

VIRTUAL LOBBY MEETING TIPS

BEFORE THE MEETING

Scheduling the meeting:

- Requesting a meeting about one to two weeks in advance is usually the best way to go.
- You can schedule a lobby meeting by phone or email using the Meeting Request Template.
 - By phone: Call the office and ask for the scheduler. Some offices will ask you to fill out a form, but most of the time a phone call will suffice. During the pandemic, emails might be preferable to phone contact because many congressional staffers are working from home.
 - By email: Send a request to the scheduler.
 - [Contact your NLIHC organizer](#) for help getting scheduler contact info.
- When you make the request, ask to meet with the member of Congress or a housing staffer.
 - Oftentimes, meeting with staff members is just as good as or even better than meeting with the representative. The member of Congress relies on their staff for key information as they make decisions. It's also true that when you meet with staff, they are more likely to have more time to explore the various issues you are discussing and to ask good follow up questions that provide for more dialogue.
- Let the office know what issue you will be discussing, the number of people attending the meeting, whether constituents will be in attendance, and your available times.
- After requesting the meeting, follow up to ensure your request was received.
- Once the meeting is scheduled, confirm what virtual platform will be used (i.e. a conference call, Zoom, Google Meet, etc.).
 - [Contact your NLIHC organizer](#) for help with setting up a virtual platform.
- 24 hours before your meeting, be sure to confirm the meeting with the scheduler or aide. In this email include:
 - The virtual meeting login information or phone number if you are using your own meeting room or conference line;
 - Links to materials you want to share with the office and agenda (optional);
 - The meeting organizer's phone number; and
 - "Cc" everyone planning to attend the meeting.

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- If you are lobbying with a group of advocates, you may want to designate roles such as a facilitator, a tech manager, a note-taker, etc. Discuss in advance who in your group will open, close, and deliver specific asks.
- Outline an agenda with tasks for each person.
- Review the NLIHC Talking Points.
- Plan to tell stories! Stories stick in lawmakers' memories better than data and are emotionally compelling. See the NLIHC Storytelling Guide for more details.
- Practice, practice, practice! Write out your part and rehearse.
- Establish cues for when each person should speak (this can be part of the facilitator's role).
- Practice and test technology.
- Gather materials you want to share with the office. (See [insert page] under "[insert section].")
- Do research on the person you are meeting with—for example, if you can say, "It's great to be meeting with you today. I was happy to see that the congresswoman received an award on a particular issue" - it shows that you're interested in what they are doing, and not only looking for them to be interested in your issues. Furthermore, knowing your legislator's past votes on housing policy will help you craft a more effective argument.

MEETING TIME!

Scheduling the meeting:

- Dress professionally and avoid background clutter (if meeting on video) and background noise (for both phone and video meetings).
- Be punctual—login or call in 10 minutes before the start time.
- Open your meeting with introductions.
 - Make sure to mention your connection to the state or congressional district represented by the office you're meeting with—whether you are a constituent and voter or your organization serves their constituents.
- Stick to your agenda and speaking times.
- When switching speakers, pause to allow the next speaker to unmute.
- Actively listen and ask questions.
- If you don't know the answer to a question you receive, simply saying "I don't know" and "I will follow up with an answer to that question" is perfectly acceptable.
- Take detailed notes, especially of any feedback you receive or follow-up information you promise.
- Your elected official may not have much knowledge of affordable housing challenges in your community. Use this as an opportunity to educate them.
 - Provide the elected official or legislative staff with the NLIHC materials and refer to those materials during your meeting. You can provide these materials via email ahead of time.
 - You should provide numbers and stories about the issues you are talking about as often as possible. Share your personal story of why affordable housing matters to you.

- Connect your work to the elected official's interests as much as possible. This is another reason to do your research on them before your meeting. If you can connect your work on affordable housing to the elected official's interest in, for example, better outcomes for children, this will often create a key connection that will lead to a stronger relationship as you move forward.
- Always make a specific ask in your meeting using a question with a yes or no answer, such as, "Will you support \$100 billion in emergency rental assistance in the next relief package?" Most often, they will say they need to think about it. This is fully acceptable. You can use that as an opportunity to follow up later.
- Confirm with whom you should follow up.
- Ask the member of Congress or staff member if you can take a snapshot of the screen or a selfie with the screen to share later!
- Thank the elected official or legislative staff for their time and consideration.

AFTER THE MEETING

- Remember: No lobby meeting is the final conversation with a member of Congress. The best advocacy focuses on sustained relationship building, rather than on single conversations.
- Tweet your members of Congress to thank them for the meeting with them or their staff, including a photo if you have one. This strengthens your relationship because you'll have given public gratitude for their availability. Doing so publicly also reminds them that they are accountable to follow up on the commitments they made to you, or to get more information on questions they said they wanted answers to. Remember to:
 - Mention (@) your members of Congress and @NLIHC.
 - Include the hashtag #RentReliefNow.
- Share what you learned by completing the Lobby Visit Report Form for your meeting. NLIHC can take the information you provide and follow up with specific action items, clarify any questions the members of Congress or staff might have, and get them to engage on specific legislation. We are in a better position when we know the outcomes of your meetings.
- Share what you learn during your meeting with your network - including your members, your board, and your volunteers.
- Stay in touch by sending a follow up email or thank you card to everyone you met with. You can also follow up to check in about the status of the request you made during your meeting.

**Some language adapted from our partners at RESULTS*