher doing work at an institution in the Senator's/Congresswoman's/Congressman's district/state. During the course of our meeting, I hope we can discuss my research, how it impacts the Senator's/Congresswoman's/Congressman's district/state, and how the federal investment is critical to the excellence of that work."

This is not meant to be read verbatim to the person on the other end of the phone, but instead is a helpful reference for those first few nervous moments of a phone call to an office.

The process for making the phone call requesting an appointment is as follows:

- Call the phone number for the office in Washington DC, not the local district or state office. Since you're going to DC to meet with people there, you want to aim directly for that office.

- When the office picks up, they might ask you to introduce yourself or they might just ask to whom they should direct your call. The staff at the front desk are the primary filter for the office, and if you don't know what you're supposed to do next you may not get very far. They will be friendly, but their job is to deflect people who aren't serious about their interaction with the office.
- If needed, you should introduce yourself very briefly, perhaps dropping your constituency connection. Ask to speak to the person who handles science issues. At this point, they will either redirect your call to that person's line or they may ask what the purpose of the call is. When you tell them it's to arrange an appointment, they may direct you to the office's Scheduler instead. That person will then handle the schedule of the staffer or Congressperson for you.
- If you get to the Scheduler or staffer, you will have to repeat your brief introduction and tell them you'd like to arrange an appointment. Give them the dates of the trip, and offer them a block of time on those days when you are free. This will help to narrow down a meeting time quickly. They may ask you for the purpose of the meeting. Again, be brief and clear. Make sure to write down the time and the name of the person with whom you are meeting.
- If you get to voicemail instead, leave a brief message. Start with your name and your phone number. Then in one sentence describe what you want (an appointment to discuss the federal investment in scientific research). Close again with your phone number and name. This will prevent them from having to listen to the message twice just to get your phone number.
- They may ask you to e-mail or fax an appointment request letter. Have this ready to go before you call, so you can send it while their attention is focused on scheduling you. An example of such a letter is available in the appendix of this document.
- You may play phone tag with the Scheduler or science staffer. Return their calls when they call you, and if you miss them apologize for doing so and try to suggest a time when you are most reachable, or leave an e-mail address where you can be more easily reached. Washington DC area codes are 202, so if you see a number with that area code calling drop what you're doing and take the call.
- A week before your appointment, it doesn't hurt to call the staffer or Scheduler back and confirm the appointment. Express that you are looking forward to the meeting. Leave a phone number with them so they can contact you if they need to make last-minute appointment changes.

3.4 Role-Playing Congressional Visits

Role-playing Congressional visits is a very hands-on activity that is difficult describe with simple guidelines. This section will provide some tips on how to execute effective role-playing. Like giving a speech in front of a mirror, role-playing is a chance to get feedback on your performance. Here are some things you'll want to watch for when giving feedback on role-playing:

- **Eye Contact:** you cannot have an effective conversation if you are not making good eye contact with the Congressperson or staffer. Force yourself to make good eye contact during your discussion. You want to connect with people, and the first and most effective way to do that is through the eyes.
- **Posture:** There is no one correct way to sit during these meetings, but there are some incorrect ways. Don't slouch in your chair, and don't lean back unless doing so leaves you sitting upright. Knees

together, or knees crossed, are fine; avoid legs akimbo, or elbows on knees leaning far forward. You want to project confidence and relaxation.

- Verbal crutches: everybody has a verbal crutch - um, uh, or a short phrase - that they return to when they don't know what to say next, or as a transition from one phrase or sentence to another. There is nothing fundamentally wrong with this - it's a natural way for our brain to pause before going to the next part of the conversation. However, it's too simple to over-use these, repeating them once per sentence, or even more frequently.
- Distraction: sticking close to the message is important. A staffer or Congressperson may get you off on a tangent by making specific inquiries about a current event in science, or about something you said. There is nothing wrong with this, but do your best to segway gently back to the main current of the conversation, which you should direct around your message.
- Listening: you should be inviting them to make comments or ask questions, either directly or subtly. You should at least be leaving pauses in your part of the conversation, natural places where they can interject. You should be listening to them, and not doing all the talking. It's not a conversation if the other party doesn't talk.
- Stay non-partisan: you are a scientist; you are not a member of a political party (at least, during the course of your advocacy effort). If you encounter a strongly partisan individual on a meeting, it is incumbent upon you to behave in a non-partisan way. Science has appeal to any political viewpoint, so there is no reason to adopt one of them to drive your message home. Do not fall prey to partisan bait in either direction (either directed against the science or spending policies of the other party, or touting the policies of the office as they align with party doctrines). Play to your audience, but never pander.

As you practice role-playing, watch for these things and make sure to note them. It is advisable for the role-players to keep notes about feedback, and reflect on those notes. Being aware of undesirable behavior exposed during a role-play will help you to mitigate that behavior in the future.

The best role-plays occur when somebody writes a scenario around which the role-players can act. Hiding little tidbits in the back-story can make for surprises in the role-play that can expose players' strengths and weaknesses. It is effective when a team leader writes a short scenario for a triplet of players, where one acts the part of a Congressperson or staffer, one acts the part of the primary, and one acts the part of the secondary. Such a scenario is illustrated in Appendix B. These can be time-intensive to write, so saving them for cases where the whole team serves as an audience for the role-play is a good idea. Showing this to the players, so they have some idea of how to start improvising scenarios, can spur creativity ahead of the role-play.

Generally, breaking into small groups of three or four and going to different corners of the room to act out improvised scenarios is the best way to use the time in a meeting. The fourth person can serve as a feedback coordinator. Team leader(s) can walk the room and offer commentary as each group finishes their scenario.

3.5 Using Visual Media

Appendix A

Example appointment request letter

My Name
My Street Address
My Phone Number
My E-mail

The Honorable So-and-so
United States (House of Representatives/Senate)
Street Address

Dear Senator/Congresswoman/Congressman So-and-so,

I am writing to request a meeting with you or a member of your science staff on the afternoon of Wednesday, March 8, or any time on Thursday, March 9, 2006.

I conduct particle physics research at a major U.S. research facility. This facility is not located in your state/district, but researchers from your state/district and across the U.S. and globe converge at this facility to conduct their work. On March 8 and 9, I will be in Washington, D.C. and would like to meet with you or a member of your science staff to discuss the importance of continuing the federal investment in the physical sciences in general, and in particle physics in particular. I also hope to share my enthusiasm for the exciting, cutting-edge research we do at the scientific and technological frontier. Such work is critical to the innovation economy of the nation, and is an integral part of the much larger U.S. scientific research portfolio.

Thank you very much for considering my request. I will call your office in a few days to schedule a meeting. Please do not hesitate to contact me at (PHONE NUMBER), or by e-mail at (EMAIL ADDRESS).

Sincerely,

MY NAME HERE

Appendix B

Example Role-Playing Scenario

The following is an example of a short-role playing scenario, providing back-story and “planned pitfalls” for the players. How players react when exposed to these pitfalls can reveal notable strengths and weaknesses that then must be fed back into the exercise. This scenario was written in early 2009, after the pass of a large economic stimulus package. Much of the back-story is taken from the Congressman’s website; quotations were manufactured for the purpose of the scenario.

The Congressman/staffer only gets to see the information pertinent to them, and similarly the primary and secondary only get to see the information meant for them.

Scenario: Congressman Ralph Hall

Information for the Congressman or his Staffer:

*You represent Texas’s 4th district. This district is very conservative, and is located northeast of Dallas but does not include the metroplex. It borders Oklahoma to the north and Arkansas to the east. You are the Ranking Member on the House Science Committee, and is committed to maintaining the U.S. as a world leader in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics). **You are receptive to discussions of science education and the education system.** You supported President Bush’s Competitiveness Initiative and worked on STEM legislation for K-12 education. These measures would attract math and science majors to become teachers, an improve undergrad/grad courses. You are a strong advocate for NASA, noting that we derive more benefits from NASA work than just the 1% of the federal budget spent on NASA. **You are receptive to discussions about the benefits of science and research, and may specifically react best to NASA.***

*You are also a member of the Energy and Commerce committee. On energy, you call for support for domestic traditional and alternative fuel sources, and your strongest action has been on legislation to open up Gulf drilling and the Alaska National Wildlife Reserve for drilling. On immigration, you note that “It is important that we recognize the significant contributions legal immigrants have made to the United States; however, I do not favor granting citizenship to someone for breaking an immigration law.” **You are cautious about issues relating to the attraction of non-U.S. citizens into the sciences, but not resistant to it.***

You voted against the Stimulus Plan both times, although it passed in the end with \$1B additional money for DOE science and \$2B additional money for NSF science. NASA received \$0.5B in additional money. You have criticized the FY10 appropriations proposals for NASA, DOE,

and NSF as “Insufficient to realize the nation’s needs in STEM education and competition in the marketplace of ideas.”

Information for the primary and secondary

Ralph Hall is a Republican Congressman who represents Texas’s 4th district. This district is conservative and does not include major metropolitan areas of Texas. Hall is the Ranking Member of the House Science Committee and a member of the House Energy and Commerce Committee. From his website, you know that he supports STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) education efforts, and supported President Bush’s Competiveness Initiative. His most plain statement of support for a science agency is for NASA, where he notes that the benefits of investing in NASA work outweigh the cost (1% of the budget) of the investment.

*From his voting record, you see that Hall voted AGAINST the Stimulus Plan both times. In that plan, there was \$1B, \$2B, and \$0.5B in additional money for DOE, NSF, and NASA, respectively. In the press, Hall has criticized the current FY10 numbers as “Insufficient to realize the nation’s needs in STEM education and competition in the marketplace of ideas.” **You will ask that he support the existing budget proposals for DOE and NSF as a means to smooth the transition from the stimulus plan going into stable budgets.***