Coordinating Effective Local Advocacy

Fulbright Association
2026

This guide is intended to help local Fulbright advocates plan, prepare for, conduct, and follow up after meetings with Members of Congress and their staff in their district offices.

While no two meetings are exactly alike, the guidance below reflects best practices developed through the Fulbright Association's advocacy efforts. Whether you're coordinating your first meeting or your fifteenth, these recommendations will help you build productive relationships with congressional offices and represent the Fulbright Program effectively.

Before the Meeting

Successful meetings begin well before anyone walks into a congressional office. Careful planning helps ensure the right people are involved, logistics are handled smoothly, and participants have time to prepare.

Who

Chapter leadership – typically the president, advocacy director (if you have one), or another appointed board member – should take the lead in organizing district meetings. Those who are not part of chapter leadership but would like to become involved in local advocacy should reach out to their chapter president or the Fulbright Association National Office for guidance.

When

District meetings are most successful when preparations begin several weeks in advance.

4-5 weeks before: Reach out to the district office(s) by phone or email to request a meeting to allow ample time to coordinate schedules, identify the appropriate staff member, and finalize logistics. We have created several outreach scripts and templates for you to use.

> *Note: When possible, review the congressional calendar to get a better understanding of when Members will be in recess and, thus, more likely to be available for an in-district meeting with advocates.*

2-3 weeks before: Confirm the Fulbright alumni who will participate in the meeting.

1 week before: Hold a final preparation call with the advocacy team to assign roles, review messaging, and confirm logistics.

Building Your Advocacy Team

The advocacy team should ideally consist of 2-3 Fulbright alumni or local stakeholders familiar with the programs (e.g., university representatives) and constituents of the Member of Congress. Consider participants who are comfortable speaking in a professional setting, can help keep the conversation on track, and are prepared to share their Fulbright experience.

> *Note: If you are unable to find local Fulbright alumni who are also constituents of a particular Member of Congress, a non-constituent Fulbrighter can still be a valuable participant, particularly if they have a compelling story to share. In this case, be sure to consistently address the value of the Program specifically in the Member's district/state.*

Small groups generally create more conversational meetings, are easier to schedule, and allow everyone to participate meaningfully while sharing responsibilities throughout the discussion.

Scheduling the Meeting

Visit the Member of Congress's official website to locate the appropriate district office and its contact information. Since this is a local advocacy effort, be sure you are contacting the district office rather than the Washington, D.C., office.

When possible, request a meeting with the staff member who handles appropriations, foreign affairs, education, homeland security, or other issues relevant to Fulbright. If those staff members are unavailable, a constituent services representative is another excellent point of contact.

Many Members of Congress also serve on committees or subcommittees that are particularly relevant to the Fulbright Program. Before your meeting, review the Guide to Key Congressional Offices to better understand the Member's priorities and tailor your messaging accordingly.

Preparing Your Team

Every participant should understand both their role and the team's overall strategy before the meeting.

Assign clear responsibilities ahead of time. While roles may vary depending on the size of your group, a typical advocacy team should include:

> **Lead Speaker:** Guides the conversation, makes introductions, and delivers the primary advocacy messages.
>
> **Storyteller(s):** Shares personal experiences that demonstrate the impact of the Fulbright Program.
>
> **Note-Taker:** Records key discussion points, questions, commitments, and follow-up items.

One participant should also keep an eye on the time to help ensure the meeting stays focused and respects the office's schedule.

Be sure to review the talking points, tough questions guide, and your local advocacy plan as a group to ensure your team is well prepared.

Rather than memorizing a script, focus on understanding the key messages so they can be communicated naturally and confidently. If you don't know the answer to a question during the meeting, it's perfectly acceptable to let the office know you'll follow up afterward.

During the Meeting

A successful advocacy meeting should feel like a conversation, not a presentation. While it's important to communicate your key messages and "the ask," taking time to listen, ask thoughtful questions, and engage naturally with congressional staff will help build a stronger, more productive relationship.

Conducting the Meeting

Begin by introducing yourself and the other participants, sharing your connection to the Fulbright Program, and thanking the office for taking the time to meet with you.

Throughout the conversation:

- Focus on the key advocacy messages rather than memorizing a script.
- Share personal Fulbright experiences that demonstrate the program's impact.
- Encourage multiple participants to contribute to the discussion.
- Listen carefully and respond thoughtfully to questions.
- Keep the conversation focused while remaining flexible if the discussion takes an unexpected direction.

Remember that congressional staff are looking to understand how the Fulbright Program benefits their constituents and communities. The most effective meetings combine compelling personal stories with clear, consistent advocacy messages.

> *Note: If you don't know the answer to a question, don't guess. Let the office know you'll follow up after the meeting, then coordinate with the Fulbright Association National Office if additional information is needed.*

Meeting Etiquette

Nonverbal communication matters. Maintain eye contact, actively listen, and speak with confidence and courtesy throughout the meeting. Even when discussing challenging topics, a respectful and conversational approach is often the most effective.

Leave Behind

Before leaving, be sure to provide the office with leave-behind materials and collect business cards or contact information from everyone you meet. These small steps make future follow-up significantly easier.

After the Meeting

The conversation doesn't end when the meeting does. Prompt follow-up and continued engagement help strengthen your relationship with congressional offices and ensure the Fulbright Program remains a familiar and trusted voice over time.

Immediate Follow-Up

Within 24-48 hours, send a thank-you email to the staff member(s) you met with. Thank them for their time, reiterate your appreciation for the opportunity to meet, and provide any additional information or resources you promised during the conversation.

You should also complete the meeting report form for the Fulbright Association National Office. These reports help us track advocacy efforts across the country, coordinate future outreach, provide follow-up support when needed, and ensure chapters receive timely updates as advocacy priorities evolve.

Building the Relationship

Beyond the initial thank-you, look for opportunities to stay engaged throughout the year. Consider reaching out when Fulbright is in the news, a constituent receives a Fulbright award, your chapter is hosting a significant event or program, or Congressional staff request additional information or resources.

Working with the National Office

The Fulbright Association National Office is here to support your chapter's advocacy efforts. If a congressional office requests additional information, asks questions you cannot answer, or expresses interest in future engagement, let us know. We can provide updated messaging, additional resources, and guidance to help strengthen your relationship with the office.

Likewise, if you have additional interactions with a congressional office after your initial meeting, we encourage you to keep us informed. This helps us coordinate advocacy efforts nationwide, identify opportunities for follow-up, and ensure chapters have the latest information as advocacy priorities evolve.