

Audio Transcripts: (3) Module 3: Advocating for chemistry in Congress

3.1 Module 3 goal and objectives

3.1.1 Module 3 goal

Module 3, *Advocating for chemistry in Congress*, will provide you with resources to select chemistry policy issues and organize advocacy meetings. By the end of this module, you will be able to successfully prepare and execute an advocacy meeting with congressional officials.

3.1.2 Module 3 objectives

There are two learning objectives with this module. First, you will successfully navigate the logistics of speaking with elected officials or their staff. Second, you will effectively select and/or refine your policy issue(s) and support that choice by employing available resources.

3.1.3 Congressional advocacy

Module 2 discussed the various ways you can engage in the policymaking process as a scientist and a citizen. You will recall that one way is through the legislative process. That will be the focus of this module. Constituent and expert input into legislation is key to the process, and you, as chemists, are equipped to provide this input from your scientific perspective. Engagement in the legislative process can seem complex and daunting, but the appropriate knowledge of logistics and preparations can go a long way to making it achievable.

3.2 Strategic audience selection

3.2.1 Strategic audience selection

The first thing you should think about is strategically selecting who you'd like to speak with. The first people you should consider are *YOUR* members of Congress who represent your district or state and who will want to meet with their constituents. Normally, these members of Congress will be the most accessible to you. ACS has a tool to help locate your elected officials as shown in the image on the right. To access it, click the hyperlinked word 'YOUR.'

You should also look to members of Congress that align with your issue and can relate to your narrative. This may or may not be your member of Congress. A good way to go about this is by looking at the relevant committees and members within those committees. Members of Congress have a variety of committee assignments. They also come from different geographical areas and have a range of seniority within Congress, so their interests and power may vary.

For example: if your main interest is mitigation of forest wildfires, it wouldn't be much help to speak with someone who represents a mid-western or eastern state or who isn't on a relevant committee (such as natural resources or appropriations). Alternatively, you can search for natural champions of your issue, the members of Congress who are most outspoken on your topic and who you can find with a simple internet search.

The next module will talk more about how to tailor your message to whomever you speak with, but first, you should aim to select the best fit. To achieve this, you must do your research.

3.2.2 Resources for congressional information

To facilitate research for your advocacy efforts, here are some useful resources. Congress.gov is a government website with information such as bills that have been introduced, committee schedules, and congressional voting records. All of it together, tells you what a member of Congress does and does not support. By clicking ‘congress.gov,’ you will be able to view and open the website in a different tab.

You can also visit websites of members of Congress. Their websites address their priorities and highlight what *they* want their constituents to know. You can also check congressional committee websites and memberships. Resources that specify areas in which a particular member of Congress has power and sometimes explains what they care about. Finally, local media outlets are a good resource with different points of view. They might explain constituents’ feelings, community support, district issues, background information, etc.

3.2.3 Consider where to meet

Once you decide who you want to meet with, also consider where you might meet them. A member of Congress has both D.C. and in-district offices that have different priorities and atmospheres. You should not feel restricted to the offices of a member of Congress. Members of Congress tend to organize town hall meetings, which offer a great opportunity to meet, ask questions, or advocate for issues. Last, you can go the extra mile by organizing a tour or event at your organization, and invite your member of Congress to attend.

3.2.4 Requesting a meeting

Once you have identified with whom and where you’d like to speak about your issue, you must formally request a meeting with their office. Most offices have slightly different processes, but the member’s website is a good place to start. Through the website, you can fill out an online request form and find the office number to call and locate the office scheduler.

If your member of Congress does not offer an option to fill out an online request form, prepare an email for the scheduler. You should include: who you are, when and where you’d like to meet, and what you’d like to discuss. You may not hear back immediately – this is not uncommon. Congressional offices are busy and receive many emails, so don’t hesitate to follow up, and do so repeatedly. Once your meeting is confirmed, the scheduler *will* notify you regarding who you will meet *and* if the member of Congress will join. For further guidance and sample meeting requests, visit ACS’ Advocacy Toolkit referenced in this slide.

3.3 Congressional office structure

3.3.1 Congressional office structure

As was touched on in module 2, you should be aware that staff of congressional offices have important and different roles. Remember, the member of Congress is the face of their office;

however, you're more likely to meet with a staffer, which isn't a bad thing. This slide shows you a general organizational chart of a congressional office.

At the top, is the member of Congress. Naturally, they are the most public-facing individual. Their time is *very* limited so they don't tend to dive deeply into issues in a short meeting. Next, is the Chief of staff who reports directly to the member of Congress and is essentially the chief operating officer of the office. They have overall responsibility for evaluating political outcomes of various legislative issues and constituent requests.

The group you will engage with are the legislative staffers (shown here in green). The Legislative director plans legislative initiatives and strategies, monitors the legislative schedule, and makes recommendations regarding the pros and cons of particular issues. This individual also manages other legislative staffers. Legislative aides or correspondents specialize in specific areas (health, science, or education for example), monitor bills and committee meetings in their areas, and draft floor statements and responses to constituent mail. Congressional science fellows, temporary staffers with scientific expertise, are usually in this area. When engaging with staffers, be sure to get in contact with the legislative staffer specializing in your issue.

The Press secretary and their team are responsible for building and maintaining open and effective lines of communication between the member of Congress and constituents, the general public, and the media. Essentially, ensuring that the member's legislative priorities, actions, and opinions are communicated beyond Capitol Hill.

The Scheduler and their team are keepers of the member's time for congressional responsibilities and constituent requests. Your requests will either go directly to the scheduler or be shared with them to assess whether the member of Congress has availability.

The Office manager and their team are the individuals who receive constituents, supervise support staff, and manage office accounts and the general maintenance of the office and equipment. Last, there are an assortment of Interns answering phones and providing support to the different teams of a member of Congress' office.

Throughout your meeting process, keep in mind who you are talking to and their role. An elected official, an office staffer, a science fellow, and a committee staffer will require different approaches. We will discuss this further in the next module.

3.3.2 Typical congressional staffers

As different roles in a member of Congress' office vary, so too will attributes of House versus Senate staffers. Please take a moment to connect the list of attributes on the right to the columns on the left that cover: age, education, work hours, portfolios, and permanence. Note, these are sweeping generalizations, but they are helpful in gauging who you may be speaking with in your future engagements with members of Congress and their staff.

3.3.3 Typical meetings

Most of your meetings will be short – about 15 minutes long so don't be discouraged by the short meeting or take it personally. In 15 minutes, you can convey important information, so do your best to accomplish what you came to do. You'll receive different receptions depending on who you speak to and what's going on in the greater legislative arena, so some meetings may feel difficult but this can be for many reasons. There are broad approaches you should take when encountering meetings on either end of the spectrum, from the disengaged to the friendly staffers.

For the disengaged staffers, they typically will not meet you halfway. So it's important not to dwell on it. Make your points, be polite, and move on. On the other hand, when encountering 'preaching to the choir' meetings – meetings where you essentially agree on the position and path forward for your issue – use this as an opportunity to discuss your work, find commonality, and explore new topics. Take these meetings as an opportunity to ask questions!

3.4 Know your 'ask'

3.4.1 Know your 'ask'

Now that you know the basics of your target audience, it's important for you to understand an 'ask.' What does 'an ask' even mean? It's the reason you are there, it's what you want the member of Congress to do or not do. It's the proposal you want them to support or not support. An 'ask' can take various forms, such as: support or opposition to a specific piece of legislation or policy; funding requests for NSF, NIST, DOE, etc.; or other actions like asking a member of Congress to join a congressional caucus. Keep your message focused with one or two, at most three, asks per visit. The next module will talk more about selecting your issue and formulating your 'ask.' Keep in mind that for any congressional meeting, the member of Congress and their staffer will expect you to have 'an ask.' So don't be coy about it. Tell them early and, without being annoying, repeatedly.

3.4.2 Congressional Chemistry Caucus

In connection to your 'ask,' it's also important for you to know that there is a Congressional Chemistry Caucus with which ACS often works. It is bicameral and bipartisan. Its mission is to educate members of Congress, their staff, and the public about the benefits of chemistry in today's society and its positive impact on our country. The caucus membership is displayed on this slide. It ebbs and flows depending on elections and congressional retirements. During your meetings, consider starting by either thanking a member of Congress for their membership or asking them to consider joining the caucus. The map on the right shows which states have at least one member of Congress in the caucus. You can learn more by clicking on the hyperlink in the first bullet point.

3.5 Test your 'ask' skills

Now that you know what an 'ask' is, please take a moment to test how well you can recognize a good one. Below you will be provided an issue and three examples of an 'ask.' Based on the

material we've covered, select what you think would be the most effective 'ask.' Note there is more than one hypothetical issue to select an 'ask' for.

3.6 Group preparation

3.6.1 Group preparation

As you're thinking about your audience and your 'ask,' you should think about how you will present yourself throughout the meeting. If you are in a group, choreography and teamwork become key. The next module will cover more tips on communicating your message, but as a group, it is important to remember a few key points. Decide who will begin the meeting – usually it's the constituent. Determine who will say which talking points and practice the hand – offs between your speakers. Study your talking points so you are comfortable with the content! Finally, practice! The more you practice the more at ease everyone will feel. The first meeting of the day is often the least comfortable for advocacy teams who are acclimating, so the more you practice beforehand the more you can alleviate that discomfort.

3.6.2 Materials preparation

Ideally, after your meeting you will have something to 'leave-behind' that is designed to provide further information and keep the audience thinking about your issue or 'ask.' Well-developed materials can be useful during the meeting as well to illustrate points and distill complex issues. So, it's important to think about what you want to leave behind. As you decide what documents you want to leave with the member and/or staff, consider including: contact information (for instance business cards), ACS state fact sheets, issue-specific flyers, reports, or event invitations.

3.7 Day-of

3.7.1 Dress appropriately

The next few slides will address various items to keep in mind for the day of your meetings in Congress. The first of which is to dress appropriately – business dress being the standard. You are representing your issues, so look the part. Washington, DC and most state legislatures are rather conservative when it comes to attire, so err on the side of formality.

The graphic in this slide provides a general idea of dress expectations. Prepare to wear a suit jacket, slacks or suit pants, ties, business dresses or skirts, and dress shoes. Be sure to wear walkable shoes – flats and low heel shoes are best. It's highly recommended you avoid open toe or shoes that aren't broken in, since visits to Washington, DC usually require a lot of walking.

3.7.2 Be punctual

In addition to dress attire, consider when you should arrive for your meetings. You should absolutely avoid arriving late, rather, plan to arrive early. Congressional office buildings have security, similar to what you find in an airport. Dangerous items are not permitted, so avoid bringing anything that will set off metal detectors. Similarly, avoid bringing laptops.

You should allow time for security lines and time to locate the office once inside the congressional office building. Additionally, allow yourself time to debrief between your meetings. Generally, it takes 15 minutes to move from House to Senate so give yourself time to move and to regroup prior to starting another meeting.

3.7.3 Be flexible

In addition to knowing the basics on arranging a meeting, the audience and your preparations, it's also important to keep in mind that delays can and likely will happen. As was previously mentioned, members and staff run on tight schedules but unexpected events happen often – like a sudden call to vote. So don't be surprised if your meeting doesn't start exactly at the time arranged.

Productive meetings can happen even outside of a member's office. Advocates have been known to have ad hoc meetings anywhere, including conference rooms, reception areas, hallways, cafeterias, or even elevators. Be prepared for the unforeseen and remain focused if you find yourself in a 'walk-and-talk.'

3.12 COVID-19 virtual considerations

3.12.1 Virtual meeting requests

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many Members of Congress and their staff are limiting in-person interactions with their constituents. That does not mean they are inaccessible, but it does likely mean you will not be able to meet in-person, either in their home district or in DC. Therefore, when making your initial scheduling request, ask what the office's current policy is on constituent meetings. Indicate that you would be available for a virtual meeting with the Member of Congress or the appropriate staff. You may need to prepare for different meeting policies or approaches in each office. Find out what web-based platform or conference call set up will be used for meetings.

3.12.2 Virtual meeting preparation

If you arrange a virtual meeting with a congressional office, even though it will not take place in person you should still follow the preparation recommendations laid out earlier. If you're arranging congressional meetings in a group, schedule time to meet virtually as a group to prepare what everyone will say and practice saying it. If possible, familiarize yourself with whatever software the congressional office has indicated they will use. Similarly, you should still prepare any brief materials you wish to leave behind. Remember, the material must be distributed electronically.

3.12.3 Remain professional and flexible

Although a virtual meeting may seem more informal than a meeting in person, you should still take it as seriously. Follow the business dress recommendations, take your call in a quiet space with as few distractions as possible. Remember, be punctual for your meetings. Finally, remain flexible. Prepare for the possibility of technical difficulties and remember that Congress continues to legislate and will have unexpected activities throughout the week.

3.8 Follow up

3.8.1 Follow up

Once you complete your meetings, it is just as important to follow up. Communication should be consistent to build an informal relationship with a member and/or staffer. So here are some tips: send the member and each staffer a thank you email within 48 hours of your meeting. If you promised additional information, be sure to follow through. Send relevant and timely information such as developing stories and offer your expertise and assistance. Last, develop the relationship and continue communicating by visiting the district office or by inviting them to your work place.

3.8.2 Reminders for advocacy meetings

You now have the basics in terms of logistics and what to expect for a congressional meeting. Keep these in mind for all your advocacy meetings. Your goal is to be a civically engaged advocate for science. Don't go into election politics, and always be polite. There is a high probability you will interact with people who don't share all of your views, however that doesn't mean you can't be civil and still represent your cause well. Remember that meetings are an opportunity to identify potential solutions to issues, track upcoming legislation or policies, learn about priorities of the office, and build relationships.

3.9 Issue selection & ACS

3.9.1 Refining your policy issue

Now you have the logistics of planning your meeting, you should become familiar with ACS resources to help you select or refine the issues for which you want to advocate. If you are looking for inspiration in developing your issue or 'ask,' there are a few areas that you'll want to consider combining. Consider the use of personal stories, ACS policy statements, keeping in mind the larger context, and gathering supporting data.

3.9.2 Personal relevance

In selecting an issue, you should look for things that have a compelling narrative. Consider *what* matters to you and why. A good starting point here is looking for issues that have personal relevance to your life. Consider your work, school, hobbies, and experiences for inspiration. Look at different facets of your life and consider what issues are most meaningful to you personally. For instance, you have certainly had experiences as a student in STEM courses, you can probably list several challenges you faced or areas that can improve the experiences of future STEM students. In this case, as a former STEM student yourself, you can speak to the issue with

more passion and effect than someone who was not a STEM student, so STEM education is an evergreen issue for chemistry advocates.

3.9.3 Public policy statements

The ACS public policy statements, which were introduced in module 1, are an important resource you can use in the further refinement or selection of your issue. These policy statements are written by ACS members from governance committees. There are four broad policy priorities with 29 statements under them. The policy priorities for ACS are to: foster innovation through research and technology; advance science through openness; strengthen science education and scientific workforce; and promote science and sustainability in public policy.

ACS is a membership organization, and these statements outline what members think and care about. If you are not sure how to select your issue, ACS policy statements are a good starting point. However, there are a few things to keep in mind. Every issue that ACS Government Affairs team engages with must have coverage in one of these statements. So, if you identify yourself as an ACS member in your advocacy activities, you *must* ensure that your positions are in keeping with ACS policy statements. If you do advocate on behalf of issues that fall outside of ACS policy statements, you must note that you are speaking as a private citizen.

3.9.4 Consider the larger context

Another item when refining or selecting your issue is to consider the larger context. Some issues will be a better choice for successful advocacy than others. Some are so broad, or complex, or politically or ethically charged that they will likely take a very long time to be resolved. To increase your odds of success, aim to keep your ‘ask’ to something readily achievable. Take one step at a time!

Consider asking yourself these questions to assess the larger context of your desired issue – how broad or complex is it? Are there geographical differences to keep in mind? How politically charged is it? How long will it take to address it? What is an immediate and actionable ‘ask’ that can help you get closer to your goal?

For example, telling a member of Congress that the United States should immediately go carbon neutral is not realistic. But suggesting investment in research for technologies to help move the United States toward carbon neutrality is achievable.

3.9.5 Supporting your issue with data

Last, you should be prepared to prove why your ‘ask’ is important. Especially to the member of Congress with whom you are meeting and who has a variety of priorities to balance. ACS provides state fact sheets with information such as the number of chemistry relevant jobs and institutions, science funding levels, and ACS membership statistics. Additionally, you can keep your eyes peeled for public sentiment, backed by things like studies or journalism. You can check with Act4Chemistry as it is always tracking relevant issues and providing resources. Click on the word ‘Act4Chemistry’ for a link to the twitter account.

3.10 Choose your own advocacy adventure

Now you will have an opportunity to consider different elements that are important in selecting and refining a policy issue. In this activity, you will play the role of an industrial chemist who lives in a coastal city and is preparing to visit Capitol Hill to advocate for something you care about. Your job is to keep your role in mind and select an appropriate issue, an ACS policy statement, supporting information, ‘larger contexts,’ and other elements to prepare for a successful congressional meeting.

3.11 Module 3 key takeaways

This concludes module 3, *Advocating for chemistry in Congress*. The key takeaways from this module are that preparation and knowledge of congressional procedures will enable you to successfully interact with members of Congress and their staff. Also, careful consideration of your own interests, ACS policy statements, the larger context, and supporting data will help you select a policy issue to advocate for.