

**#AUCD2020
VIRTUAL HILL VISIT
TOOLKIT**

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Introduction



About AUCD

The Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD) is a membership organization that supports and promotes a network of university-based interdisciplinary programs located in every United States state and territory. The mission of AUCD is to advance policies and practices that improve the health, education, social, and economic well-being of all people with developmental and other disabilities, their families, and their communities by supporting our members in research, education, health, and service activities that achieve our vision. AUCD includes three different types of network members: University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities, Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental Disabilities Programs, and Intellectual and Developmental Disability Research Centers.



Figure 1. Graphic flow chart of AUCD with its three types of programs: UCEDDs, LENDs, and IDDRCs, including the number of each type of program and funding source for each type of program.



AUCD 2020 Conference: Achieving Equity: Leading the Way in the Next Decade

Our [virtual event](#), taking place December 7th through 9th, is committed to providing informative, innovative, and accessible content through plenaries, concurrent meetings, and poster sessions. Our virtual platform will offer high visibility and many ways for attendees to connect with our sponsors, exhibitors, and each other. Our Virtual Hill Day(s) are a key opportunity to build and support your relationships with Members of Congress by giving you a chance to plan, schedule, and hold meetings at a time that works for you in November or December to educate members of congress about your work and the needs in your community.

About Congress



The Basics

Congress is made up of two chambers, or groups: the House of Representatives and the Senate. Both chambers are responsible for writing and passing federal laws, including laws that set the federal government's budget. A bill, which is a potential law, must pass both chambers and be signed by the President before it can become a law.

The current Congress is called the 116th Congress because it is the 116th group of elected Representatives. It began on January 3, 2019 and will end on January 3, 2021. While each Congress meets for two years, they take breaks, called 'recesses', throughout that time. During a recess, Representatives and Senators do not meet in Washington, D.C. and do not vote on bills.

The AUCD 2020 Conference takes place in what is called the 'lame duck session' between Election Day and the start of the new Congress. It is called a 'lame duck session' because even though they still meet in Washington, D.C., Congress typically doesn't get anything done during this time. **It is important to know that our advocacy this Hill Day is not about results in this 116th Congress, but instead about building relationships and sharing our priorities for the 117th Congress.**



House of Representatives

The House of Representatives is one of the two chambers that make up Congress. Each of the 435 total Representatives represents a set number of people who live in a congressional district, or area. States have different numbers of Representatives based on their population. For example, Montana has a smaller population, so there is one Representative for the whole state; in comparison, New York has a larger population, so there are 27 New York Representatives. Representatives are called 'Congressman' or 'Congresswoman' and are elected for two years at a time. Legislation introduced in the House begins with H.R. You can find your Representative with this [easy tool](#).



Senate

The Senate is the other chamber that makes up Congress. Every state, no matter their size or population, has two Senators for a total of 100 Senators. Each Senator is elected for six years at a time. In addition to writing and passing federal bills, the Senate has the job of approving presidential nominees for positions in the Executive and Judicial branches. Legislation introduced in the Senate begins with S. You can find your Senators with this [easy tool](#).



Congress during COVID-19

Both the House of Representatives and the Senate have changed their rules during the COVID-19 pandemic to keep members safe. The House of Representatives has passed rules changes so that Representatives can vote on legislation remotely and can hold committee hearings remotely. In the Senate, Senators must still vote in-person but can do some committee work remotely. The majority of legislative staff for both chambers continue to work from home. No Representatives or Senators are taking in-person meetings.



How to use Congress.gov

Congress.gov is the official website for United States federal legislative information. You can use it to find information about your Representative or Senators and up-to-date information on legislative activity.

Find your members

You can use congress.gov to find your Representative and Senators by entering your address into this box on the right-hand column of the congress.gov [home screen](#). The search will return your Senators' and Representative's names, photos, state, political party, years served, and links to more information.



Figure 2. Image of the 'Contact Your Member' tool on the congress.gov homepage.

Follow their actions

You can view the legislative actions of your Representative and Senators by going to their congress.gov [profile](#). Type their last name into the search box at the top of the home page and select 'Members' from the dropdown box to the left of the search box. Press enter and click on the name. The profile will include information on the legislation that the Representative or Senator has sponsored, cosponsored, and voted on.

Follow legislation that interest you

You can follow specific pieces of [legislation](#) that interests you by typing in the name or reference number of the legislation into the search box at the top of the home page. Press enter and click on the name of the legislation to find information, such as a summary, text, actions taken, amendments, and cosponsors.

Requesting a Virtual Hill Meeting



Virtual Request

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 public health emergency, the majority of congressional offices are working remotely and none are taking in-person meetings. This means that you will be meet with the members' offices, either on a video platform (i.e. Zoom) or with a conference phone call.



Contacting Congress

We recommend you contact your congressional offices as soon as possible to set-up a meeting. The best way to schedule a virtual meeting is via email. You can send your email requesting a meeting to:

- the general member office email
- the office staff scheduler
- the office staff member(s) who work on issues related to disability policy

You can find the general office email and sometimes the office scheduler email on the members' websites. You may contact either Rylin Rodgers (rrodgers@aucd.org) or Lauren Blachowiak (lblachowiak@aucd.org) to get the contact information for specific office staff. To learn more about how to contact Congress, see AUCD's [fact sheet](#).



Scheduling

We recommend you offer 2-5 dates and time slots at which you are available. Staff of congressional offices meet with many constituents and have busy schedules. We also suggest that you confirm the dates and times you offer do not conflict with [congressional recesses](#).



What to Write

We have provided a sample script that you may individualize to set-up a meeting with members' offices. Every email to request a meeting should include:

- Your name and contact information
- Center name and other center participants on the call
- Your availability to meet
- Your reason(s) for the meeting
- Thank them for taking the meeting

Find the [sample email script here](#). Note: you will need to fill in the editable fields and delete the highlighted text before sending.



Follow-Up

With the Congressional offices

You may not receive an immediate response to your email request.

Congressional staffers are busy and it is **normal** to need to follow-up on emails. If you do not receive a response after one week, you can send a follow-up email. We have included template for a [follow-up email here](#). Note: you will need to fill in the editable fields and delete the highlighted text before sending.

If you continue to have trouble scheduling a meeting, please contact Rylin Rodgers at rodgers@aucd.org or Lauren Blachowiak at lblachowiak@aucd.org.

With AUCD

The AUCD Public Policy Team requests that you once you have successfully scheduled your meeting, that you share the following information with us:

- Network center and Congressional office
- Date and time of meeting
- Names of network attendees
- If you would like someone from the AUCD Policy Team to attend

You can share all of this information with us via survey [here](#).

Preparing for Hill meetings



Learn about the issues

AUCD is committed to supporting public policies that advance the rights of individuals with disabilities across the lifespan. Policy issues that impact people with disabilities and their families include, but are not limited to, civil rights, education, employment, healthcare, transportation, and voting. AUCD has several tools and resources you can use to stay up-to-date on disability policy:

[Disability Policy News](#)

AUCD Disability Policy News is sent out each Monday and includes public policy updates that affect the disability community. You can subscribe to the newsletter [here](#).

[AUCD Policy Talk](#)

AUCD Policy Talk features writing by both established and emerging leaders in the AUCD network and disability community about the complexities of disability policy. Storytelling about policy allows us to lift up real-life stories to connect individuals to AUCD's mission. Learn more about contributing to AUCD Policy Talk [here](#).

[Tuesdays with Liz](#)

'Tuesdays with Liz' is a weekly video series highlighting current issues in disability policy. It is hosted by Liz Weintraub, a long-time disability advocate, and produced by AUCD.

[AUCD Post-Election Analysis and Discussion Webinar](#)

AUCD will be hosting a webinar on Friday, November 13, from 4 to 5 pm EST to discuss the results of the 2020 Elections. While we may not yet have all of the election results by that date, we will discuss what we do know and consider what they mean for the legislative priorities of the disability community.



AUCD Legislative Priorities

We recommend that you prepare for your virtual Hill Meeting(s) by familiarizing yourself with policy issues affecting the disability community. We have included here further information and resources on policy topics that will be relevant to your visit and AUCD's legislative priorities for the 117th Congress.



[Budget and Appropriations](#)

The U.S. federal budget is the amount of spending and revenue planned for the next fiscal year of the U.S. government. The Fiscal Year 2021 began on October 1, 2020 and will continue until September 30, 2021. An appropriation is the act of setting aside a part of the federal budget to a specific program or use. AUCD programs receive yearly appropriations that are based on past years' appropriations and funding requests that define how the money will be used.

The federal government is currently funded through December 11, 2020 through the Continuing Appropriations Act, 2021 and Other Extensions Act ([P.L.116-159](#)). Congress must pass a new federal budget before December 11th, or else the federal government could shut down. Because Congress will need to work on budget and appropriations for Fiscal Year 2021 at the time of our Hill Meetings, we have a unique opportunity to educate Congressional members on the needs of our network and community.

Budget and Appropriations Resources:

- [The Federal Budget Process](#)
- [UCEDD Appropriations Asks Fiscal Year 2021](#)
- [LEND Appropriations Asks Fiscal Year 2021](#)
- [IDDRC Appropriations Asks Fiscal Year 2021](#)
- [Projects of National Significance \(PNS\) Asks Fiscal Year 2021](#)



[Employment](#)

AUCD supports the passage of the Transformation to Competitive Integrated Employment Act ([S.260](#), [H.R.873](#)), which aims to phase out sub-minimum wages for individuals with disabilities nationally and assist employers in the transition to competitive, integrated employment for employees with disabilities.

Employment Resources:

- [Transformation to Competitive Employment Act fact sheet](#)
- [Nothing about us without us: Maryland phases out subminimum wages](#)



[Education](#)

AUCD supports federal funding for postsecondary education for students with intellectual disabilities through the Transition and Postsecondary Programs for Students with Intellectual Disabilities (TPSIDs) funded by the Higher Education Act.

AUCD also supports the passage of the Keeping All Students Safe Act ([H.R.7124](#)), which would require school faculty and staff to manage student behavior through positive behavior supports rather than seclusion or physical restraint.

Education resources:

- [Keeping All Students Safe Act fact sheet](#)
- [Postsecondary Education for Students with Intellectual Disabilities](#)
- [TPSIDs Appropriations Asks Fiscal Year 2021](#)
- [Support and Fully Fund Traditional Public Schools](#)
- [Equitable Access to Remote Learning Is Paramount](#)



[Home- and Community-Based Services](#)

Home- and Community-Based Services (HCBS) refer to programs funded through Medicaid that allow individuals with disabilities to live and receive support services in their communities. AUCD supports dedicated funding for HCBS within the federal budget for Medicaid services.

Home-and Community-Based Services Resources:

- [Plain language guide to HCBS](#) from Autistic Self Advocacy Network

- [The Wait is Not Over](#)
- [Community for All, Community With All](#)
- [We have a caregiver crisis. COVID-19 will make it worse.](#)



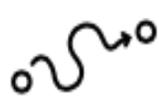
Learn about members

In addition to learning about policy topics, we suggest you learn about the members with whose offices you will be meeting. For many Senators and Representatives, some issues are more important to them than others based on the needs of their state, personal beliefs, or committee assignments. Learning which issues are important to your member will help you tailor your conversation to what the member values and is most likely to support. Some resources to learn about the priorities of your Representative and Senators include:

- [Search](#) for your representatives on [congress.gov](https://www.congress.gov)
- Read about their policy stances on their official websites
 - Find your [Senators' websites](#)
 - Find your [Representative's website](#)
- Listen to members' recent comments on [C-SPAN](#) by typing their name into the search box on the homepage

Learn more about how to get to know your members with this [AUCD fact sheet](#).

Meeting with Elected Officials



The Purpose

Meeting with Members of Congress is a great way for individuals to communicate with policymakers on the important value and needs of our network and the disability community at-large. Through these visits, you can share your concerns and establish yourself as a resource on issues affecting people with disabilities.



Policy Education vs. Advocacy

All AUCD Network members have some responsibility to be engaged in policy education and systems change. As a representative of a federally-funded program, you *can* engage in policy education with your Members of Congress in the #AUCD2020 Virtual Hill Day meetings, including:

- Educating offices on the impact of current or proposed policies and laws
- Sharing research, publications, and policy analysis
- Responding to information requests from policymakers

You *cannot* use this opportunity to advocate that a specific law be passed or defeated, support a specific political candidate or party in your meetings, nor engage in civil disobedience.

Education vs. Advocacy Resources:

- [Education and Advocacy: Know the Difference](#): A Plain Language fact sheet.
- [Your Role in Policy Advocacy as a Federally-Funded Program](#): An in-depth guide to policy education.



What To Say

You will most likely be meeting with a staff member rather than the Member of Congress. Staff are knowledgeable about the issues and policy positions of their boss, and will relay the information and stories you share to the Member of Congress. Think of this meeting as a chance to build a relationship with your Member's office, rather than just the Member him/herself.

We recommend you follow these basic steps in your meetings:

1. Describe Your Center

The staff or Member with whom you meet may not know about the AUCD network or your specific center. We recommend you begin your Hill meeting by describing the AUCD network, your center, and any key projects on which your center is working.

2. Educate Your Members

Educate the staff or Member by expanding upon the 2-3 topics you highlighted in your meeting request email. This is a great opportunity to discuss the challenges and barriers faced by members of the disability community in your state and the important work your

center is doing to address these centers. This is also a time to share what your center and community need in terms of appropriations and other legislation.

3. *Share Your Stories*

If you are comfortable, talk about your personal stories with disability. Connecting policies to people helps policymakers understand the real-world effects of policies in their own states. Read a sample format for sharing your story [here](#).

Resources:

- [Guide to Meeting With Your Members](#): a Plain Language fact sheet on what to say in a meeting with your Members of Congress
- [Top 10 Relationship Building Tips](#): a Plain Language fact sheet on how to form relationships with your Members of Congress
- [Make the Most Out of Your Visit](#): An in-depth fact sheet for trainees on how to get the most out of a meeting with your Members of Congress



Tips

- If several members of your center are attending the meeting together, we recommend you plan out who will say which pieces in advance. This will reduce confusion in the meeting and allow you to make the most of your meeting time.
- Confirm if your virtual meeting will take place via video platform or conference call. Make sure every attendee has the meeting id number and password, if applicable.
- Have everyone on the call introduce themselves by saying their name, position, and relationship to AUCD.
- Thank the staff member for meeting with you at the end of the call.



Post-meeting

Follow-up with congressional office

Send a 'thank you' email to the staff member(s) with whom you met after your meeting, ideally on the same day or the next day. In addition to thanking the staff, you can attach links and materials, and expand upon the topics you discussed. Your follow-up email can be an important part of the policy education process!

Follow-Up with AUCD

The AUCD Public Policy Team requests that you share the following information with us after your meeting(s):

- Congressional office(s) and names of Congressional staff members present
- Number of AUCD network attendees present
- Brief list of what you discussed

You can share all of this information with us via survey [here](#).

Social Media

Follow us on social media to stay up to date with the AUCD network and ways to get involved in AUCD policy activities!



Facebook: @AUCDnetwork



Twitter: @AUCDNews



Instagram: @aucdpix



YouTube: @aucdnetwork

For any questions about #AUCD2020 Virtual Hill Visits, please contact Rylin Rodgers at rrodgers@aucd.org or Lauren Blachowiak at lblachowiak@aucd.org.