

## What Difference Does Lobbying Make?

Do you get asked this question? Do you wonder about the answer yourself? In the FCNL community, people ask what can be accomplished if one person sends an email or letter or meets with a member of Congress. Is it only those who can write big checks who get their issues addressed?

Your particular members of Congress, and the relationships you have with them, will play a role in how open they are to hearing and respecting different points of view.

FCNL's experience is that change is possible in Washington. You and your friends can be a part of this change by working with FCNL and inviting others to join in this work. Without your lobbying, very little is possible: members of Congress often will not act on an issue, or modify their view over time, unless they hear from constituents.

Congressional staff tell us that as few as 10 letters or emails from constituents can make a difference – depending on the issue and how the letter is written. The impact is even greater if you begin to climb the ladder of congressional engagement by raising your issue in a letter to the editor of your local newspaper or even meeting with the staff of your members of Congress.

Want a real life example of how change is possible? Read this excerpt from an email Kimberleigh Castonzo received after she returned home from lobbying her representative during FCNL's Spring Lobby weekend:


*"Hi Kimberleigh, Hope you're doing well. I spoke with the Congressman about your visit, and he decided to sign on as a cosponsor of the bill to establish an Afghanistan-Pakistan Study Group (HR 1530). It's great to see someone your age so passionate about policy - I hope you keep it up!"*

Lobbying can also be intensely frustrating. Maybe your members of Congress seem adamantly opposed to any of the policies on which you want them to act. Maybe you get a form response back that doesn't seem to reflect the issue about which you wrote. See page 3 for more on responses.

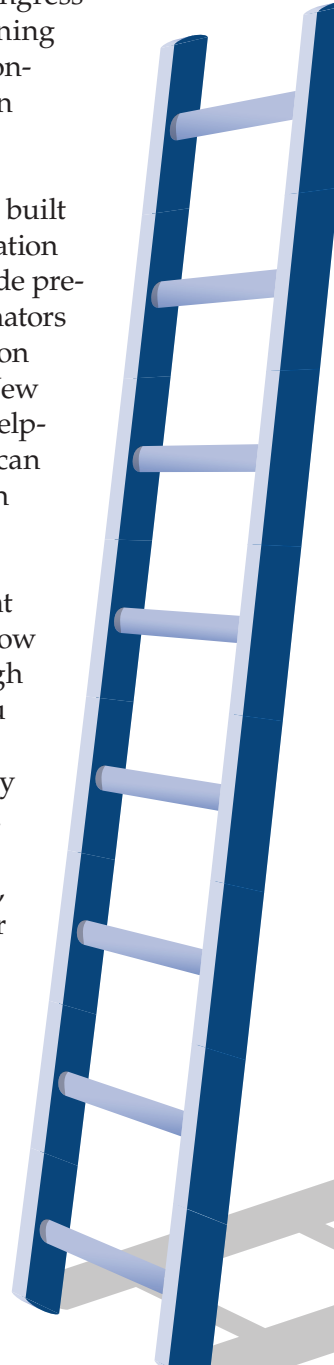
Yet by stating truthfully what you believe, by listening closely to what members of Congress and staff are saying, and by remaining open to new information, FCNL constituents are making a difference in Washington.

This year, your lobbying is helping build bipartisan co-sponsorship of legislation on the environment and on genocide prevention and has persuaded key senators to raise questions about the Pentagon budget. From Atlanta to Texas to New York City, FCNL constituents are helping train grassroots lobbyists who can help to change what's happening in Washington.

This issue of the newsletter looks at why you should lobby as well as how to do it well. After you read through the issue, please consider what you might be led to do, or if there are others in your community that may also want to learn about this work.

And if you're still feeling skeptical, or have questions, head over to our website at [fcnl.org/lobbying](http://fcnl.org/lobbying). Our staff will be answering questions over the next several months. So join the conversation! 

Change is possible in Washington, and you can be a part of that change!  
Learn how to climb the ladder of engagement at [fcnl.org/toolkit](http://fcnl.org/toolkit)



The **FRIENDS COMMITTEE ON NATIONAL LEGISLATION** (FCNL), a nonpartisan Quaker lobby in the public interest, seeks to follow the leadings of the Spirit as it speaks for itself and for like-minded Friends. Views expressed in FCNL's *Washington Newsletter* are guided by the Legislative Policy Statement, which is prepared and approved by FCNL's General Committee. FCNL includes Friends appointed by 23 Friends yearly meetings and by 10 other Friends organizations in the United States.

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## Lobby Trainings and You


In Atlanta, Sue May organized a lobby training in which constituents learned effective methods for asking their senator to support legislation to help prevent genocide.

Liz Yeats and Lon Burnam led a lobby training at an annual gathering of Quakers in Texas. They briefed participants on the basics of making significant cuts to the military budget, including talking points for their senators. The training went so well that several more are planned in the area for the next several months.



These are just two of the many lobby trainings being organized around the country by FCNL supporters and staff. Participants learn about how their action can best influence their members of Congress on a specific issue of concern to their community, practice their lobbying skills, and have some fun!

### Host Your Own Training

Interested in hosting a training in your area? We've put together all the tools you need to host your own lobby training – a PowerPoint presentation, sample announcements to advertise the event, handouts for the training participants, and more. You can find them all at [fcnl.org/lobbytraining](http://fcnl.org/lobbytraining) or contact Alicia McBride at 202-547-6000. 

### Love Our Lobbying?

FCNL supports your grassroots lobbying in concert with our Hill based actions.

You can support FCNL's lobbying and education for policy change when you send a donation today.

Making an online gift is just as easy as contacting your policymakers. Go to [www.fcnl.org/give](http://www.fcnl.org/give)

You can also mail your check to:  
FCNL • 245 Second Street NE • Washington, DC 20002

Or call: 1-800-630-1330 to give via credit card or for more information about donating to FCNL.

## Contacting Congress: The Staff Perspective



*Aaron Scherb is a former congressional staff member who now lobbies on campaign finance reform. After two years working as an FCNL intern, he spent four years working for members of Congress. We asked him some of the common questions we get about lobbying.*

### **How do congressional offices view emails, phone calls and visits from their constituents?**

Scheduling an office visit in Washington, DC is probably the most important action that you can take to get the attention of a congressional office on an issue. Schedule the meeting several weeks in advance and then follow up a week or two before if you haven't received a response. If the meeting is not with the member, it's important to meet with the relevant staffer who covers the issue in the office instead of with someone who doesn't cover legislative issues. Developing a relationship with that staffer over time should be a goal so the staffer will view you as an "expert" on an issue.

Emails and phone calls matter as well. Fifty personalized emails on an issue or bill spread out over a several-week period matter more than a petition or form email campaign sent by several hundred constituents. If the member is ideologically opposed to an issue or bill, though, the office may never do what constituents request.

### **Do members of Congress pay attention to communications on issues from individuals who are not sending money?**

Demonstrating broad support for an issue or bill in a congressional district matters more than campaign contributions. While campaign contributions are not supposed to grant any special legislative favors, if a constituent organizes a district fundraiser for one's member that draws 25 people who each contribute \$50, that will be remembered by the member.

### **Many people in FCNL's network report they receive form letters in response to their communications. Does this mean the letters have no impact?**


Form letters are a matter of necessity. They don't mean that the constituent correspondence is being ignored. Congressional offices can easily receive 3,000 or more pieces of communication each week, and often only one or two people are responsible for sorting and responding to all of them. Computer programs used by every office automatically recognize and sort emails that have the same or similar asks and then group the correspondence to receive the same form letter. This process makes constituent meetings and personalized letters that much more important in distinguishing an issue.

### **Often our constituents will only meet with a staff member for ten or fifteen minutes. What do staff do after these meetings to follow up on what the constituents say?**

This largely depends on what the constituents do to follow up with the staffer. At the end of a meeting, the constituents should try to establish a timeline for following up with the staffer. Constituents should provide any relevant follow-up materials to the staffer when sending a "thank you" email the day after the meeting. Furthermore, demonstrating support for the bill or issue in the district during this time by having additional people contact the office or request meetings with the same "ask" is beneficial.

Many offices require staffers to summarize the 15-20 meetings they might have had in a week for an end-of-week memo for the member to read. This memo sometimes includes the number of correspondences received on a bill, so if several people have several meetings with staff about a bill and also generate lots of correspondence on it over a period of time, that will help with the "ask" when following up with the staff. Your issue is important, but constituents care about lots of important issues, so do something to help differentiate your issue.

### **How important are letters to the editor?**

Letters to the editor must mention the member's name and be specific in what they'd like the member to do in order to be effective. Every office has daily "press clips" that flag any publication listing the member's name. 

# The Lowdown on Email

*Your email does reach congressional offices and can influence members. Not all emails are equal, however. What can you do to make your email stand out?*

## Make It Personal

For most offices, the content of your communication is more important than the form that the communication arrives in. In a recent survey conducted by the independent organization The Partnership for a More Perfect Union, a majority of congressional staff reported that personal contact with a constituent is the best way to influence a member who is undecided on an issue. Email messages can qualify as personal contact if you take a moment to include some details about yourself and why you care about the issue enough to write to your congressperson about it.

What makes a personal message that might be influential? In the same survey, 77% of staff said that knowing the impact of a bill on the district would be helpful or very helpful, 74% said that knowing constituent reasoning would be helpful or very helpful, and 48% said a personal story was helpful or very helpful.

## How to Send Your Email

Instead of a public email address, most members of Congress have forms on their websites for you to use to contact them electronically. FCNL's online tools work with the congressional web forms and will also deliver your messages to the offices.

The form allows the office to request your name and address to identify you as a constituent. Congressional offices do not pay attention to communications from people who do not live in their state or district.

You may receive a response that addresses the specific issue you raise, a form letter, or even nothing at all. Your members do pay attention to your opinions, regardless of the kind of response you receive. If you have any questions or concerns about how your emails are being received, we encourage you to call the office.

## Make It Specific

Your communication will be more effective if you include a specific action that the member of Congress can take. Do you want him or her to vote a particular way? Support a piece of legislation? Sign on to a letter? Advocacy organizations like FCNL can help you identify concrete steps on your issue of concern.


## Make It Trustworthy

Your members of Congress may receive hundreds or even thousands of email messages a day. Email is easy to send, and many organizations like FCNL offer sample letters that make it even easier. This ease has caused some distrust in congressional offices. In the survey, 53 percent of staff agreed that most advocacy campaigns with identical form messages are sent without constituent knowledge or approval.

This means that you should look at your email messages from the point of view of the person receiving it. Will they see it as just one more form letter, or will they be able to tell that you have just sent them a personal communication about your specific concern? FCNL's form letters can suggest ideas, but you should also put in details about who you are and why you care about the issue to give your letter the weight it deserves.

## Will My Email Make a Difference?

If you follow these suggestions, you increase the chances that your emails will influence your members of Congress. Each congressional office is different, though, so it is also a good idea to call your members' offices and ask how they prefer to hear from you and from others in the district you will be talking to. The more personal contact you have with an office, and the more you build a relationship with the members and staff, the greater the chances that your communication with the office will be effective.

Do you have a question about contacting Congress? Does your congressional office seem like the exception to these guidelines? We can help! Contact Alicia McBride, [alicia@fcnl.org](mailto:alicia@fcnl.org) or 202-547-6000 x2536. 



# How to Write a Persuasive Letter or Email to Congress

## KEYS TO SUCCESS:

**Focus your letter on one issue.** If possible, mention a specific piece of legislation. Let the member know the action you would like her or him to take.

If you know that your member has taken a public position on the issue before, refer to that position. Thank the member if possible for a previous action. **Be polite and positive.**

If you are part of a group that is engaged on this issue, include that information in your letter.

Let your representative know what moved you to contact him or her on this particular issue.

**What is your personal connection?** How would the legislation affect you and your community?

You should include a few concise facts about the issue or piece of legislation, but you don't have to be an expert. **The most important information to include is your own connection to the issue.**

**Ask for a commitment and a reply.** This lets the office know that you intend to remain engaged on this issue.



Senator Rebecca Hayworth  
United States Senate  
5555 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Re: Please Support S. 9999 to Prevent Genocide

Dear Senator Hayworth:

I am writing to ask you to cosponsor the Genocide Prevention Act, S. 9999.

I was glad to learn that you voted for a similar resolution last year that called on the U.S. government to take specific steps to improve our ability to prevent genocide and mass atrocities. Thank you for that vote. Now I hope you will follow up that vote by cosponsoring S. 9999, which would enact some of those specific steps into law.

I am particularly concerned about this legislation because, as part of a trip organized by my Quaker meeting in Anytown, I have traveled to Rwanda and met with some of the people who experienced the genocide there in 1994. After listening to their stories, I want to keep these horrors from happening to anyone else.

S. 9999 would be a step in that direction. This legislation outlines specific steps the U.S. government should take to improve its ability to prevent genocide and mass atrocities.

Will you be willing to cosponsor S. 9999? I look forward to hearing your response.

Sincerely,

Susan McClelland



## Lobbying Close to Home


When FCNL Field Committee Clerk Tom Ewell wanted to let his members of Congress know what he thinks, he didn't start by looking up plane fares to Washington, DC.

Instead, he made a phone call to his representative's local office. Within a week he was in contact with senior staff at the local office, and within 18 months he had organized a personal meeting with his representative.

Lobbying in Washington, DC is important, but like Tom Ewell you can be an effective lobbyist, and build your relationship with your members of Congress, without crossing state lines.

Meeting in your district or state has other advantages over a trip to Washington.

- **Scheduling is easier.** Without the pressure of committee hearings and votes, staff members often have more time. When members are home, they are there to hear from their constituents, and so make more time.
- **You can include more people.** Think about inviting people of different ages, religions, or ethnic or socioeconomic backgrounds to join you in lobbying on an issue you all care about. Even so, because of the limited space in most congressional offices, we recommend you limit the total number of people in your group to six.
- **You can invite your members of Congress on a field trip.** Members of Congress like to get out in the community and see what their constituents are doing. This is also a chance for you to get some extra time with the member or a staff member.

Unless a vote is just about to happen, your in-district meeting is just as influential as meeting with the member or staff in Washington. District staff members are in regular communication with their counterparts in Washington, and members are usually eager to hear what people at home are thinking about the issues under debate. See FCNL's **Grassroots Toolkit** ([fcnl.org/toolkit](http://fcnl.org/toolkit)) for the location of your members' district offices, tips on scheduling your visit, and how to make the most of your time in the office. 

### Lobbying Through Letters to the Editor

The federal budget debate is grabbing headlines. Here are some of your letters to the editor responding to local coverage of the debate that have been published.



"It's time to ask our legislators to realign our budget so it reflects our concerns about human health and welfare...A budget vote is coming up in the U.S. Senate: please contact Senators Levin and Stabenow to tell them how you feel about the budget and the use of your tax money."

~Nancy E. Taylor; Ann Arbor, MI; published 5/1/11

### THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

"Here in the state of Washington, and evidently in Washington, D.C., everyone agrees that the current level of federal budget deficits is unsustainable. But as our lawmakers debate how to cut the deficit, shouldn't we insist on truth telling and a serious consideration of all federal spending, including the Pentagon's budget?"

~ Nick Block; Spokane, WA; published 4/16/11.

#### Tips:

Letters that refer to a previous news story are more likely to be published, and those that mention a member of Congress by name will catch that member's attention. See more tips for letter-writing on our website:

[fcnl.org/editor](http://fcnl.org/editor)

Want to read more letters? Check out our website: [fcnl.org/budget\\_news](http://fcnl.org/budget_news)

# Who's Who in a Congressional Office

You've written emails, maybe written a letter to the editor of your local newspaper, and now you're ready to climb to the next rung on the ladder of engagement by getting in touch with someone on the staff in your representative's office in Washington. Who should you talk to? The average representative has about 18 permanent staff distributed between Washington and the district office. Because senators represent more people, they tend to have a larger staff.

## The Scheduler

If you are coming to Washington, one approach is to start by simply requesting a meeting with your representative. The representative's time is organized by a scheduler, who typically divides the schedule into 10 or 15 minute time slots and organizes a process to help the representative and chief of staff decide who gets to meet with the representative and for how long. Unless you know the representative personally, we recommend sending an email or fax to the scheduler with a specific request for a meeting.

The decision on whether you get to meet the representative on your first visit will depend on who you are (do you represent a large church, civic group or other organization?), who else is with you, what you want to talk about, and luck. Be sure to follow up your fax or email with a telephone call, or several until you reach the scheduler.


Many offices also hold weekly coffees or open meetings with the member. These meetings allow visitors from the district and state can participate in a group meeting with their elected officials as part of a group. The scheduler may suggest you participate in such a meeting, or you can ask about one.

## The Legislative Assistant

The best person for you to meet with might be the legislative assistant (or LA) who is an expert on the issue you are lobbying on. A good approach can be to call up the office and ask for the specific person who covers the issue you are lobbying on or ask the scheduler if you can meet with that person.

If you reach a legislative assistant on the phone, you need to have a short, two minute explanation of who you are, what your concerns are, and why you think this issue is important to the district or state the member of Congress represents. Before you call, think about your goal. If you're interested in a meeting, then get to the point and say "I'll be in town in two weeks and I'd like 15 minutes of your time to talk about x." If you want a longer phone briefing, ask respectfully if you can arrange a time for a longer conversation on the specific subject. It's a good idea to get an email address, then follow-up with an email to confirm the meeting or phone call.

## The Powerful Staff

The most powerful person in any congressional office after the member of Congress is the chief of staff, followed by the legislative director (who directs policy in the office) and then the legislative assistants and other policy staff (who may work on one or more issues). Yet you can't always tell. Like many Quaker meetings or community groups, offices have informal power structures with "weighty" staff without clear titles who are important because they have been around for a long time or are personal friends of the representative. In addition, the legislative correspondents, staff assistants, and interns who answer the phones, greet people in the office and answer emails can be very important channels for getting you in touch with others in the office. 

### Use FCNL's Website to Find Names of Staff

FCNL's online congressional directory provides a wealth of information that can help you identify the different staff working in Congressional offices and contact numbers for the office.

- Go to [fcnl.org/congress](http://fcnl.org/congress) and enter your ZIP code to see a list of your elected representatives.
- Select the the senator or representative you would like to lobby.
- Select the "Staff" tab.

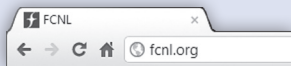
SPECIAL ISSUE  
**GRASSROOTS ADVOCACY:**  
EASY WAYS TO BE EFFECTIVE

INSIDE: WHAT MAKES A LETTER TO CONGRESS PERSUASIVE?

No. 748, May/June 2011

## Become a Lobbyist in **15** Minutes:

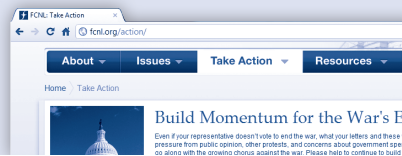
Go to **fcnl.org**



Select **Take Action**

Take Action

**Write your message**  
(you can use our template)



Click **Send**.

*You did it – you've lobbied!  
Now take the next steps.*

### Decide which issues you are led to lobby on.

Your lobbying will be most influential if you can tell your member about the impact that an issue has on you, your family, or your community. Think about which issues you would best be able to speak about from your experience.

You don't have to write to Congress every time FCNL asks you to. Pick and choose the alerts and issues that speak most strongly to you.

*See page 4 for more on emailing Congress effectively.*

### Use **fcnl.org** to learn more about your members of Congress:

- Learn what committees your members are on, and what those committees do.
- See how your members have voted in the past on issues that are important to you.
- Find out where your member's closest district offices are.

*See page 6 for more on lobbying close to home.*