AUCD Capitol Hill Guide

A practical guide made for trainees and early career professionals



AUCD
Association of University Centers on Disabilities

AUCD Capitol Hill Guide

How to use this guide:

Use this packet to get ready for a visit to Capitol Hill. This guide will help you get ready to meet with Members of Congress and their staff. It explains what to do before, during, and after your visit.

You do not need to be a policy expert to visit Capitol Hill. Your experiences and questions are an important part of the conversation. You can help Congress understand what people need and would like to see. You can share what you know from your life, training, or work.



Words you may hear or read:

Remember that it is okay to ask someone to explain a word.

Policy: A plan or rule that guides what a government or organization does.

Congress: The group that makes federal laws. It includes the House of Representatives and the Senate.

Constituent: A person who lives in the area a Member of Congress represents.

Staff member or staffer: A person who works for a Member or a congressional committee.

Bill: A proposal for a new law or a change to a law. A bill is not yet a law.

Committee: A smaller group of Members who work on certain topics.

Appropriations: Laws that provide money for government programs and activities.

Recess or district work period: Time away from the usual meeting schedule in Washington. Members may work in their home states or districts.

Follow up: Contact someone again or send information after a meeting.

Before You Visit Capitol Hill



Get help to prepare. Talk with your mentor or program staff about what you can say. A mentor is someone who helps you learn. Your supervisor or training director can also help you get ready.

Ask these questions:

1. Why are we visiting?
2. Am I speaking for myself or for my program?
3. What information can I share?

Know the rules about your visit. *Education* means sharing facts and explaining experiences. For example: "This program helps me learn to provide better care."

Asking a lawmaker to vote for or against a bill or for money can be *lobbying*. A bill is a plan for a new law.

Rules about lobbying depend on your role and how your visit is paid for. Your mentor can help you follow those rules. You can also visit https://www.aucd.org/uploads/Policy_Advocacy/Educating%20versus%20Lobbying.pdf for more information about the difference between educating policymakers and lobbying.

Learn about who you will meet at Capitol Hill. Find out their name and what they do. Learn a little about their work before your visit.

You may meet with a Senator or Representative. Congress has two parts: the Senate and the House of Representatives.

- Each state has two Senators.
- Each state also has Representatives. Your Representative serves the area where you live.

Washington, DC, and the territories have a Delegate or Resident Commissioner in the House. They do not have Senators.

You may also meet with a staff member who works for your member of Congress. A meeting with a staff member is also important. Staff members learn about issues and help the Member make decisions. They also meet with people from the community.

Plan what you want to say. Choose one main idea. What is the most important thing you want to share? Use short sentences and explain words the office may not know. Treat everyone in the office with respect.



Write your message. Use these four steps:

1. Say who you are. *"My name is [name]. I live or go to school in [place]."*
2. Share your main idea. *"I want you to know about [topic]."*
3. Give one example. *"In my life or work, I have seen [example]."*
4. Offer more information. *"I can send you more information about this."*

Practice what you will say with someone. Try saying your message in about one minute. You can use notes or a communication device. You can ask someone to help you share your message.

Use facts you have checked. Ask your mentor to check numbers or information about bills.

Know when and where your meetings are. Add each meeting to your calendar, including the time, building, room number, and names of the people you will meet. Plan how you will get there, by Metro, car, or walking, and arrive at least 10 minutes early. Save your office contact's info so you can reach them if you need help or are running late.

House office buildings

Building	Street address
Cannon	27 Independence Avenue SE
Longworth	15 Independence Avenue SE
Rayburn	45 Independence Avenue SW
Ford	441 2nd Street SW
O'Neill	200 C Street SW

Senate office buildings

Building	Street address
Russell - SR	2 Constitution Avenue NE
Dirksen - SD	50 Constitution Avenue NE
Hart - SH	120 Constitution Avenue NE

Plan who will speak. If you are visiting with a group, decide who will speak and what each person will share. If you have more than one meeting, make a plan for each one. Give everyone who wants to speak a turn.

Ask the office for the support you need before your visit. For example, you may need an interpreter, an entrance you can use, or extra time to communicate. Also ask for details that may impact your visit. For example, ask if construction or elevators that are not working could make it harder to get to your meeting.

The Day of Your Visit

Wear comfortable, professional clothing. Choose clothes that are easy to move in and work with your access needs. Wear comfortable shoes for a long day. You do not need an expensive outfit. Examples of professional clothing are on the right of this page.



Pack what you need for the day, like your meeting details, notes, and personal supplies.

Get to the office early. Leave extra time to travel and go through security.

Share your story and listen to the person you are meeting with. Be respectful. To start the conversation, thank the person for meeting with you and introduce yourself. You can also ask how much time you have.



Use “Senator [last name]” or “Representative [last name]” when speaking to a Member. Use the staff member’s name when they introduce themselves.

Take turns speaking and leave time for questions. Share your main idea and example. Speak directly to each person, including people who use an interpreter or support person. Give everyone time to communicate.

If you have less time, say your name, share your main idea, and offer a handout if you have one. Ask how to send more information to their office.

Write down questions the staffer or Member of Congress asks you. If you do not know an answer, it is okay to say: “I do not know. I can check and get back to you.”

Before you leave, ask: “What information would help your office?” Confirm what you will send and who should receive it. Thank everyone for their time.



Remember: If the Member cannot meet, you may meet with a staff member instead. You can still share your message and build a relationship.

Ask before taking or sharing a photo. Do not record a meeting without permission.

If you disagree, stay calm. Ask a question to understand the person’s concern. Explain your experience without arguing.

If you need a change or a break, say: “Could we move to a quieter space?” or “I need a short break.” Ask your support person for help if you want.

After the Meeting



Write down what happened.

- Who did you meet?
- What questions did they ask?
- What did you promise to send?
- Who will send it, and by when?

Follow up to say thank you. Send a thank-you email after the visit. Include any information you promised to send. Check the information before you send it. If you made a mistake during the visit, correct it in your message.

You may want to write something like this:

“Dear [name],
Thank you for meeting with us about [topic]. We appreciated the chance to share [main idea]. Here is the information we promised: [link or attachment]. Please contact [name and email] if you have more questions.
Thank you,
[your name and organization]”

Take time to think about what you learned and what you might do next. Your visit can be the start of an ongoing conversation.



Additional Resources

These resources can help you learn about policy, prepare for your visit, and stay informed.

Politico Playbook: News about politics and policy in Washington, DC. https://www.politico.com/playbook
Politico Huddle: News about Congress. https://www.politico.com/huddle/
Politico West Wing Playbook: News about the White House. https://www.politico.com/newsletters/west-wing-playbook
Politico Pulse: News about health policy. https://www.politico.com/politicopulse/
Politico Weekly Education: News about education policy. https://www.politico.com/newsletters/weekly-education
Politico Weekly Shift: News about labor and employment policy. https://www.politico.com/newsletters/weekly-shift
Congress.gov: Find bills, follow their progress, and search the Congressional Record. https://www.congress.gov/
AUCD Policy Tools: Find a policy glossary, state information, and guides for visits. https://www.aucd.org/policy-advocacy-tools
AUCD Meeting Guides: Read Connecting with Congress and Meeting with Congress. https://www.aucd.org/advocacy-guides-and-resources
Education and Lobbying: Learn the difference between educating and lobbying. Read this with your mentor before a program visit. https://www.aucd.org/uploads/Policy_Advocacy/Educating%20versus%20Lobbying.pdf
Disability Policy for All with Liz: Learn about disability policy through short videos. https://www.aucd.org/disability-policy-for-all
Find Your Representative: Enter your ZIP code to find your U.S. Representative. https://www.house.gov/representatives/find-your-representative
Find Your Senators: Find the U.S. Senators who represent your state. https://www.senate.gov/senators/index.htm
Capitol Accessibility Services: Find access information and maps. Ask the office you will visit to help arrange any meeting supports you need. https://www.aoc.gov/explore-capitol-campus/visitor-resources/accessibility-services
Capitol Police Visitor Information: Check building and security rules before your visit. https://www.uscp.gov/visiting-capitol-hill

My Capitol Hill Visit

Fill this out or get someone's help to fill it out before your visit.

The Member of Congress we will visit
Building room and entrance
Date and time including the time zone
Office contact and phone number
My main idea
One example I want to share
Supports I need
Someone I can contact for help
After the visit I will

My Capitol Hill Visit

Write down your plan before your meeting.

The Member of Congress we will visit

Date and time, including the time zone





Building, room, and entrance

Office contact and phone number





My main idea

One example I want to share





Supports I need

Someone I can contact for help



After the visit I will

- [ ]
- [ ]
- [ ]

Capitol Hill Maps

Senate office buildings

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Dirksen - SD	50 Constitution Avenue NE
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Map symbols

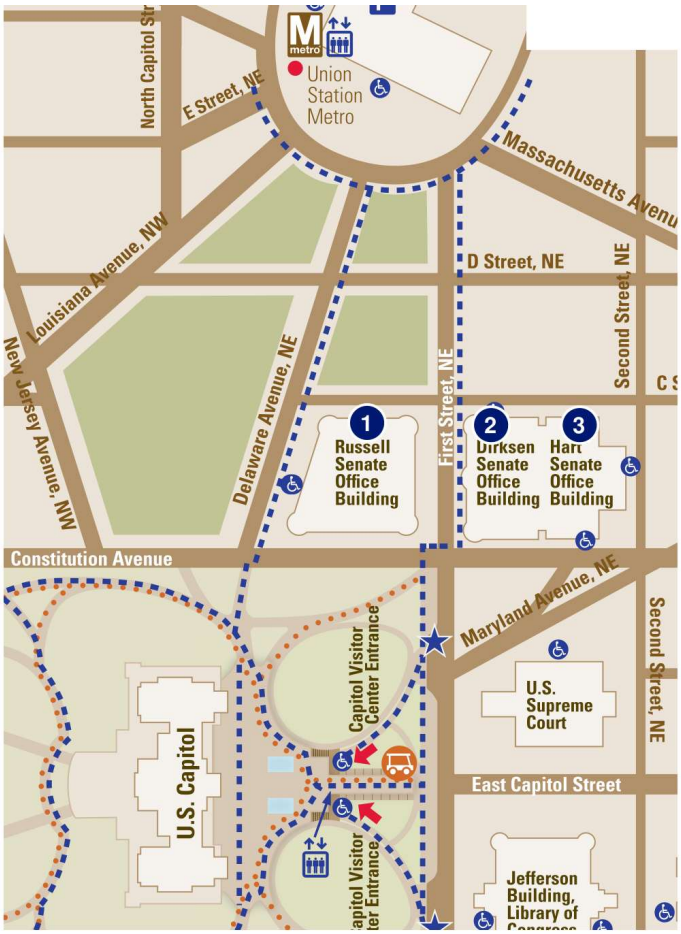




North is toward the top.

Union Station is north of the offices.

1. **Russell SR**
2. **Dirksen SD**
3. **Hart SH**



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