



**CO-HOSTS OF THE**  
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Helpful Hints for Educating Members of Congress  
on Emergency Management Issues

**Why:**

While meetings with members of Congress and staff take time away from the demands of your responsibilities in emergency management, the rewards can certainly benefit you and the entire emergency management community. Making sure that relationships are built before a disaster is vital to ensuring mutual trust between members of Congress and your emergency management operations. While you also stand to benefit from these meetings, members of Congress and their staffs are also eager to learn more about issues that impact their constituents. The aim of working with members of Congress on a one-on-one basis is to not only gain something for emergency management, but to also serve as a sounding board for members of Congress when they have new ideas and questions about emergency management.

Your relationship with members of Congress can benefit your association as well. While you may not always have immediate issues to address with members from your Congressional delegation, there may be a need to meet with them on national issues that are a priority to IAEM or NEMA as a whole. For example, your member may serve on an authorizing committee on an emergency management bill or serve as an appropriator on the Department of Homeland Security budget where IAEM has a key position paper or a NEMA Committee has an interest in following the issue.

**Who:**

Before going to a meeting with a member or their staff, get to know their credentials. Looking at their Web site through <http://www.house.gov> or <http://www.senate.gov> is a good place to start. Make a note of previous experience in office at the state and local level. Take the time to know which committees the member serves on and utilize their committee memberships to address issues that are relevant. Currently, all committee assignments have not yet been made for the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress, but your association staff will provide a list once the assignments are complete. For example, if meeting a member of the House Transportation Committee, you might thank them for their help in getting the preparedness relinked with response and recovery, and give them an update on their implementation and how that impacts their state.

Understand that a member may not be able to meet with you and understand that whoever meets with you is responsible for getting the information on the meeting back to the member. Ideally, you want to meet with the staff person who is responsible for your issues.

In many cases, issues are arranged by committee within a personal office. If the member serves in a key slot on an appropriations Committee or Authorizing Committee, it may be best to meet with Committee staff. For example, if the member is the Subcommittee Chair with oversight of FEMA, you will want to meet with Committee staff if possible. You may have to meet with a junior staff member fresh out of college, so it will be important to get their attention and interest as they may have many different issues they are responsible for tracking. The key is finding someone who takes ownership over your issues and getting them interested in following up when you need assistance. Developing personal relationships is the key to sharing information and participating in the process. Understand also that because of the party changes in Congress and the numbers of new members, organization is taking time and you may be meeting with someone temporarily handling your issues.

**What:** Crafting a clear, concise message is the key to getting heard by members of Congress and their staffs. For NEMA or IAEM issues, you are provided with talking points on key issues at the mid-year conference or meeting, and with information on other issues as they arise. Use these talking points with examples from your own local or state jurisdiction to illustrate the importance of these issues to your area. You may want to bring supporting materials from your state to leave behind as well as IAEM or NEMA materials. Congressional staff members appreciate having issues summarized and reference materials to look at if issues are worthy of action. One-pagers are a great way to introduce members and staff to issues – if more information is desired, they will ask. If you feel you are not getting enough follow-up, call the member directly and explain your problem. You may not get a return call from the member, but you are likely to hear back from staff again.

**When:** Congress usually meets Tuesday-Thursday when they are in session. Meeting with a member at this time is optimal when in Washington, D.C. It is recommended that meetings are set up at least two weeks in advance for staff and a month in advance for members. Both members and staff have demanding schedules, so be flexible. For meetings with members, contact their schedulers by phone and in a fax letter. For meetings with staff, call them via phone and follow-up with a fax letter. Tell them when you want to meet and what you would like to discuss.

You will probably want to leave 45 minutes to an hour for each meeting you set up to give you time to move throughout the Capitol Hill complex to attend other meetings. Be on time, but be understanding if members and their staff are running late. Often, the votes on the floor dominate the schedules in Capital Hill offices.

**Where:** There is value in meeting with members of Congress and their staffs both in Washington, D.C. when they are focused on legislative issues and while they are on recess in their home district. While in Washington, D.C., set up the meeting in their offices in the House or Senate Office buildings. Understand that their time is limited and that you may get 5-10 minutes with the member, and possibly an additional 10-20 minutes with staff members to further discuss issues.

Many members of Congress could benefit from seeing your emergency operations centers and understanding how your state emergency management agency works. This will give members of Congress insight into what you might need to better do your job for the state.

**How:**

You will want to make sure you are organized before your meeting and that you have a goal in mind. Talk about the most important issues first, since you may not have a lot of time. Speak in general terms and avoid using acronyms. The level of detail will increase if staff and members are familiar with the subject. Remember that members and staff often do not know issues in detail on the spot. Do your homework and expect questions. Staff think in terms of what the member might ask or want to know and will ask lots of questions from both sides of any issue – they are just trying to gain enough information to explain the issue to the member. Members will want to know what you want from them and how it impacts their constituents. Remember to include examples when possible of how something works or does not work. Offer the appropriate follow-up, and offer your assistance.

**How Your Association Fits In:**

The value of your visits and relationships with Congress are enhanced by information sharing with members of your association and your association staff. Please share copies of correspondence, and update your association staff on interface with members and their positions on emergency management.

In turn, NEMA staff tries to consult with state directors when they are working with members of your Congressional delegation or if additional action is needed with a member from the state level. At the mid-year NEMA conference, each state director is asked to report out on their legislative visits during the conference closing session. This reporting allows NEMA to track support among particular members of Congress and assist in your efforts if follow-up is necessary.

At the IAEM mid-year meeting, traditionally held in the Washington, D.C. area, members of the U.S. Government Affairs Committee make recommendations to the Board on legislative and policy positions. The IAEM policy advisor assists IAEM members who wish to schedule visits with their members of Congress to present their positions in regard to emergency management.

**Helpful Hints:**

- As an organization, NEMA discourages earmarks on appropriations or authorization bills. When earmarks are placed in bills, what often happens is that the rest of the persons that are funded within a specific line item are left with a smaller piece of the pie. Typically, NEMA seeks fairness in allocation of funds across the states and would not want to see an increase for one at the expense of another or formula changes that result from accommodating one community.
- Keep national, state and local politics out of the agenda – emergency management is a bi-partisan issue that impacts all members of Congress. Be bi-partisan.
- No matter how well you know a member of Congress, it is important to remember that Members of Congress and the President belong to a highly select group that were elected to a national office by citizens of the United States.
- An average representative spends about 120 days a year in the district, and an average senator spends 80 days a year in the district. Evidence shows that members spend less than half of their time on lawmaking related duties and the balance on constituency activities. It is important that you remind members that you are their constituent and that you represent their constituency.
- Members of Congress, similar to that of a state local emergency management director, hold jobs similar to a 24-hour job with demanding schedules. Remember to be flexible if necessary.

- Bear in mind the fundamental difference between authorizing and appropriations committees. The authorizing committees intend to produce legislation in the form of authorization bills that are intended to set policy, establish federal agencies and programs, and recommend budgets at certain levels. Appropriations committees decide if and how the program gets funded in any set fiscal year through an appropriations bill.

### **Contacting NEMA and IAEM:**

If you have questions or would like to share information with your association staff, here is contact information for NEMA and IAEM:

- *NEMA*: If you have questions or would like to share information with NEMA staff regarding legislative issues, contact Kristin Robinson, NEMA Government Relations Director, at (202) 624-5459 or [krobinson@csg.org](mailto:krobinson@csg.org) or Trina Sheets, NEMA Executive Director, at (859) 244-8233 or [tsheets@csg.org](mailto:tsheets@csg.org).
- *IAEM*: If you have questions or would like to share information with IAEM staff regarding legislative issues, contact Martha Braddock, IAEM Policy Advisor, at (703) 644-8557 or [braddock@iaem.com](mailto:braddock@iaem.com) or Beth Armstrong, IAEM Executive Director, at (703) 538-1795 or [armstrong@iaem.com](mailto:armstrong@iaem.com).

### **Special Considerations for Security:**

- Because of increased security, bring a driver's license with you – just in case.
- Also, be aware that underground tunnels connecting the office buildings and the Capitol are no longer open to the public, so build in extra time to get to and from the House side to the Senate side. Remember to dress appropriately for the weather and the amount of walking, and try not to bring luggage or other large items with you.
- Be sure to check which room that you are meeting in.
- Mail service on the Hill is still slow – you may want to utilize fax capabilities to get in touch with members or a member's scheduler. E-mail is a good way to engage staff members.

### **Other Considerations:**

- If you have new members in your Congressional delegation and do not know how to get in touch with them, we suggest you call the main Capitol switchboard at (202) 224-3121 and explain you are trying to get in touch with the new member's office. They will help to connect you.
- If your governor has an office in Washington, D.C, be sure to coordinate with them on your visits. Some offices just like to know who you are meeting with and what the issues are; other offices will schedule your visits for you and even accompany you to the meetings. Let your association staff know if you need help connecting with your governor's DC office.
- Also, consider holding a briefing for your entire delegation, if you have a very large delegation, and then holding private meetings with key members in your state delegation if they are in leadership or are committees that consider emergency management or homeland security legislation. A senior member of the Congressional delegation is often happy to host the briefing and obtain a room for the briefing.