

How to build and maintain relations with members of Congress ^[1]

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As a scientist interested in advocating for science and health before the government, I gave myself the task of finding tools to achieve effective communication with members of the legislative bodies.

As constituents we have the right and responsibility to advocate for our communities and their interests before the legislative bodies that govern our territories. However, many times we do not know how to begin to build and maintain these relationships with the members of these bodies. As a neuroscientist I attended the webinar presented by the Society for Neuroscience (SfN) titled "**Building and maintaining relationships with New Members of Congress**" to obtain tools on how to be more effective in my advocacy for science and health before our legislative bodies.

Last year, members of Congress were elected, resulting in 111 new members between the Senate and the House with 10 new members in the first mentioned body and 11 in the second. These new members represent opportunities to impact and expose the importance of advocacy for topics related to science and health. Members of the legislative body define their positions and political issues depending on factors such as their previous work experience, campaign platforms, committee assignments, party priorities and concerns, and legislation addressed to their constituents. **It is imperative to understand how the offices of our representatives work, how they are built and the staff that works within it.**

First, a new member of the legislative body needs to hire staff and set up his office. Within this office and the staff hired will be established policies that will be of high priority for this office as well as how you can interact with this member in the future. However, observing how these members interacted during their campaign with the constituents can identify which is the most effective method to establish a relationship with the members. It is even possible to observe their disclosure methods and begin to establish a relationship with them through these disclosures. In these past years there has been an increase in the activity of officers and members of legislative bodies on social media platforms. In a survey conducted at the offices of Congress, 97% of them reviewed the comments made in social network publications and 76% of them indicated that social platforms have allowed to establish meaningful relationships with their constituents. Moreover, 78% of these offices pointed out how publications addressed to their offices of multiple constituents affiliated with a specific group or cause had an impact on the priority assigned to these issues within the office. Undoubtedly, social media has brought with it an opportunity never

seen before to establish relations with members of legislative bodies. Today, "Twitter" leads the list of most effective ways to communicate with legislative members. **To begin a possible relationship between scientists and legislative members through social networks, we suggest:**

1. Tell your story - What do you do? What is your relationship with science? What do you do in your laboratory?
2. Raise the tone of the message - In plain language, what is the message that you are trying to convey to this legislative member in a language that does not bring with it elaborate scientific terminology. You can practice it with family and friends before writing to your representative.
3. Building the relationship - Identify what you have to offer and offer it as a resource for this office.

Another way to communicate with your representatives in a more indirect way: you can respond positively to news that are positive or relevant to your interest in politics. Share positive news about what happens in your district or scientific interest and, finally, never forget the power of "hashtags" on social networks; Consciously labeling legislative members can draw your attention to start a conversation. However, it has been shown that **the most effective way to urge a legislative member to address a social problem is through a group effort either through social networks or more traditional ways such as calls, emails and letters.** The best political decisions are made through citizen advocacy. Legislative members are elected to represent our concerns, for this, we as citizens and scientists must start and maintain a direct communication with our representatives to together take care and create new measures related to the sciences in our territories.

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