

# PREPARING FOR A LEGISLATIVE VISIT



American Pharmacists Month



AMERICAN ASSOCIATION  
OF COLLEGES OF PHARMACY

**A**merican Pharmacists Month provides an excellent opportunity for colleges and schools of pharmacy to bring their successes and needs to the attention of their congressional delegation. The month of October 2006 will be very important as every seat in the U.S. House of Representatives is up for re-election. Incumbents and new office seekers alike will be looking for every opportunity to appear in public and build rapport with their constituents. Therefore, every college and school of pharmacy should use *American Pharmacists Month* as a hook to develop a new or enhance an existing relationship with a member of the House that represents the district in which their college or school of pharmacy is located. There is no better opportunity to accomplish this than a member of Congress visiting your college or school of pharmacy to see your research facilities, the technology in your classrooms, or the need for improved facilities.

The importance of strong relationships with members of Congress cannot be underestimated. Regardless of the rhetoric around the allocation of specific funding requests—also called pork or earmarks—members of Congress are dependent on the goodwill of their constituents. There is no better way to develop and grow this goodwill than for them to be attentive to your needs, supportive of your programs, and to utilize the outcomes of your teaching and research to enhance public policy.

Academic pharmacy's contributions to public policy development and improvements to the public health are many. These contributions are frequently supported by funds from federal agency programs. This makes it essential that you make your congressional delegation aware of the many ways you utilize federal program funds so they can become proponents of those programs and readily make the connection between the appropriations that fund the federal agency from whom you get the financial support to continue your work.

Building effective working relationships with your congressional delegation is an essential element for academic pharmacy leaders. While the competition for these types of visits may be high depending on the level of leadership your member of Congress has attained, they all need to be seen as responsive to the requests of their constituents. Members of Congress must also have the ongoing work of colleges and schools of pharmacy brought to their attention on a regular basis to provide a contemporaneous link to federal policy development.

## STEP 1: FORM A PLAN OF ACTION

Extending an invitation to a member of Congress to visit your campus is simple, but requires some dedicated thought as to what the reason for the invitation will be and coordinating this request with other relevant offices and individuals in your institution.



When considering the focus of the visit consider if federal funds have been central to the development of a particular activity at your institution. If you can answer yes, by all means use this as a primary focus for a congressional visit. When a member of Congress can link your implementation of a telepharmacy program with support from the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) Office of Rural Health they are more likely to support future appropriations for HRSA.

If you know there are federal funds available that would allow you to develop a new or improve an existing program or component of your institution, then by all means use that as the focus of your visit. Again, when a member of Congress can make the link to your interest in improving the immunization rate of older adults by creating an immunization outreach program that could be supported by funds from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) there is a greater chance he or she will be more supportive of increasing appropriations for CDC. Most importantly, if your member of Congress has already been vital in

helping you obtain federal funding for a program, service, or project at your institution you should use this as the focus of the visit. There is never a better campaign opportunity than when a member of Congress can say “I did this for my constituents.”

## STEP 2: CREATE AND EXTEND AN INVITATION

Every member of Congress has staff dedicated to scheduling and to the functions of public relations. They may even be the same person. The Chief of Staff is also someone that should be kept in the loop when extending an invitation. Each member of Congress also has a local office that might be helpful to you as you assess the best way to extend your invitation.

Frequently a formal letter of invitation, addressed to the member of Congress, stating the time, place and focus of the visit is all that is necessary to start the process. In today’s world sending a copy of the invitation electronically can speed-up the process and ensure that the office actually gets the letter.



Follow-up with a telephone call to the scheduler to make sure the letter was received. You should keep your institution’s government affairs and public relations offices in the loop to the appropriate extent. The individuals in these offices may have personal relationships with the member of Congress or their staff that could enhance your chances that your invitation will be accepted. These individuals will also help you determine who else within your institution or outside the institution should be included in the visit. Local community leaders and leaders of private industry can often be effective spokespeople on your behalf, especially if you have ongoing relationships with them.

## STEP 3: THE BIG DAY

If your invitation is accepted, be prepared to work closely with the member’s staff to stage the event. Keep in mind that the visit will be out of necessity briefer than you would like. Because of this, presentations and conversations should be very targeted to make the most of the time you are together. While general conversation is nice, nothing is more disappointing than having your meeting end without the essential focus of the meeting being brought to the member’s attention. Prepare written materials that briefly, but accurately detail the focus of the visit. Include relevant contact information so staff can follow up if necessary.



After the tour, presentation or conversation, thank the member and ask for a commitment to work on your behalf if you are asking them to do something for you. It is essential that you thank them for their past and continued support if you are showing them the fruits of their past actions. Create as many photo opportunities as possible during the time you are together. Think about the staging and placement of these opportunities prior to the actual visit.

## STEP 4: THE FOLLOW-UP

After the visit, send a letter expressing your appreciation for the visit. Include in the letter any oral commitments extended by the member and any other areas that were denoted as requiring follow-up. If some of those follow-up items require action on your part, state when they will be fulfilled and make sure to follow through on these as promised. Take the opportunity in this letter to ask the member to visit your campus again in the future.

## THE WRAP-UP

To get you on your way, here is a quick recap:

1. Work with your public relations and government affairs offices as appropriate.
2. Identify one or two implemented programs or important needs of your institution.
3. Include relevant public and private partners if they are part of the program on which you are focusing.
4. Write a letter to the member of Congress that represents the district in which your institution is located. Work with local district office staff to determine how best to deliver the invitation. Be sure to identify the reason for the visit.
5. Follow-up with a telephone call to the staff person that schedules engagements for the member.
6. Create print materials that briefly but completely reflect the visit's focus.
7. Work with your public relations department to determine when photographs will be taken and who will be included in each.
8. Make sure to close the visit by getting assurances from the member for a particular action.
9. Send a follow-up letter thanking the member for the visit, listing any actions they committed to and indicate when you will be following-up on any actions you committed to.
10. Fulfill your part of the stated actions!



*Following Legislative Day activities at the University of Southern California School of Pharmacy, students host a community event on the University Park Campus. Quynh-Nhu Nguyen, 2007 Pharm.D. candidate, greets Lisa Dixon, representing Senator Kevin Murray, and Lilliana Perez, from Assembly Speaker Fabian Nunez's office.*