**While we all have been on many video conference calls over the past year, meetings with Congressional offices can still operate differently. Below are some thoughts from NACD’s Government Affairs staff to make sure your meeting is as successful as possible. Email** [**coleman-garrison@nacdnet.org**](mailto:coleman-garrison@nacdnet.org) **with any other questions.**

**Does the meeting have to be a video conference?**

Congressional offices now have almost a year under their belt on how they prefer to conduct virtual meetings with their constituents. While face to face meetings through Skype, Zoom or Microsoft Teams are preferred, don’t be surprised if a conference call is still offered, especially if that conference call allows your Member of Congress to attend during a busy schedule. You may also be asked to provide the platform’s log in credentials. Being flexible and responding positively to whatever request an office has is key for successfully scheduling a meeting.

**How many people should be on the call?**

While it is easier to have more people from your district or state in the meeting because we are not holding these meetings in Washington, D.C., we’ve all been on enough virtual meetings by now to know that having 20 people representing one side can be more complicated than the benefits it might provide. Additionally, going through 20 people’s “Hello my name is John, from Johnson Conservation District” can take valuable time you could instead use to talk about your issues and the work of your conservation districts. Many virtual meetings have been shorter than in person meetings and you may only have 15 minutes with your Member of Congress. Consider having your NACD Board Members, a State Executive Director and perhaps 2-3 additional attendees join the call with the Congressional office to keep the logistics of a meeting as simple as possible.

**Should every district in my state request a meeting?**

Generally, each state sends 3-5 individuals to Washington, D.C. to represent the districts of each state. While every district in that state is not physically represented in these meetings, and in fact for some House Members there may not be a direct constituent in that meeting, you are there to represent every district in that state. Similar to the prior question, it is important to respect the Member of Congress’ time and it is recommended that the State Association’s coordinate meeting requests. We would recommend reaching out to your NACD Board Members or State Executive Director to coordinate meeting requests.

**Should we try to hold one large meeting with all members of our delegation to save time?**

There could be some benefits to trying to schedule one or two larger meetings so that all Congressional offices hear the same information and have the benefit of hearing the same questions and answers. If you can successfully coordinate this, it would he a great way to communicate with your Congressional delegation. That being said, Congressional schedules are incredibly busy, even during COVID 19, and trying to line up that many office schedules could be much harder than it is worth. A smaller state that has one or two Members in the House along with a state’s 2 Senators may be able to pull this off, but we would caution a larger state from trying this attempt this approach. If something has to change, it’s easier to move one Member’s schedule than five.

**If the Member isn’t available should I still meet with staff?**

Congressional staff make Capitol Hill work and while you of course want to communicate directly with your elected Representatives, if an office lets you know that only a staff member is available, do not take this as a slight but rather as an opportunity. Congressional staff may actually have a better understanding of individual issues and ensuring they are educated of our priorities will only help ensure that your Member of Congress is aware of what you need. As previously stated, Members of Congress are incredibly busy and their schedules can change at the last minute as votes are called or hearings run long. Even if you are told by the office that your Congressman will join the meeting, there is a chance that they may not ultimately be able to join.

**How should we conduct the meeting?**

Before the meetings, sit down with all the individuals who will be participating, and make a plan. What are the key messages you are trying to deliver? Who will take the lead on presenting issues? Who will talk about each topic? In what order? Thinking about these questions ahead of time ensures a smooth and productive conversation. Also keep in mind that this is your main opportunity to talk about these issues. The Member may bring up his sister’s best friend’s mom’s recent election to the School Board. Try to keep the meeting on topic as best as possible (while being respectful of course). Dress and present yourself as if you were in person.

**What if the week of March 22-26 doesn’t work for us?**

NACD is stretching out this year’s “Fly-In” over the course of a week to hopefully have more participation across the country. Understandings that this week may still not work for you, it is more important to have a meeting at another time than not at all.

**What if I don’t know something?**You will probably be asked a question to which you do not know the answer. It can be tempting to answer anyway, since everyone wants to demonstrate their expertise. However, do not try to make up or guess an answer under pressure. Just say that you do not know and will follow up with the answer after. And most importantly, make sure to follow up.

**What else?**

* Send the issue papers to the staff contact ahead of the meeting since you cannot physically hand them out.
* Send a thank you note or thank you email to the staff contacts afterwards.
* Let NACD Government Affairs staff know that the meeting happened and how it went. NACD’s advocacy efforts on your behalf are more effective when we know what meetings have taken place and can follow up with the Member of Congress’s staff.

**Questions? Contact NACD’s Government Affairs for help by emailing** [**coleman-garrison@nacdnet.org**](mailto:coleman-garrison@nacdnet.org)**.**